



Championing healthy relationships  
and sexual wellbeing

# You are the salt of the earth You are the light of the world let your light shine before others and glorify your Father in heaven

## Salt and Light

April 2019

## Sex education at home

Since its publication in February, there's been much debate about the Department of Education's updated guidance for relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education.

One topic of contention has been parents' rights to withdraw their child from RSE: with an online petition sparking a parliamentary debate.

The concern centres on the statement that, from three terms before their 16th birthday, a child can choose to overrule their parents' wishes and receive sex education rather than be withdrawn. As the age of sexual consent is 16, the government believes that a child should have the opportunity to access sex education before this age.

The RSE guidance also states that parents will not be able to withdraw

their child from relationships or health education – only sex education.

Withdrawal from sex education only may be complex once a child is in secondary school, as aspects of RSE are likely to be integrated in a single topic, so that young people learn about sex in the context of relationships – which we believe is important.

To waylay parents' potential fears, the guidance does acknowledge that 'parents are the first teachers of their children' and makes it clear that schools *must* communicate what will be taught and when.

acet UK is passionate to see young people equipped to deal with issues around relationships and sex in healthy and well-informed ways. Whilst other adults, such as teachers and youth workers, can provide expert information and an independent voice, we firmly believe that RSE should start at home, led by parents and carers, and supported by the wider family.

However, while some parents and carers may feel confident in talking to

their children about relationships and sex, many find it a daunting prospect – especially if they did not receive good RSE themselves.

Supporting a child in becoming a safe, healthy and responsible individual is a huge, and sometimes scary, part of being a parent or carer. You are primarily responsible, and best placed, for influencing their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills – including those concerning relationships and sex.

This issue of Salt and Light gives you an overview of the kind of work we are doing to support parents and carers in this undertaking, through our Esteem project in the UK. It also gives a taster of what our International Support partners are doing.

Complete our short quiz at [www.acet-uk.com/RSEparents](http://www.acet-uk.com/RSEparents) to tell us what you think about RSE, how you want to be involved, and to find out what the draft guidance says about it.

## A trip down memory lane

Marion qualified as an acet UK volunteer in December 1992 and carried out home care visits for HIV and AIDS patients in the London Borough of Harrow.



Thank you so much Marion for sharing these photographs, and for being such an important part of the acet UK story.



Former acet UK director, Maurice, with former patron, Sir Cliff Richard

Gerald, Patrick (acet UK founder) Queen Anne of Romania and Pat - with an ACET Romania cake!



# Nigeria: challenging societal norms

To complement their Kids Clubs and HIV prevention and care activities, ACET Nigeria trained 47 parents and guardians of vulnerable children last year, so that the children could more readily absorb and apply education messages, with support and guidance from their families.

The 5-day training course covered comprehensive childcare (health, food and nutrition, education, psychosocial needs, protection) and focused on improving parent-child communication, and increasing knowledge and understanding about child protection.

Using a peer education model, the 47 trainees have gone on to share their knowledge with other parents and guardians. So far, 11 parenting forums have been formed, with 296 parents meeting regularly for 'Better Parenting' discussions. More parents will be recruited to join these forums in 2019.

ACET Nigeria volunteer, Joshua, said: "One of the ways our beneficiaries contributed toward the success of the program was their willingness, their active participation and by asking us to come again for continuity. Also, we consider it a big sacrifice by the parents to allow their children to attend Kids Clubs programs on Saturdays, being the only day they have to do home chores."

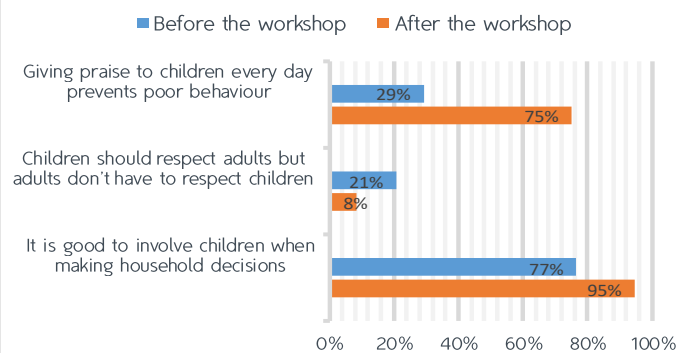
"Before, I was not listening to my children. After the training, I was able to give listening ears to them. My response to them has changed, even when they are wrong. I value their differences and know what they can do individually based on their personal strength."

Mrs Igwe

"Before I couldn't differentiate between sex roles and gender roles: some domestic functions were not assigned to male children because I felt it was meant for only female children. I no longer assign roles to my children on the basis of societal dictates but on the basis of their abilities."

Mr Ochaji

% of parents who agreed with a statement



# Zimbabwe: positive parenting in difficult circumstances

The Nehemiah Project promotes positive parenting amongst its peer educators, through home visits and emotional support. Last year, the project also organised a one-day workshop for 40 girls and women engaged in sex work. However, news got around, and 60 parents showed up on the day, meaning 100 children benefited!

The workshop included sessions on communication and conflict resolution: in one session, a dialogue was conducted between parents and their children. Parents were concerned that their teenage children did not respect them: the teens responded by saying, "How can we respect you when you bring different men home?"



60 parents attended a positive parenting workshop

The ladies then resolved to stop doing this.

At the beginning of the workshop, parents were asked to identify the most important things for their child: 76% said food and shelter. When asked the same question after the workshop, parents had changed their perspective and also considered the psycho social well-being of their children. 90% named things such as love, safety, family time, being listened to, and being protected from abuse.

After the training, 20 children, with particularly difficult relationships with their parents, received counselling from one of the Nehemiah Project's Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) officers.

Later in the year, 60% of their parents reported a positive change in family relationships.



One child told OVC workers:

"This is the first year my mother has remembered my birthday and even did a celebration. It made me feel so loved and so happy."



# Ukraine: strengthening families

Alongside ACET Ukraine's bespoke 'University of Healthy Youth' programme, delivered to young people in schools and colleges, the team provide parents with training evenings. Here they discuss how to build and strengthen family relationships, and install confidence to approach discussions about relationships and sex.

Last year, 7,780 parents benefitted from this training. Educators from 3 regions also delivered ACET Ukraine's 'Precious Grain' training for 275 parents and have been particularly encouraged to see the resulting change in the fathers who attended. In Ukrainian culture, many men dominate the home and struggle to show children love and compassion. Through the 8 seminars, the men began to change these attitudes.

Families were also brought together and celebrated on a Family Day, which involved 14,300 people across 7 cities.



Family Day activities

# Belarus: breaking the cycle

ACET Belarus reached 4,108 parents last year through workshops and talk shows, addressing concerns around sex, relationships, drugs, alcohol and lifestyle choices. The team also work with vulnerable young people, impacted by serious family issues. Here's one story from an educator who met with a group of 16-18 year old boys, identified as having suicidal tendencies.

*"When I arrived, one of the staff warned me: even psychologists don't stay long in this college. When I entered the hall, I saw 16 pairs of unfriendly eyes. For the first 15 minutes, I felt like I was on the front line. The boys said they didn't believe in kindness, compassion, humanity, honesty, love, loyalty or the possibility of a happy life. They didn't believe in anything and didn't rely on anybody. I saw pain and despair in their eyes. It seemed like they had already lost faith in all that is good.*

*We talked about kindness, mercy, honesty and sincerity, about the fact that each and every one of them is unique, that they have lots of talents and, if they use them right, they can achieve a lot.*

*"I often reproached and insulted my son thinking that by doing this I was raising him properly and could save him from improper actions. I realise now that only kind words, sincerity, attention and love can influence him, not anger. Thank you so much." Parent of a 13 year old.*

*"Every year, it is harder for me to be around my son. He doesn't listen, doesn't help. I think that today I found the answer to the question - how to improve the relationship with my son. I will try to find out more about his wishes and worries, I will gain his trust back. And of course I will show my love more." Parent of a 14 year old*

92 teenagers from ACET Ukraine youth clubs took an active part in the event and 62 other organisations joined in.

ACET Ukraine often works in difficult conditions, including in the war torn region of Maryanka. The young people here live in fear, as there are regular bomb explosions and they risk their lives going to school. Many live in poor single-parent families (families that couldn't move to safer areas due to financial difficulties) and the fear of war creates an atmosphere of intimidation.

When ACET Ukraine first rolled out their training in the region, many of the young people were resistant and did not want to communicate with anybody. Some blamed their parents for their poor living conditions.

Thanks to the work of ACET Ukraine, barriers have been broken down and young people have built stronger, more understanding relationships with their parents. They now have hope of a brighter future with a family of their own.

*"I always thought kindness and mercy demonstrated weakness of character. Today my opinion changed. I realize now that only strong people can be kind and are able to forgive others and themselves. I want to be strong and forgive." 16 year old Anton*

*One said, "We don't have a future, what do we live for, if there is nothing good to expect? My parents live like that, my friends live like that, so do I."*

*We started talking about the meaning of life, about the possibility for each of them to break out of this cycle. Then one of the boys exclaimed, "This world needs people who know how to love and how to forgive." Many boys started changing their opinion right there.*

*It isn't easy for them. Most have serious family problems. Their parents have degrading lifestyles. They love and hate their parents at the same time, hate them for lost opportunities and dreams. We talked about ways to recover and break free from this burden.*

*By the end, I could see different people in front of me. The light of hope began to glow in their eyes."*

# UK: parents' workshops

Our parents' workshops are designed to equip parents and carers to talk with their families about relationships and sex confidently, in a positive and age appropriate way.

During the workshops, we:

- look at the social landscape children and young people are growing up in;
- explore the importance of meeting children where they are in their development;
- encourage parents and carers to explore their own values in regards to relationships and sex, and consider what messages they want to share with their family; and
- discuss practical suggestions and ideas of how to get started.

During the 2019 spring term, we ran two workshops for 68 parents and carers. One was held at a school in Southwark for Year 7 parents, so the workshop also gave the parents an overview of what their children would be taught in RSE lessons in school by our Esteem team.

If you would like to find out if we could run a parents' workshop at your church or school, please drop us a line at [info@acet-uk.com](mailto:info@acet-uk.com).



Two workshops in the spring term involved 68 parents and carers



It has given me more confidence - especially as I didn't have the same opportunity to be taught about relationship and sex growing up.

I received encouragement that it's ok, and good, to start conversations early with your children.

I feel more confident about having more informal talks with our children and not 'the talk.'

I am confident that our children are in the right school and they've got all the support they need.

## Do you live in the Chester area? Free workshop for parents and carers

We will be running a free workshop at All Saints, Hoole, on the evening of Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Designed for parents, carers, grandparents, aunts, uncles - in fact, *any* adult responsible for a child of *any* age. This workshop will help you clarify your own values about relationships and sex, and will

provide practical tips for how to take advantage of 'teachable moments' to stimulate further family dialogue and closeness.

This is a free event, but booking is essential as numbers are limited. Visit [www.acet-uk.com/training](http://www.acet-uk.com/training) to register.



acet UK  
Abbey House  
Abbey Green  
Chester  
CH1 2JH

+44(0)1244 566111

[info@acet-uk.com](mailto:info@acet-uk.com)  
[www.acet-uk.com](http://www.acet-uk.com)

 @esteem\_acetUK

 acetUK

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AIDS Care Education and Training  
Registered Charity No: 299293  
Company No: 02245302