



From Relationship Education to Relationship Skills

Exploring how relationship health and an I Matter approach could connect RSHE with neighbourhood working

The revised statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) guidance came into effect in England on 1 September 2026. Alongside this, the Neighbourhood Health Framework, published in March 2026, sets a direction for more coordinated services, prevention and locally developed approaches to health and wellbeing.

These developments create an opportunity to consider a shared question: **what helps children, young people and adults develop the capabilities they need for healthier relationships?**

This article proposes that relationship health offers a useful connection between these agendas. Schools, families, health services and community organisations have different responsibilities, but all depend on people's capacity to manage pressure, understand one another and work together.

Knowing about relationships—and being able to respond

Relationship education provides important knowledge about respect, boundaries, consent, communication and wellbeing. Yet knowing what matters does not automatically mean being able to put that knowledge into practice.

Knowing about kindness is not the same as being able to remain kind when frustrated. Knowing what consent means is not the same as being able to accept another person's "no". Knowing that conflict should be resolved is not the same as having the emotional regulation, perspective-taking and communication skills needed to repair a relationship.

Teaching can help develop these capabilities. Their development also depends on repeated experiences with parents, carers, teachers, peers and other trusted people, and on opportunities to practise with appropriate support.

A practical question for RSHE implementation is therefore:

How can home, school and community life support the development of the understanding and skills that allow young people to use what they learn?

Supporting the adults around children

Parents, carers and school staff bring experience, commitment and care to this work. They also face pressures that can make thoughtful responses harder to sustain.

Adults may understand the importance of calm communication, consistent boundaries and connection, while finding these difficult to maintain when exhausted, worried or overwhelmed. Professionals may be working hard to help families while carrying substantial emotional demands themselves.

Supporting children's relationship capabilities therefore involves supporting the understanding and capacities of the adults around them.

This raises an important partnership question:

How can parents, carers and school staff access learning and support that help them become confident partners in children's relationship development?

Schools have a contribution to make, but they cannot carry this responsibility alone. Health services, community organisations and wider support networks also have roles. A shared approach needs clarity about what each can reasonably provide.

The connection with neighbourhood health

The Neighbourhood Health Framework emphasises coordinated services, prevention and collaboration with communities. It also recognises the need for local partners to agree how they will work together.

My argument is that these ambitions have a relationship dimension.

Participation requires people to feel able to contribute. Collaboration requires some capacity to listen, negotiate differences and repair misunderstandings. Prevention depends partly on what happens in everyday relationships, before difficulties reach the point of requiring specialist intervention.

Services and commissioning structures matter. So do the capabilities of the people working and living within them.

Relationship health could provide a shared language for exploring these connections across education, health and community settings.

A developmental perspective

A developmental perspective invites us to ask more than whether someone knows the right answer or displays the expected behaviour.

It asks what capacities a situation requires, what the child or adult can currently manage, what changes under pressure and what support might help.

The I Matter Five Developmental Stages offer a simple organising framework for reflecting on these questions. They draw attention to different ways of managing experience, from sensation and exploration through control, curiosity and collaboration.

The stages are intended to support reflection rather than label individuals. People's development and responses vary, and their access to particular capacities can change across situations.

This perspective encourages adults to consider both the expectations being placed on a child or young person and the conditions that may help them respond. It also invites adults to reflect on their own patterns under pressure.

The contribution of I Matter learning

The I Matter Model and Framework were developed to make ideas about stress, development and relationships more accessible across personal, parenting and professional roles.

Relationship health provides a connecting concept: a way to consider how people influence one another, how difficulties develop and what may support more constructive responses.

The approach invites attention to:

- How stress affects thinking, behaviour and relationships.
- How relationship capabilities develop through experience.
- What adults can influence within their own roles.
- When support, clearer boundaries or a different response may be needed.
- How people can strengthen connection, contribution and repair.

These ideas can support reflection alongside existing education, professional practice and services. They are not a substitute for safeguarding, specialist assessment or treatment where these are needed.

A manageable starting point

A shared approach does not have to begin with a large new programme.

Schools, primary care and community organisations could start by making relationship health learning accessible to interested adults and exploring its relevance to the conversations and responsibilities they already have.

Staff could consider how the ideas connect with PSHE/RSHE, pastoral practice and family engagement. Parents and carers could explore their relevance to everyday family relationships. Local partners could use them to reflect on communication, responsibilities and shared priorities.

Any wider locality initiative would need agreed roles, resources and evaluation. Shared learning can provide a starting point from which those conversations develop.

From education towards capability

Relationship education matters. Its practical value grows when people have opportunities and support to develop the capabilities needed to use it.

The opportunity is to connect what young people are learning with the understanding and everyday responses of the adults around them—and with the wider conditions in which relationships develop.

I Matter currently offers free introductions and low-cost self-guided Foundations learning. Schools and other organisations can begin by exploring the ideas and considering their relevance to existing work.

Explore introductions and professional learning at www.imattertraining.com.



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