



Welcome to Relationship and Sex Education

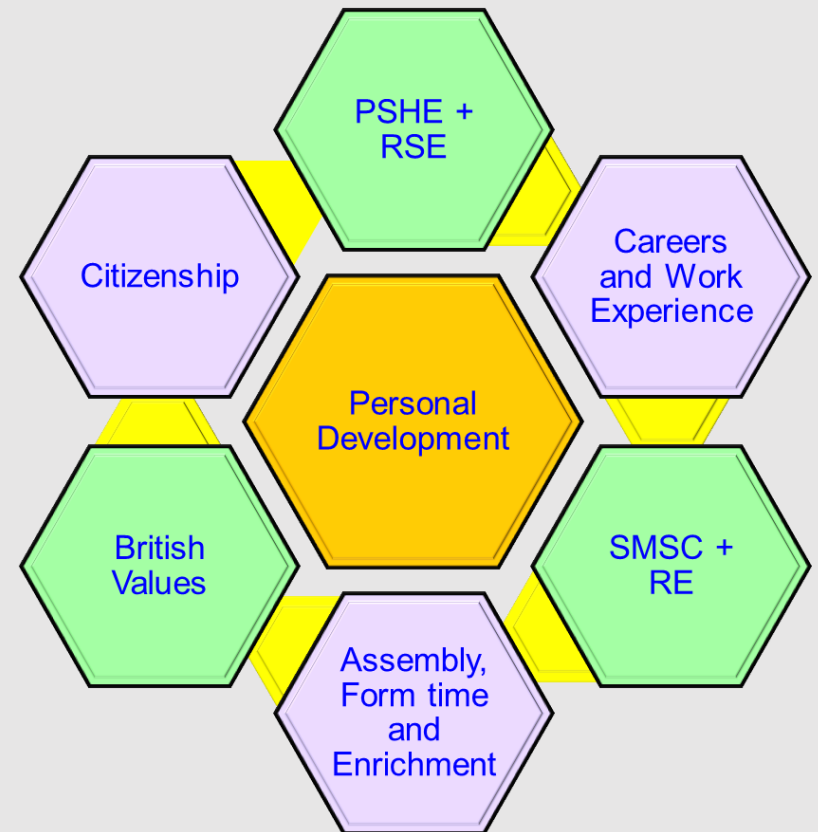
***Personal Development
Thornden School
Safeguarding Curriculum***

Focusing on Personal Development



You may hear the term 'Personal Development' used in quite a few subjects. Personal Development is an umbrella term for how we develop our personal qualities and attributes throughout school.

Remember – school isn't just about improving your academic ability; it is about you becoming a well rounded and responsible young adult. It supports your wellbeing; helps you understand the world around you and prepares you for life after Thornden.



Aims of PD at Thornden



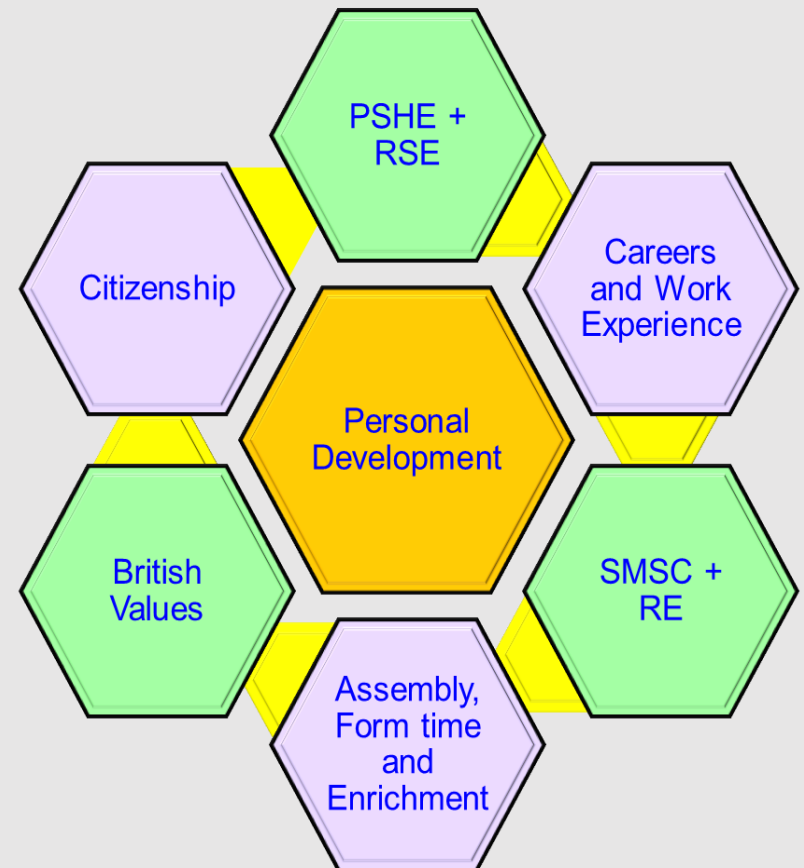
To help you understand:

- how to be responsible, respectful and active citizens who are able to play their part and become actively involved in public life as adults
- fundamental British values (democracy, individual liberty, law, respect and tolerance)
- how to develop confidence, resilience and knowledge so that they can keep themselves mentally healthy
- how to keep physically healthy, eat healthily and maintain an active lifestyle
- the importance of healthy relationships through appropriate relationships and sex education

Why Do We Learn Relationship and Sex Education at School?



At Thornden School we teach Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to help students develop the knowledge, confidence, and values to manage more mature relationships and make informed, responsible choices about their well-being and future. It covers important topics such as healthy relationships, consent, contraception, sexual health, and recognising harmful behaviours, including those online. RSE at this stage prepares students for adult life, supports their emotional and physical safety, and contributes to safeguarding by helping them understand their rights and responsibilities in different situations.



Year 9 Autumn 2 RSE – Knowledge Check

Confidence Scale:

1 = Not confident at all | 5 = Very confident

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can explain what gender stereotypes are and how they can be harmful?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can describe different types of relationships shown in the media and how they might affect young people's expectations?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can identify how diverse relationships are represented (or misrepresented) in society and media?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can understand and challenge harmful gender-based assumptions?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can discuss how gender equality benefits individuals and society as a whole?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can explain what constitutes sexual harassment and why it is never acceptable?
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can understand what the law says about sexual harassment and how to report it?
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can identify the negative effects that pornography can have on mental health and relationships?
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can evaluate how pornography may present unrealistic views of relationships and intimacy?
10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel that you can know where to go for support if you have concerns about any relationships, online behaviours, or sexual content?



This is your Home Learning. It has been shared with you on Satchel. Please make sure it is completed by next week



Do Now

Relationships and media representation



When Love Island power-couple, Molly Mae Hague and Tommy Fury split up, there were calls for emergency helplines to be set up to console devastated members of the British public. Yet months on, the pair were apparently back together, just in time for a new TV series.

Discuss: Why might some people be sceptical about the sincerity of online celeb or influencer relationships?



Why do some people put so much emotional investment into on-screen relationships?

I think some people do this because...

Relationships and Media Representation



Learning outcomes:

Explain how living vicariously can lead us to not take full advantage of our own lives and opportunities.

Analyse the extent to which media representations of relationships reflect real life.

Parasocial relationships - a one-sided connection between a person and a media figure, that may feel two-sided to the fan, though it isn't.

Living vicariously - to experience something indirectly through another person's actions, achievements, or activities, rather than doing it yourself.



When a celebrity relies on attention from social media to make a living, it's in their benefit to ensure there are dramatic events in their lives to keep an audience interested. Unfortunately, this can mean that not every event is real; some may be exaggerated or even made up for views.

It is possible this couple genuinely did split up and get back together, but for most adults this would be a very private matter that they wouldn't post about. A couple like this may also realise they can make more money together than they can apart.



Many of us are guilty of placing too much emphasis on our parasocial relationships with celebrities or media figures. Unfortunately, for some people they can become too involved.

Parasocial relationships introduction clip:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iDPUifn9is>

Now we know the meaning of parasocial relationships and living vicariously, let's explore *why* a person would spend so much of their life living vicariously.



One reason a person may spend so much time living vicariously is...



Why do some people spend so much time living vicariously?



People are easily bored and lack real-life social connections. It's also much, much easier now to follow the life events of celebrities. Often people like to imagine themselves spending the money that celebs do, when they themselves have little money.



One reason a person may spend so much time living vicariously is...



Why do some people spend so much time living vicariously?



Relationships and media representation



Meet Dan and Becky. They are just an average UK couple, both aged 29. Very kindly, today, they're letting us know about what their long-term relationship is really like. Warts and all! The pair live in Reading, have two pugs, and are engaged. We're going to hear a little from Becky, then compare their very average lives to relationships we see onscreen.

KEY FACTS:

The average UK couple earns £38,000 after tax.

After all Dan and Becky's necessities are paid each month (rent, car, bills, food, clothes), the couple have £70 per month left over. They currently use this money for a takeaway each month, wedding savings and a Netflix subscription.



Relationships and media representation



- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| Getting angry with someone else when it is yourself who is at fault. | Asking your friend if you can start dating her sister. | Trying to get someone to change their religion so your family will accept your relationship with them. |
| Always copying your friend's homework but not spending time with them in any other way. | Following your partner to check they are where they said they'd be. | Telling someone if your friend is in danger, even though your swore you'd keep it a secret. |
| Confronting your friend about their behaviour when they have been mean to another friend. | Not letting your partner hang out with their friends of the opposite sex (or same sex in a gay relationship). | Pressuring your girlfriend or boyfriend to send you naked pictures of themselves. |
| Getting someone else to take the blame for something that you have done wrong. | Lying to your friend about liking their flute-playing when it sounds awful. | Telling your partner where they can or can't go. |

Well, I don't why you'd want to know about us, we're pretty 'average' I suppose... but I don't mind. Dan's happy for me to go ahead so long as I don't get too personal, lol! No talking about his gross toes then... Ok, so what you have to do us decide whether the statement is something we've said about our relationship, or whether it's something a celeb or influencer has said about theirs! Just put them in the right column.



This sounds like an average couple's relationship.

The decision to take a year off [to renovate our French chateau] has brought us closer together.

We always make time for each other, but have our own hobbies, like football and running club.

A marriage is a lot of work. But when you have homes in different countries, it keeps things exciting.

We make it a priority to be in the same country whenever possible.

We don't do traditional anniversaries. Instead, we buy each other things like acreage, or cars.

Doing tasks together like painting the shed or redecorating help bring us together – and we enjoy it!

When he and I argue, we go to separate wings of the house to cool off.

We're happy because we make each other laugh so much.



This sounds like a celebrity couple's relationship.

We would love to get married but probably can't afford it for a few years yet. It's our dream.

We wed in the Bahamas and had two dresses custom-made for the day. It wasn't extravagant.

I'm never happier than when it's just the two of us snuggling up on the sofa after a tough work week.

I know neither of us are perfect, but we work hard to forgive each other. Relationships are hard work.



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This sounds like a celebrity couple's relationship.

Yes, these are real quotes about relationships from celebrity couples (some of whom have now split up).
So, just in case you wondered who said such things...



The decision to take a year off [to renovate our French chateau] has brought us closer together.

Brad Pitt + Angelina Jolie

A marriage is a lot of work. But when you have homes in different countries, it keeps things exciting.

Catherine Zeta Jones + Michael Douglas

When he and I argue, we go to separate wings of the house to cool off.

Crissy Teigan + John Legend

We wed in the Bahamas and had two dresses custom-made for the day. It wasn't extravagant.

Mariah Carey + Nick Cannon

We don't do traditional anniversaries. Instead, we buy each other things like acreage, or cars.

Will + Jada Smith

We make it a priority to be in the same country whenever possible.

David + Victoria Beckham

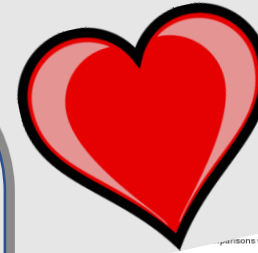
Relationships and media representation



BELONG CARE ASPIRE SUCCEED

Let's delve further into the world of vicarious living and parasocial relationships and ask the question, does it really matter, are any of these things actually harmful to us anyway?

THORNNDEN THREE READING!
Follow the text in your booklet closely



How do parasocial relationships affect us?

Parasocial bonds we form with public figures, such as celebrities, become an increasingly prominent phenomenon in our lives. They can be fascinating and even entertaining, offering us a glimpse into their lives. However, they also carry significant risks, such as mental health issues. Living vicariously through others may sometimes blur the lines between reality and fantasy, fostering harmful patterns of behavior. This essay explores the dangers of parasocial relationships and the importance of grounding our self-worth in our own lives rather than in the curated images of others.



Parasocial relationships often begin innocently. Fans might admire an influencer's fashion sense, a celebrity's talent, or a public figure's charisma. This admiration can evolve into a deeper sense of familiarity, creating the illusion of a reciprocal relationship. Social media intensifies this dynamic by providing glimpses into these individuals' "personal lives," making them seem more accessible and relatable. For example, when YouTuber Zoella shares a cosy vlog about her daily routine or Love Island stars like Molly-Mae Hague post their luxurious lifestyles on Instagram, viewers may feel as though they are part of an intimate friendship. While this connection can provide comfort or inspiration, it's essential to recognize that these interactions are inherently one-sided. The celebrity or influencer does not know their followers personally, and the curated nature of their content often masks the complexities of their true selves.

One of the most insidious effects of parasocial relationships is the tendency to compare oneself to the idealised lives portrayed by public figures. Influencers, for instance, often showcase seemingly perfect lifestyles: luxurious vacations, flawless appearances, and happy relationships. Molly-Mae Hague and Tommy Fury, for instance, frequently share content highlighting their enviable relationship, complete with grand gestures and extravagant holidays. This constant exposure can lead to feelings of inadequacy, as individuals may believe their own lives fall short by comparison. These comparisons are especially damaging because they are inherently unfair. The carefully curated content of influencers is designed to highlight their best moments, often omitting struggles, failures, or imperfections. As a result, people may internalise unrealistic standards, damaging their self-esteem and fostering feelings of jealousy or dissatisfaction.

Living vicariously through others is another aspect of parasocial relationships that can negatively impact mental health. While it might feel thrilling to immerse oneself in the drama of a celebrity's life or to celebrate their milestones, it can also detract from one's own experiences and achievements. Overinvestment in the lives of public figures can create a sense of detachment from reality, where personal goals and relationships take a backseat to the excitement of someone else's narrative. This can lead to a diminished sense of agency and purpose, as individuals may prioritise escapism over addressing their own challenges or pursuing their aspirations.



Relationships and media representation



How Media Representations of Relationships Affect Us

Parasocial relationships are one-sided bonds we form with celebrities, influencers, or public figures. They have become common in the digital age because social media makes these people feel more accessible. These relationships can feel comforting or inspiring, but they can also be harmful if they lead to constant comparison or unrealistic expectations.

Social media strengthens the *illusion* of a two-way friendship. For example, when YouTuber **Zoella** shares cosy daily vlogs or Love Island stars like **Molly-Mae Hague** post their glamorous holidays, followers may feel they know them personally. In reality, this connection is one-sided and based on carefully chosen, often edited, moments.

Relationships and media representation



A major danger of parasocial relationships is **comparing your life** to the idealised lives seen online. Influencers often show only their best moments — designer clothes, happy couples, luxury trips. For example, **Molly-Mae Hague and Tommy Fury** often share their seemingly perfect relationship, which can make followers feel their own lives or relationships are lacking. These comparisons are unfair because social media hides struggles and imperfections.

Another risk is **living through celebrities instead of focusing on your own life**. It can feel exciting to follow a celebrity's milestones or drama, but over time it can reduce motivation to focus on personal goals, relationships, and achievements. This can harm mental health and lower self-esteem.

Relationships and media representation



Media also shapes how we think relationships should look. Influencers such as **Olivia and Alex Bowen**, or Hollywood couples like **Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds**, often share only joyful moments. This can make ordinary relationships seem inadequate, even though every relationship has challenges that are rarely shown online.

To reduce these risks, it helps to remember that much of what we see online is **performative and selective**. Building gratitude for your own life, spending time on personal growth, and fostering **real-world friendships and family connections** can provide healthier sources of support and self-worth.

Now answer the questions in your booklet

1. What are parasocial relationships, and why have they become common in the digital age?
2. How does social media contribute to the illusion of a reciprocal relationship with influencers or celebrities? Provide examples.
3. What are the main dangers of comparing oneself to the idealised lives portrayed by public figures?
4. How do influencers like Molly-Mae Hague and Tommy Fury exemplify the risks of parasocial relationships?
5. In what ways can living vicariously through celebrities negatively impact a person's mental health and sense of purpose?
6. Why are media portrayals of relationships, such as those by Olivia and Alex Bowen, often misleading?
7. What strategies can individuals adopt to mitigate the negative effects of parasocial relationships?
- 8/ How can individuals build healthier, more fulfilling relationships and self-perceptions?



For individuals from such backgrounds (remember Angel from our starter!) the clash between the culture of their home, workplace, or school and their personal identity can make forming meaningful partners more difficult. The prospect of an arranged marriage, which remains common in many conservative, religious families, adds another layer of complexity. In many ways, the struggle mirrors the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals in the 1950s and 60s in the UK, when societal pressures often forced gay men and lesbians into heterosexual marriages. While societal attitudes have improved significantly since then, parallels remain in the challenges faced by those navigating familial expectations and personal authenticity.

Compounding these challenges is the pervasive stereotype that gay men, especially, are inherently more promiscuous than their heterosexual counterparts. While it is true that some lonely-hearted individuals prefer casual relationships, a preference based solely on sexual orientation—the stereotype of fairy pants a diverse group with a broad brush. Gay men actively seek stability, love, and commitment, just like anyone else. Unfortunately, this misconception can discourage meaningful connections, as potential partners may approach relationships with preconceived notions of hedonism. Furthermore, societal expectations can sometimes pressure individuals to conform to these stereotypes, even if they don't align with their true desires.

At its core, the struggle for LGBTQ+ individuals to find long-term relationships underscores a universal truth: All humans, regardless of sexual orientation, crave love, stability, and connection. These needs transcend labels and identities, rooted instead in the shared human experience. However, religious barriers, cultural stigmas, and societal expectations create a uniquely challenging path for LGBTQ+ individuals to fulfil these desires — even today.

What progress has been made in society toward LGBTQ+ acceptance in recent decades?
Why is the pool of potential partners smaller for LGBTQ+ individuals compared to heterosexual individuals in everyday environments?
How do conservative and religious family backgrounds affect LGBTQ+ individuals' ability to form stable relationships?
What stereotypes about gay men is discussed in the text, and how does it impact their relationships?
How does the oversensitized culture on dating apps perpetuate difficulties for LGBTQ+ individuals looking for meaningful connections?
What unique challenges do LGBTQ+ individuals from religious backgrounds face when seeking long-term relationships in the UK?
How is the struggle of some LGBTQ+ individuals in the modern day compared to the experience of gay people in the 1950s and 60s in the UK?
What do you think could be done to help solve the issues discussed so far today?



As we go through the answers don't forget to add any advice statements on to your table that you may have missed the first time.



What role can social media play?

It can make you throw away a love that would have been perfect for you.

Don't think I only deserve someone who is X, Y, Z

It raises our expectations of how we think our lives should be.

Social media shows highlights – the best moments of people's lives. We forget this is the case.

The pressure to perform and meet unrealistic standards means we are stressed when relationships aren't perfect.

How should we be setting our standards?

It's great to have high standards but base them in reality.

Think about what you, yourself are bringing to the table.
Accept the flaws and work together.

Standards should come from your own life, context and environment.

We shouldn't be comparing ourselves to others. All relationships are individual entities, just like people are.

We should be building relationships based on trust and mutual respect, not on appearances.



So, it's twenty years later – and I know what question's on your mind ...and yes, we do have robots doing our housework.

Ha! No, not that question, yes, we ARE still together.

Life has been fun but hard – and to be honest, one of the reasons we're still together is *because* life has been hard.

This has made us work as a team, help each other out through illness, tough economic times and sleepless nights (we have two sons!) I see most of those celebs are now divorced. We could never afford to get divorced – and actually, that was a blessing in disguise.

Discuss:

- 1) What does Becky mean by 'that was a blessing in disguise'?**
- 2) Why do you think most of the celebrity couples ended up splitting?**
- 3) Does Becky sound happy to you? What does this show us?**

How do you report something you are concerned about?

- It is important to us that all of you feel safe, happy and belong at Thornden.
- We also know that sometimes it is not as easy as simply telling a member of staff
- It could be:
 - A friend you are worried about
 - Someone being unkind to you
 - Something you have heard and think we should know



How can you report anything you are worried about?

- Speak to a member of staff or parent / carer
- Visit the Well Being Den or Head of Year area
- On Satchel each week you will be sent a link to a form to share any worries you have
- On our school website homepage there is a 'Report a Concern' link.
- In the Student Bulletin there is a 'Report a Concern' link
- On all school desktops there is a 'Report a Concern' logo to click and report anything

Need Support? You're Not Alone

If anything in today's lesson has affected you, or you want to talk to someone, there is help available.



Mental Health & Low Mood

YoungMinds – <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Kooth – <https://www.kooth.com>

Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Talk to Someone

Your Tutor or Head of Year – We're here to help.

Wellbeing Team and School Nurse

Report a Concern on Satchel

Safeguarding Team with the Purple lanyards

Healthy Lifestyle

NHS Every Mind Matters – <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters>

Change4Life – <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

Apps That Can Help

Calm – For mindfulness and sleep.

Headspace – Meditation and stress relief.

Clear Fear – Manage anxiety (designed for young people).

MeeTwo – Anonymously talk to other teens, moderated by experts.

Eating Concerns

Beat Eating Disorders –

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk>

NHS Live Well – Eating Disorders –

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/eating-disorders/>