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Schools should be putting sexual harassment on the curriculum - and parents can help

POLLY NEATE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WOMEN'S AID

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Sexual abuse is rife in schools (posed by models) CREDIT: DAVE THOMPSON/PA WIRE

Earlier this year, the [women and equalities select committee found](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/aria-miller-im-tackling-sexual-violence-in-britains-schools---a/) that more than half of girls in British schools and colleges have faced sexual harassment.

Following an inquiry, it concluded that sexual bullying has become a common (indeed, an expected) part of girls' everyday lives, and that almost a third of 16 to 18-year-olds have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school.

Put simply: sexual abuse is rife in schools; it be could happening to your daughter, niece, cousin, sister, goddaughter and her friends.

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[As Maria Miller, the committee's chair](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/aria-miller-what-ive-learnt-about-sexual-harassment-in-britains/) said at the time: “The evidence of the endemic nature of this abuse is overwhelming. The report’s findings should horrify every reader, and the recommendations should be no less than top of the political agenda.”

[Yet, the Department for Education has just announced](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/29/sexual-abuse-girls-schools-accepted-part-lad-culture-government/) it isn't taking forward the recommendations to tackle this serious issue.

Maria Miller, chair of the women and equalities select committee CREDIT: REX

It will not prioritise the main action urged by the women and equalities select committee: to introduce statutory, age-appropriate [sex and relationships education](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/11/scrap-sex-education-and-make-school-children-watch-pornography-s/) (SRE) into all schools.

This despite admitting, in a new report published today, that sexual abuse of girls in schools is “accepted” and that the rise of “lad culture” means [teachers are effectively “condoning sexual harassment”](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/aria-miller-im-tackling-sexual-violence-in-britains-schools---a/). And despite conceding that boys are surrounded with messages that encourage them to act in “sexually dominant ways, and to collude with other males who do so”.

The Government report says that Ofsted will consider “adapting” its training to ensure that inspectors are able to recognise cases of “sexual

harassment and violence” in schools. While teachers will be surveyed further, because there is currently “limited evidence available in this area”.

Women’s Aid, the charity I lead, is deeply disappointed at this lukewarm response.

“Contact your school - there's nothing stopping them from providing sex and relationships education”

If we don't address the root causes of violence against women and girls through education on healthy relationships - and equip young people to tackle the sexist and disrespectful attitudes that underpin it - we have no hope of ever preventing it.

A sobering new statistic, released last week from the [Femicide Census](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/femicidecensus/) (https://www.womensaid.org.uk/femicidecensus/) showed that between 2009 and 2015, a staggering 936 women were killed by men in England and Wales.

But education can help us reduce these terrifying statistics. Statutory SRE is needed to keep girls safe now - and to prevent violence against them in the future.

So what can parents do?

There are steps worried mums and dads can take.

Do you know what is going on in your own child’s school? Teenagers are not exactly famed for confiding in their parents, and the shame and stigma of sexual harassment will keep many silent.

The first thing is not to be put off. Contact your school and make clear that there's nothing stopping them from providing high-quality sex and relationships education - despite the lack of a clear Government directive.

Girls are the worst off, but it hurts boys too.



Sexual violence in schools hurts boys, too (posed by model)

Boys who are so often taught by popular culture that the way to 'be a man' is to be sexually aggressive; to collect women like trophies, and [expect their girlfriends to act out porn-inspired fantasies](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/mother-tongue/11554595/Pornography-has-changed-the-landscape-of-adolescence-beyond-all-recognition.html) (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/mother-tongue/11554595/Pornography-has-changed-the-landscape-of-adolescence-beyond-all-recognition.html).

It is our duty to help them learn about healthy relationships - just as we do maths or English.

So advocate for your child to have this right. Download a [Expect Respect Toolkit](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/safer-futures/expect-respect-educational-toolkit/) (https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/safer-futures/expect-respect-educational-toolkit/) - which contains a lesson plan and teaching resources for every age group from reception to year 13. There are also resources to educate teenagers on coercive control and healthy relationships, as well as a coercive control toolkit for parents of teenagers. You can find out more information about all of this on our website.

You could join the [SREnow campaign](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/these-women-are-calling-on-theresa-may-to-make-sex-education-com/) (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/these-women-are-calling-on-theresa-may-to-make-sex-education-com/). You could talk to your MP, and explain that you believe SRE is essential for your child. This burden should not fall solely upon parents, any more than the burden of the other subjects we believe are essential for young people's future. Speak up and demand the Government looks at this issue again.

A life free of violence and abuse is a right. And the basic human rights of young women and girls in the UK - of our daughters, and indeed our sons - are being undermined.

Young people are bombarded with images which provide a clear lesson in how not to do relationships. We need to help them understand the alternatives.

How to spot if someone's being bullied

According to anti-bullying charity Ditch The Label, these are the most common signs of bullying in teens:

- ◆ Their moods. People who have been bullied will often have a sense of low-worth and this can be seen through their mood and attitude. They will often lose motivation for certain things and tasks that they might otherwise enjoy.
- ◆ A loss in appetite. This ties in with a change in mood since we all know that when you are feeling low, the last thing that you probably want to do is eat. This can cause a large amount of problems if it is happening on a regular basis.
- ◆ A desire for isolation. With people becoming more and more reliant on the internet and the things on it, the web can be a

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