

# A peer-led intervention to promote sexual health in secondary schools: the STASH feasibility study

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## Plain English summary

### The STASH feasibility study

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## Plain English summary

Young people report higher levels of unsafe sex and have higher rates of sexually transmitted infections than any other age group. Good sex education is important for later sexual health, but it needs to be done well. We tested an approach to sex education [called the Sexually Transmitted Infections And Sexual Health (STASH) intervention] in which influential students – chosen by their year group – were trained to start conversations with other students about sexual health on social media and face to face. This approach has previously worked well to prevent young people taking up smoking. Working with students, teachers, health professionals and youth workers, we adapted the approach for sexual health and older students (aged 14–16 years).

We also developed a website of digital resources (memes, infographics, web links, etc.) that could be shared via social media. We tested the approach in one school, made adjustments and then delivered it in six schools in Scotland. We wanted to find out if it was practical to deliver and whether or not those taking part would like it. We observed some of the project activities, kept careful track of participation, interviewed students and teachers, and asked peer supporters to complete a brief web survey. We also asked the whole year group to fill in a questionnaire about their sexual attitudes and behaviour, and about taking part in the STASH study. We compared their answers with those of students in the year above who had completed the questionnaire the previous year.

About half of the students who were chosen as ‘most influential’ by their friends decided to become peer supporters. Once trained, nearly all of those chosen completed the role and many of them were active on social media and in conversations. Students and teachers generally liked the project. Using social media (closely monitored by adult trainers) was helpful and did not cause problems. Our findings suggest that it would be worth doing a larger study to find out if the STASH intervention can increase the number of young people staying safe from sexually transmitted infections (either by always using condoms or by not having sex).

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