



Preventing Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

# A strategy for the next generation: For every child in every school

Parliamentary briefing: March 2024



**“By prioritising prevention, we can end this public health crisis and empower young people to make the choices that will prevent them becoming victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual violence.”**

Susie McDonald, CEO, Tender



**"I love that Tender's sole focus is on prevention. Stopping something from ever happening is a big ambition, but an absolute necessity to protect children and young people."**

Olivia Colman, Tender's Patron since 2014

## **Domestic abuse is a public health crisis of epidemic proportions.**

One woman is killed by a man every 3 days in the UK.<sup>1</sup> Young people aged 16-24 are the age group most likely to experience domestic abuse in their relationships.<sup>2</sup>

For a child starting in secondary school in September 2024, there is no guarantee that they will receive high quality relationships education. RSHE (Relationships, Sex and Health Education) is not seen as a specialist subject and is therefore left to schools to work out who teaches it and when it is taught.

**This needs to **change**.**

# Tender's Call to Action

Tender is calling for consistent, high quality and effective relationships education for all children in England from age 5 by the end of the decade, wherever they go to school, delivered through three pillars:



**1** An integrated government Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Prevention Agenda that brings together the best thinking from both Education and VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) specialists at local, regional and national levels.



**2** Designating the RSHE Curriculum a specialist subject with core elements aligned to safeguarding policies, best practice and quality assurance that gives teachers the skills, knowledge and confidence to support young people to safely navigate relationships in their early years.



**3** All schools having sufficient funding and access to trained specialist teachers and/or local accredited delivery partners that can deliver consistent, safe, healthy relationships education that is informed by VAWG specialists and the voice of young people.

Tender is one of the few UK organisations focusing solely on the prevention of domestic abuse and sexual violence amongst young people. Since 2003, we have supported over **535,000** young people and **27,000** adults to develop healthy relationships through drama-led education.

# 1 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: A Public Health Crisis

Domestic abuse is a public health crisis of epidemic proportions. Statistics around victims of domestic and sexual violence remain stubbornly high; the victim is female in 74.1% of domestic abuse-related crimes<sup>2</sup> and one woman is killed by a man every 3 days in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner estimates that domestic abuse related offences have more than doubled since 2016.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic and sexual violence is intensely present in the lives of young people. Young people aged 16-24 are the age group most likely to experience domestic abuse in their relationships<sup>2</sup>, and 1 in 7 children under the age of 18 have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood.<sup>4</sup>

Campaigns such as “Everyone’s Invited” have published 50,000 anonymous accounts of sexual violence in UK educational settings. In 2021, an Ofsted review revealed that “sexual harassment occurs so frequently [in young people’s lives] that it has become ‘commonplace’<sup>5</sup>. Domestic and sexual violence reduce young people’s ability to participate in society and exacerbate entrenched, intersecting disadvantage: including mental ill-health, homelessness and educational absence.

**“Sexual harassment is really downgrading the society right now and I feel terrified to live in such a toxic environment.”**

Girl, 17, from the Children’s Commissioner: Young People’s Views (2022)



In the year ending 31 March 2017, domestic abuse was estimated to have cost over **£66 billion** in England and Wales<sup>6</sup>. The largest proportion is the physical and emotional harm caused to victims (£47bn). It costs the Exchequer £19bn in lost economic output as well as additional spending to deal with the consequences of domestic abuse across the NHS, the criminal justice system and services for victims/survivors.

**We urgently need a fully-funded suite of domestic abuse prevention interventions that seek to respond to this public health crisis. We need to embed healthy relationships education for all children and young people in England with long term investment that creates long term change.**

There are amazing organisations supporting victims and working with perpetrators and they have never been more vital. But this violence has persisted at these levels for decades. It is time for it to end. The vast majority of spending goes on frontline crisis support, but prevention delivers the best outcomes for society as a whole and for each young person; it needs to be properly funded if we are going to break the cycle of abuse.

## 2 Tender's case for domestic abuse prevention

Tender has been delivering and championing prevention education as a means of ending domestic and sexual violence for two decades. We are one of the few UK organisations focused solely on the prevention of domestic abuse and sexual violence amongst young people. We use drama, art and media to provide a safe, playful space where young people can engage with sensitive topics, "rehearse" for real life situations and explore their rights, responsibilities and expectations within relationships.

We aim to shift long-term behaviour in young people's choices in their relationships. Since 2003, we have supported over **535,000** young people and **27,000** adults to:

- increase their knowledge about the early warning signs of unhealthy relationships, and how to seek support
- improve their self-management and interpersonal skills such as confidence, emotional regulation and communication
- increase their understanding of the enablers and impacts of domestic abuse and sexual violence
- achieve positive attitudinal and behavioural change through reflection on their views and choices.

### Following our interventions:

**91%**

of participants have more understanding of healthy and unhealthy behaviours.

**82%**

feel more confident in dealing with issues around violence and abuse.

**87%**

have more knowledge about where to seek support or advice.



**“I see ego from young people, and it’s hiding confusion, misinformation and, I think, some fear. We need to stop this behaviour, understand where it comes from and support it changing.”**

Assistant Headteacher, St Mary’s Magdalene Secondary School

Tender delivers education programmes in primary and secondary schools, in special educational needs (SEND) schools, in 6th forms and universities, with vulnerable groups of young people in specialist provision settings, and with adults with a safeguarding responsibility.

Empowering young people with the knowledge and skills to form healthy relationships, protects them from a range of entrenched and often interacting consequences of abusive relationships including mental ill-health, substance misuse and risk-taking behaviour. This education creates a ripple effect across peer groups and enables young people to positively impact on the attitudes and behaviours of those across their communities.

**Tender believes that the most effective way to stop domestic abuse and sexual violence is by equipping every child in the UK with the skills and knowledge to recognise the components of healthy and unhealthy relationships, identify the early warning signs of harmful behaviour and make informed, positive choices about their own behaviours in relationships.**

Healthy relationships education cannot be restricted to one-off sessions or specific educational stages, but should be a continuous process where children can practice what they are learning – they deserve the opportunity to rehearse relationships. Schools are the best place to provide the opportunity to enable this to happen; they must be properly equipped and funded to do so.

# "Drama is a chance to practice how to get things right in the real world."

Year 5 student

## Current Relationships, Sex & Health Education provision

For a child starting in secondary school in September 2024 there is no guarantee that they will receive high quality relationships education. RSHE is not seen as a specialist subject and is therefore left to schools to work out who teaches it and when it is taught. If a teacher has negative attitudes towards women, a personal experience of domestic abuse or lacks confidence to facilitate sensitive conversations with students, the risks are high. There is very limited funding to give schools access to high quality training or to partner with specialist organisations to support the delivery of the more sensitive subject areas such as domestic abuse, female genital mutilation and pornography.

**Current RSHE is failing to meet the needs of our young people.** A 2022 report by SafeLives found that, even with the new RSHE curriculum, only 46% of students felt confident about who to talk to if they or someone they know is experiencing abuse. Just 24% of young people could recall being taught about coercive control in RSHE classes and only 13% believed this topic was taught well.<sup>7</sup>

This lack of sufficient prevention education leaves children and young people isolated and vulnerable to abuse. Recent research by The End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition revealed that 80% of girls thought schools needed to do more to support young people's sex and relationships education, and to tackle sexual harassment in schools.<sup>8</sup>

**Teachers of RSHE must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support young people to safely navigate relationships (of all kinds) in their early years.**



## Tender programmes: Rehearsing Relationships

Tender's Whole School Approach programme, RE:SET (Relationships Education: School's Equality Toolkit), aims to support primary and secondary schools to create and maintain healthy cultures by exploring, adapting and resetting their existing relationships education provision across the whole school.

A teacher from a RE:SET Primary School commented:

**"The children have been given space to safely explore relationships. I have not seen the children able to safely test out what respect and kindness looks like before - not just saying but knowing what equality is" ... "it's a great way to prepare them for secondary school. Gives them the confidence to speak out for what they need and what they deserve."**

In a Secondary RE:SET school, a teacher commented that as a result of the programme young people had gained "a huge amount of confidence in themselves, their self-worth, ability to form healthy relationships and to help support their peers with advice on what to do if they are uncomfortable in their relationships."

During Tender's teacher training sessions, we often hear from educators who are struggling to deliver the more specialist areas of RSHE curriculum, for example domestic abuse and sexual violence, intimate image abuse and pornography. They have reported appreciating the specialist knowledge, resources and support that can be offered by external organisations.

**"I was fully aware of the complex nature of violence and abuse but have now experienced a subtle and effective way to educate young children on this matter."**

Male Teacher, RESET Primary School

### 3 What needs to change

We are calling for consistent, high quality and effective relationships education for all children in England from age 5 by the end of the decade, wherever they go to school.

This can be achieved through three pillars:



1 establish an integrated government Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Prevention Agenda



2 designate the RSHE Curriculum a specialist subject aligned to safeguarding policies, best practice and quality assurance



3 ensure access to trained specialist teachers and/or local accredited delivery partners for all schools





# An Integrated Government Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Prevention Agenda

The Government should commit to an integrated Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Prevention Agenda that draws together the best thinking from Education and VAWG specialists at local, regional and national levels.

## **This will:**

- provide clear direction, priorities and a strategic framework for national and regional stakeholders as they create plans and allocate budgets (including government depts, local authorities and commissioners, professional and regulatory bodies such as Ofsted and teacher training establishments)
- promote a whole school approach which ensures school culture is transformed to create a safe environment in which everyone – children, staff, governors, families and other community members – can play a role in preventing domestic abuse and sexual violence
- be informed by evidence and best practice as well as the voices of children and young people, teachers and specialist agencies in the education and VAWG spaces
- build on existing and new partnerships at local, regional and national level including excellent grassroots organisations currently lacking wider reach and voice
- include additional government funding for curriculum development, teacher training, delivery and quality assurance including ring-fenced budgets for commissioning training by schools without specialist teachers of their own
- monitor and evaluate progress to build a robust evidence base for what works, including longitudinal research to understand the effects of primary prevention interventions for violence against women and girls.



## Designate the RSHE Curriculum a specialist subject with core elements aligned to safeguarding policies, best practice and quality assurance

RSHE must be considered a specialist subject with associated training and continual accreditation. Core elements of the curriculum must be incorporated into safeguarding policies and inspections to ensure these form part of schools' legal obligations to keep children safe in education, and be measured for efficacy by Ofsted and associated regulatory bodies.

### We are calling for RSHE to:

- be grounded in evidence, research and best practice with a dynamic feedback loop to ensure it remains relevant, and meeting the needs of children and young people
- be gender informed
- be reflective of all young people including those with SEND and/or identifying as LGBTQ+
- be consistently delivered and safe to teach, so that it is not dependent on the attitudes and experience of the individuals teaching it
- include adequate funding for schools to work with specialist partners to support delivery of more sensitive topics such as pornography and FGM
- apply to the independent sector and special educational settings

**"It is clear that the students responded to the approach taken, and this has impacted on my approach in class. By sharing a common language of what defines an unhealthy relationship means we can have more frank and open discussions."**

Teacher, Norwich

# 3



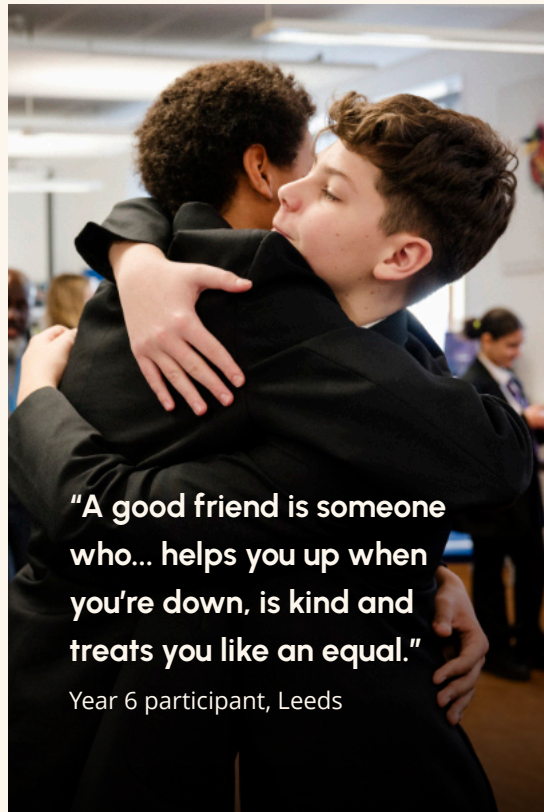
## Ensure access to trained specialist teachers and/or local accredited delivery partners for all schools

Teachers of RSHE must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support young people to safely navigate relationships (of all kinds) in their early years.

High quality teacher training is required to deliver consistent, safe, healthy relationship education that is informed by VAWG specialists and the voice of young people. The current curriculum (mandatory in all schools since 2020) is the starting point for achieving this ambition. The curriculum itself is fairly good, but the way in which it is delivered is unreliable and inconsistent, making it potentially very harmful to young people receiving messages about gendered violence.

### We are calling for:

- a minimum standards framework for training with mandatory CPD (continuing professional development) accreditation
- a directory of specialist local delivery partners with accreditation relating to the minimum standards framework
- ringfenced additional funding for schools to allocate training and partnerships – which doesn't come out of existing budgets.



**“A good friend is someone who... helps you up when you're down, is kind and treats you like an equal.”**

Year 6 participant, Leeds

**"The most impressive thing about Tender is their ability to challenge and confront stereotypical or antiquated views in a way which neither shames nor makes anyone feel inferior. All opinions are heard and everyone is made to feel safe and valued. In creating this dynamic, views shift in a way that empowers young people to change their minds instead of making them feel chided or lectured. The skill of the workshop leaders is second to none in this regard."**

Teacher, Norfolk

## How you can help

**Please support this vital domestic abuse and sexual violence prevention agenda by:**

- as a parliamentarian, raising the importance of domestic abuse and sexual violence prevention in parliament, in debates and with questions. Please contact us for key points and suggested questions
- writing to the Minister for Schools, to express your support for a domestic abuse and sexual violence prevention agenda and to ask what plans they have to ensure every child and young person receives high quality healthy relationships education
- visiting our programmes in action so you can see the impact and speak to young people and teachers about the need for investment in prevention
- investing in preventing domestic abuse and supporting young people by donating to Tender via our website - [www.tender.org.uk](http://www.tender.org.uk).

Contact Susie McDonald at [susie@tender.org.uk](mailto:susie@tender.org.uk) for more information about any of the above, or to learn more about domestic abuse and sexual violence prevention.





**"I want to be a boy who treats girls and women well."**

Year 8 participant

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022#sex>
3. Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2023)  
<https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/domestic-abuse-commissioner-responds-to-latest-criminal-justice-statistics/>
4. Women's Aid  
[https://www.womensaid.org.uk/impact-on-children-and-young-people/?\\_gl=1\\*1czfs4f\\*\\_ga\\*NzA2OTAzOTg0LjE2NzcwNTcyMzU.\\*\\_ga\\_C8H9JGBD77\\*MTY4OTMyMDExOS4xMDQuMS4xNjg5MzlwMjMzLjAuMC4w#:~:text=Domestic%20abuse%20services%20offer%20specialist,some%20point%20in%20their%20childhood](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/impact-on-children-and-young-people/?_gl=1*1czfs4f*_ga*NzA2OTAzOTg0LjE2NzcwNTcyMzU.*_ga_C8H9JGBD77*MTY4OTMyMDExOS4xMDQuMS4xNjg5MzlwMjMzLjAuMC4w#:~:text=Domestic%20abuse%20services%20offer%20specialist,some%20point%20in%20their%20childhood)
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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>
6. Home Office (2019)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-domestic-abuse>
7. SafeLives (2022)  
[https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/RSE\\_Report\\_2022\\_0.pdf](https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/RSE_Report_2022_0.pdf)
8. #It's About Time, EVAW (2023)  
<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FINAL-About-Time-WSA-report-140723.pdf>



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