

St John Bosco Community College



St John Bosco Community College

Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

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BOM Chairperson: _____

BOM Secretary: _____

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1. Introductory Statement and Rationale

The Relationships & Sexuality Education policy will be an accumulation of consultation, collaboration and research. It is hoped that this document will be comprehensive and informative and will provide guidance and direction to all involved in the teaching of RSE.

2. School Mission Statement

Our core aim is the provision of an educational experience that is life enhancing for all, both teacher and pupil; a school that together with the home provides a happy environment where the Christian spirit is nurtured; the dignity of the individual is cherished; where diligence, courtesy, participation and respect are fostered and the code of behaviour is implemented for the good of the individual

Education through Friendship and Understanding

2.1 Relationship to the School Mission Statement

The mission of St John Bosco Community College aims to be life enhancing for all. This ideal is realised by building on foundations which have been laid in the home. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a process which provides structured information and promotes the development of responsible attitudes, values and beliefs about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.

The RSE programme reflects and contributes to the objectives of St John Bosco Community College, namely to teach moral values, attitudes and behaviour patterns which engender respect towards oneself and others, thus promoting self-esteem and an appreciation of one's own dignity.

It is developmental in nature and age appropriate in content. It counteracts the information received from peers and the media which may not be accurate and empowers students to make responsible choices.

3. Rationale

Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents/guardians, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their students.

The Education Act 1998 requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both junior and senior cycle. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of the Junior Cycle Wellbeing curriculum.

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the board of management and students.

4. Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than RSE and SPHE. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy. Furthermore, the policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

5. Definition of RSE

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and must be taught in this context. It provides structured opportunities for pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. (p.5 NCCA interim curriculum and guidelines for RSE.)

6. Aims of our RSE Programme

- To help students develop healthy friendships and to promote a positive sense of self awareness.
- To promote a healthy attitude to sexuality and relationships.
- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the student.
- To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to human sexuality and relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To enable the student to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction, and to provide age and stage appropriate information about contraception.

7. Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The Department of Education and Science (DES) has approved the recommended syllabus for SPHE at junior cycle. As a life skills programme, SPHE aims to:

- Enable students to develop personal and social skills
- Promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making
- Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- Promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being

The RSE programme forms part of the SPHE programme. The guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one’s relationship with others. The content of the school’s SPHE programme includes a wide range of topics such as self-esteem, self-identity, assertiveness, motivation, effective communication, decision-making skills, bullying, healthy eating, hygiene and safety – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

8. Guidelines for the management and organisation

of RSE in our School

8.1 Content Provision

- SPHE/RSE is offered to students through formal and informal activities in the school. Our school recognises a whole school approach to the development of the school programme, which promises the participation of all members of the school community. This approach ensures the greatest likelihood of success.
- The values inherent in the programme should be consistent with the core values of the school ethos.
- Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of the schools Social, Personal and Health Education programme. SPHE is allocated one class period per week for 1st, 2nd and 3rd Year students.
 - In Senior Cycle, RSE will be covered as part of the Religious Education.
- All the resource materials for RSE developed by teachers and parents in line with the NCCA RSE curriculum guidelines will be followed.
- Aspects of RSE/SPHE are offered across the curriculum in subjects such as Science, Biology, Civic Social and Personal Education, Guidance and Counselling classes, Physical Education, Religious Education and during school developed programmes in Social Personal and Health Education.
- Counselling, Guest Speakers, Student Support Teams, Class Tutors and Year Heads may also deal with some issues pertaining to SPHE and RSE.
- The teaching methods for the Relationships and Sexuality module within SPHE and Wellbeing will be based on sound pedagogical principles. These teaching methods will be student centred and appropriate to the age and stage of development of the pupils. Every effort will be made to create a class atmosphere which respects the privacy of each student and treats all students with sensitivity and care.
- Teachers will maintain an awareness of the guidelines as set out within the school's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy in order to ensure that RSE content is delivered in a manner accessible to all students.
- All programmes will be reviewed and evaluated regularly. The teacher in his/her professional capacity is ideally the person who will deliver the school based programme. Guest Speakers and community resources can be used to supplement, complement and support the already established RSE programme.

8.2 Provision of Training and Staff Development

In-service training in RSE is one of the key elements in promoting its inclusion. School management personnel are responsible for identifying the relevant expressed and perceived training needs of SPHE teachers and whole staff. SPHE is enhanced when the appointment of teachers to the subject has been negotiated in advance of timetabling. Due to the importance of the student-teacher relationship, it is best practice to assign a teacher to a particular class for a three year cycle. Where this is not possible and a teacher takes up a class in the second or third year of program delivery, it is preferable that the teacher assuming SPHE tuition also teaches, or has taught the class for another subject, so as to have facilitated the development of rapport. As part of the RSE programme all teachers will have access to RSE teaching materials.

8.3 Inclusion of Parents and Guardians

Our school is committed to working with parents/guardians and acknowledges that parents/guardians have, by law, the primary responsibility for the education of their children and that the home is the natural environment in which Relationship and Sexuality Education should take place. Parents shall be fully consulted and informed of the development of the RSE programme. The parents of incoming 1st Year students will be provided with a link to the summary of the three year SPHE/RSE programme on our school website.

8.4 Participation

Each parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from some, or all, RSE classes but parents are in this case encouraged to facilitate alternative RSE provision at home.

Parents/Guardians wishing to withdraw their son/daughter from RSE must inform the Principal in writing of their decision in September of each year, otherwise the students will take part in the RSE classes.

Where a parent/guardian has communicated their intention to withdraw their child from accessing the RSE programme, the school will extend an invitation to discuss in person the reasons for this request. The purpose of this meeting will be to provide an opportunity to clarify any potential misconceptions in relation to programme content and/or delivery which may henceforth permit the student to participate in the RSE programme.

In the event that a parent/guardian, having met with the school, maintains their intention to withdraw, the school will respect this choice. However, it will be necessary for parents/guardians of any student opting out of RSE to make suitable arrangements with the school principal for the welfare of their child at these times. Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by others.

8.5 Sensitive Issues

Class discussion will be of a general nature, and will not target individuals in accordance with the class ground rules. Inappropriate questions will not be answered by a teacher in class. The SPHE teacher may exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer the question privately after the class has finished. This must be done in harmony with the ethos of the school. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Head, Student Support Team, and/or Guidance Counsellor.

8.6 Confidentiality

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE class there will be times when they talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the following limits of confidentiality must be observed.

These limits are:

- Child abuse: i) Physical, ii) Emotional, iii) Sexual, iv) Neglect
- Intention to harm self or others
- Substance misuse
- Underage sexual intercourse

It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year and where possible before making disclosures.

If a disclosure is made by the student, or a teacher ascertains that a child is at risk, the appropriate action should be taken, i.e. follow the child protection procedures and guidelines for post -primary schools.

8.7 Sexual Activity

Teachers must inform students on the age of consent which following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences Act), is 2006, is 17 years for both males and females, and for homosexual and heterosexual sex.

As a mandated person, if a teacher becomes aware that a student is sexually active under the age of consent, the teacher will refer to the procedures outlined in the *Child Protection Procedures 2017*, in order to establish whether further action is required (i.e. liaison with the DLP or DDLP and/or potential referral to TUSLA), or to confirm that the circumstances are such that a mandated report is not obligated [Reference: *Child Protection Procedures 2017*, Section 4.7: Exceptions from the obligation to make a mandated report].

8.8 Referral

While it is acknowledged that teachers have a professional responsibility to impart the SPHE course content, it remains paramount that the personal, social and emotional needs of our students are responded to in a caring and supportive manner. Where it is appropriate, the teacher may refer students to other supportive links within the school. As far as possible this should be done in negotiation with the student. The teacher should inform the class of external services relevant to the class material. This should be done within the context of the St John Bosco Community College ethos.

8.9 Visiting Speakers

Visiting speakers can play a valuable role in supplementing, complementing and supporting the SPHE/RSE programme. The SPHE coordinator inviting speakers must

- Inform the principal.
- Make the speaker aware of the school ethos and relevant school policies.
- Agree the content of the presentation.
- Where applicable inform the parents.
- Evaluate the presentation in terms of subject matter, messages, structure, methodology, and proposed learning outcomes.
- Ensure all classroom teachers remain in the classroom for the duration of the presentation.

8.10 Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

How staff will be informed:

The policy will be available for all staff on the school website.

How Parents and Students will be informed:

Present students will be informed of this policy in their SPHE/Wellbeing classes. The policy will be available for parents to view on request or on our school website.

9. Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated on regular basis. This practice will be coordinated by the Principal/policy committee in consultation with the wider school community. Parts of the policy may be adjusted from time to time in line with changing information, guidelines, legislation and in light of feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.