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Skills for Life at Ellis Guilford School

A guide for parents and carers supporting RSHE education at home

Here at Ellis Guilford School, PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) education is a school curriculum subject through which children and young people acquire knowledge and skills to stay safe, be healthy (physical and mentally) and prepared for life, and work, in the modern world. This is delivered through our Skills for Life curriculum, which your student completes for one hour a week in a lesson delivered by their tutor. This is also where students will cover the statutory RSHE content as of September 2020.

As a parent/carer you are your child's first educator and play a vital role in their personal and social development. Therefore, PSHE and RSHE education should always be a partnership between schools and parents/carers. This guide will support you to contribute to your child's Skills for Life education outside of school or through home learning. This guidance is relevant at any time, but particularly so given current school closures due to the coronavirus epidemic.

Skills for Life covers many topics, which are organised into three themes: 'health and wellbeing'; 'relationships', and 'living in the wider world' (which focusses on careers, media literacy and economic wellbeing).

Topics in Skills for Life lessons include age-appropriate teaching about healthy lifestyles (e.g. diet, fitness and maintaining good mental health); relationships, including friendships and families; personal safety (including online); growing and changing; sex education; study skills; media literacy and digital resilience (including how to recognise fake news); managing risk and personal safety; money, careers and preparing for the world of work.

The school website's curriculum information includes details of what is covered and an outline of the planned Skills for Life curriculum for each year group. This will give you an overview of what your child is being taught, and what is considered age-appropriate for them to be learning in Skills for Life. To support this, there is a guide to RSHE progression from primary school into secondary school in the RSHE information section.



What role can parents and carers play?

At Ellis Guilford we have provided work for your child to complete during school closures, and this includes Skills for Life. Mr. Lever (Associate Assistant Principal for Personal Development) has selected topics which would usually be covered during Skills for Life but may be particularly pressing during this time. So far your student will have looked into E-safety, Communities, and completed some tasks to maintain their wellbeing to name a few. As a parent or carer you will already have talked to your child about (or had to support them with) many of the topics and issues covered in Skills for Life, so you may also wish to supplement this learning with further discussions of your own.

Sometimes PSHE or RSHE conversations with your child will arise incidentally, when you are playing or cooking together, when you are watching television or films, or through news stories. In such cases we cannot always control the stimulus for the question or conversation, only how we manage it. Other times, you may wish to initiate a conversation about a topic you feel is important to approach.

The following principles apply to teaching PSHE and RSHE in school, but can also apply when covering this content or supporting your child's learning at home:

- It can be helpful to start talking about a PSHE topic using a stimulus — such as a storybook, film, news article, scenario or case study. It is important that any stimulus is chosen very carefully. Always ensure that the story/article/scenario you are using does not:
 - include content, such as graphic, violent or gruesome images that might upset, shock or frighten young people (for example, many young people tell us they find the images on cigarette packets distressing to look at, especially if they know someone who smokes).
 - focus on extreme behaviours by providing worst case scenarios. This tends to make young people think 'that will never happen to me!'
 - unwittingly instruct young people in unhealthy or unsafe behaviour, for example, providing descriptions of self-harm, or details of potentially harmful social media 'challenges'.
 - encourage children to explore topics online, which if unsupervised might lead them to inappropriate or harmful websites/platforms.



Instead, any stimulus you choose should:

- provide positive messages about how children and young people can stay healthy and safe, for example helping them to develop strategies for staying healthy while self-isolating during the coronavirus situation, or how to safely stay connected with friends online.
- be accurate, non-biased and balanced, for example only using reliable sources for information, such as the BBC education site, NHS website and Public Health England.
- reflect modern day society and actively seek to address or challenge stereotypes.

Skills for Life is not therapy or counselling. In order to engage safely with the subject matter, it is important that neither you nor your child feels 'put-on-the-spot' or expected to share personal stories or experiences. Some tips:

- Develop ground rules together and agree to adhere to these during Skills for Life discussions e.g. *"We will talk openly but we will not ask each other personal questions."*
- Help your child to explore a situation through the lens of a fictional person. You could use a character from a children's storybook, film or young adult novel or videogame. Rather than "What would you do in this situation?" instead ask "What could this character do in this situation?" / "What could someone do if this happened to them?" In Skills for Life we call this 'distancing the learning'. It enables children and young people to engage objectively with the subject matter, without embarrassment or emotional upset from being asked to imagine themselves in (or relive) a stressful experience.

It is a good idea to find out what your child already knows, thinks and feels about a topic or issue before discussing it with them. This helps you to work out how best to pitch the conversation appropriately. You don't need to be an expert on every topic; be guided by your child's starting point and be prepared to do some research of your own should you feel unsure about a topic or question.

The most important thing to remember is that Skills for Life is about children and young people developing the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to manage their lives, now and in the future, so Skills for Life lessons provide opportunities for children and young



people to rehearse how to deal with everyday situations in which they might find themselves.

Children and young people should also know where to go for additional safe and age-appropriate advice. As well as reminding your child that you are there to help them and that they can always ask you, help them recognise how to access other trusted sources of support too. For older children this will include online advice such as ChildLine (www.childline.org.uk). Unfortunately, it is all too easy for young people to find unscrupulous advice online, so be sure to provide them with the exact links and remind them that not everything they read is true.

In Skills for Life, we welcome young people's questions and want them not to be afraid to ask things they may think are silly or too difficult to ask. It is likely that your child may have already asked you a question on a PSHE education topic, and very probable that this happened when you least expected it or in a situation where giving an on-the-spot answer was not appropriate. It is a good idea to have a plan for managing questions that arise from such discussions.

For example, you might:

- Praise and respond, remembering that most young people like short, simple, factual answers. If they want more information they will usually ask more questions.

"Thank you for asking that question... here's what I would say..."

- Find out what they think first.

"Good question! What do you think about that?"

- Delay, take time to stop and think or check information before going back to your child, but make sure you do respond.

"That's a great question! Let me have a think about how best to answer. I will come back to you later."

- Provide opportunities for open questions.

"Today we talked about... can you write down a question you still have about this so we can talk about it another time?"

- Pre-empt the type of questions they might ask. Discuss what you feel would be age-appropriate answers with friends or family. Prepare a response. Always aim to try to give a response where possible, whatever your child's age. If you feel it is something you really cannot answer, be honest about that and explain.



"I really like that you were able to ask me that question, but you know what, that's a question that will be answered when you are older, right now it's not something to worry about."

Issues approached through Skills for Life can include controversial topics on which people may have strong views and opinions — part of Skills for Life is about enabling young people to reflect on these and develop their own thoughts and ideas. As parent-educators you may find that you are having to explain different points of view or that your child's view is different or in conflict with your own. It is important to listen — be open to hearing your child's views, explain others' as best you can and accept that at times, we have to agree to disagree.

Staying connected

Here at Ellis Guilford we are taking different approaches to home learning and have already created some learning activities for pupils through our Remote Learning package or home resource packs. You can keep in contact with your child's teachers through the school website or other channels we have enabled such as emails, newsletters or Google Classroom, and in the first instance support them in completing this work.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your support during this testing time. There has been some fantastic, thought provoking work completed by students within Skills for Life so far and your support in ensuring we continue to prepare our young people for the future, when life is back to normal, is greatly appreciated. I hope you are staying safe and well, and we can't wait to see our students back in their Skills for Life lessons in the future.

If you have any questions or queries about Skills for Life, or would like any additional resources to support any PSHE based work or discussions with your child, feel free to email me on RSE@ellisguilfordschool.org.uk

Yours Sincerely,

Mr N Lever
Associate Assistant Principal for Personal Development