

Robertstown National School

R.S.E. Policy

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Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

Introduction

This school policy on Relationships & Sex Education, has been developed through consultation with parents, students, teachers and management.

This policy was initially agreed between the principal, staff and PA in 2007.

It has been reviewed a number of times since most recently in May 2017.

Rationale

Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions.

Sexuality education seeks to provide young people with formal opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality, through processes, which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours, within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

While parents have the primary responsibility for the overall education of their children, it is accepted that the school should play an important role in supporting and complementing them in this task, including Relationships and Sex Education.

Because of the changes in Irish society, in recent decades, the need for the school to carry out this duty has become urgent.

Definition

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual. Relationships and Sexuality Education is an important element of this process. It is a lifelong task of acquiring knowledge and understanding and developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. In the school setting it is an integral part of general education provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development.

Aims of Programme

- To help young people develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- To promote and understand sexuality.
- To promote a healthy attitude to sexuality and relationships.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction and to provide opportunities for students to develop appropriate skills to make informed decisions on sexual matters based on factual information.
- To enable young people to develop healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework. To develop fuller understanding and appreciation of relationships and marriage and the responsibilities of love, parenthood and family life.
- To promote positive attitudes to their own bodies.

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To create an atmosphere where dignified discussion regarding human sexuality can take place.

- To provide opportunities for students to develop appropriate skills to make informed decisions on sexual matters based on factual information.
- To help students grow towards the management of emotions leading to responsible behaviour.
- To foster full awareness of gender equity.
- To help young people develop an awareness of potential threats to their sexual safety and to learn skills for preventing or coping with such situations.
- To inform young people of the personal health and safety aspects of their sexuality.

Management and Organisation of the Programme

There should be a collaborative, whole-school approach to the development and delivery of the school programme. This will be an age appropriate programme and will be in response to children's needs.

The sexuality aspect of R.S.E. will be phased in on a gradual basis and the content monitored to match the level of maturity of students. This will be covered in the final term, usually beginning of June.

5th /6th class boys and girls will be separated where teacher feels it is more appropriate.

R.S.E. is the part of the S.P.H.E. curriculum that provides children with structured opportunities to develop the knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs and practical skills necessary to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships as children and subsequently, as adults.

R.S.E. is a spiral programme from Junior Infants to Sixth Class, building on and returning to similar topics each year to suit the age of the children.

The teaching approaches used will include: classroom discussion, group-work, games, art activities, using stories and poems, class round/circle time, quiet time, a visitor to the classroom, video, educational drama and debate.

Content can be viewed in the "Going Forward Together" information booklet. Teachers may also use the Busy Bodies Booklet as a resource tool.

Possible sensitive issues

May aspects of R.S.E. are common to other school programmes. For example, 'the family' might be central to oral language work in English or Gaeilge, or a life-story project in history.

The R.S.E. programme also includes a number of possible sensitive issues, listed below. It is school policy to deal with these issues through structured lessons, as naturally as possible and without undue emphasis. Listing the issues here, along with the classes in which they are first taught, enables parents to prepare their children in advance for a particular topic, if they so wish (see section on parents/guardians as primary educators).

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Lesson Title	Class	Topic or Language
Caring for New Life	Senior Infants	Language: baby in womb for 9 months, breast feeding
My Body	Senior Infants	Language Used: penis, vagina
How My Body Works	First Class	Language: urine passes through the penis in boys and the urethra in girls
The Wonder of New Life	Second Class	Language: baby leaves its mother's womb through the vagina
Preparing For New Life	Third Class	Language: umbilical cord, navel
My Family	Third Class	Language: gay, lesbian, heterosexual, homosexual
The Wonder of New Life	Fourth Class	Topic: the developing foetus
Growing and Changing	Fourth Class	Topic: physical/emotional changes in puberty. Menstruation (taught to fourth class girls only)
My Body Grows and Changes	Fifth Class	Topic: puberty (revised), menstruation (taught to boys and girls, reproduction)
The Wonder of New Life	Fifth Class	Topic: reproduction
Relationships and New Life	Sixth Class	Topic: sexual intercourse in the context of a committed, loving relationship, reproduction

Topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, masturbation and abortion are not covered in the primary school R.S.E. programme.

Why do we need R.S.E.?

Many children get information and misinformation about relationships and sexuality from television 'soaps', on the internet/ social media, in the playground, from older friends – in many settings and in many ways that parents cannot control and may not be too happy about. Furthermore, children may be picking up messages from television, videos and films such as 'aggression works', 'it's okay to be dishonest if you're not caught', 'I can do exactly what I want now'.

There is a need to help children and young people to listen, to distinguish between differing points of view and to express themselves in an appropriate way. An Advisory Group established by the Minister for Education in 1994 to advise on the introduction of R.S.E. into school quoted the following examples from research and common observation:

- ❖ children receive informal and unsupervised information about relationships and sexuality.
- ❖ such information may be inadequate and inappropriate.
- ❖ young people are already exposed to a variety of sexual practices and attitudes through the media, particularly television, film and magazines.
- ❖ children are maturing physically at even earlier ages.
- ❖ the roles of women and men in society are changing.
- ❖ the nature of family life is changing in a way that places many pressures on children and young people.

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For these reasons and because education is about developing skills for life as well as skills for learning, the Advisory Group concluded that there was a need for a soundly based programme of R.S.E. in schools

Answering questions

This policy document guides the school staff on how to respond to children's questions regarding R.S.E. lessons:

- ❖ for some topics, on age appropriate 'contract' between teacher and class should be devised, where it is agreed that personal questions would not be asked or answered.
- ❖ where a child seeks information that is beyond the content of this school's R.S.E. programme and/or not considered to be age appropriate for the general body of pupils, the teacher should not answer the question, but use limits. Examples: 'I will do my best to answer your questions, but I may not be able to answer all of them'. 'Would you be able to ask your mum or dad about that?' 'That's something you'll learn about as you get older/you'll learn about in fifth class'. 'We agreed in our contract for this lesson that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions'.
- ❖ teachers can inform parents what questions are arising in class and how they were answered/not answered, as necessary.
- ❖ for older children a 'question box' can be used as part of a structured R.S.E. lesson. Teachers can follow-up on the written questions at a later date, thus allowing time to prepare suitable answers, consult with colleagues, etc.

Co-education

This is a coeducational school. We will teach boys and girls together, except for the following lessons:

- ❖ fourth class girls and boys will be taught the lessons on puberty separately, giving each group the same information and lesson. [Exception: only the girls will receive information on menstruation.]
- ❖ fifth and sixth class boys and girls will be taught the lessons on puberty and reproduction separately, giving each group exactly the same information and lesson (including menstruation). The boys and girls will then be brought back together for discussion and follow-up lesson.

Multi class situations if situation arises (e.g. 3rd and 4th classes in the same classroom)

Many R.S.E. topics can be taught to two or more classes together, (as is the case with some other subjects). The staff will, however, make organisational arrangements for the teaching of certain material to a specific class, where this is necessary.

Will R.S.E. help children to make responsible choices?

Yes. The choices and decisions we make in our lives are influenced by the values we hold. We receive these values from our religious and cultural traditions but also from our family, school and community. The methods used to teach R.S.E. create opportunities

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for children and young people to discuss attitudes, beliefs and values about many issues and to develop the skills to make informed and responsible choices and decisions.

Will R.S.E. lead to a loss of innocence in children?

No. However, we should distinguish between innocence and ignorance. Lack of correct and appropriate information can leave your child vulnerable, confused and anxious. On the other hand, providing information, combined with opportunities for discussion and decision-making within a moral framework, can be very helpful and valuable.

Consultation with Parents

Parents have in law and in fact the primary responsibility for the education of their children and home is a natural environment in which Sexuality Education should take place. The role the school plays is to support and to complement. Children have both the right and the duty to understand their own bodies and emotions. With the onset of puberty, this becomes a more serious right and duty. The school will strive to protect this right. The rights of parents who hold conscientious or moral objections are acknowledged.

Organisational matters

Parents have a right to choose whether or not their children receive instruction in issues of growth and development and reproduction in school or not. School will send out parent booklet along with consent forms to inform parents of the areas covered. Where parents choose to withdraw their children from these parts of the curriculum arrangements will be made, in consultation with their parents, as to the best way to handle this as discreetly as possible. Teachers may opt out of the teaching of these areas also, in this case another teacher or a guest speaker will take their class.

Training and Resources

All resources needed, in terms of time, finance and personnel, will be made available to develop and support the Relationships / Sex Education programme in the school.

Evaluation

It is important that the school's Relationship / Sex Education be evaluated and reviewed annually. This should be done at a number of levels – at the level of the student, the teacher, the parent/guardian and the Board of Management.

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Amendments following 2010 review

In 2010 Joan Boland a S.P.H.E. cuideoitheoir from the Department spoke to members of the staff regarding our R.S.E. policy. Following this meeting the policy was reviewed by the staff.

Inclusion of the Stay Safe Programme

Overview of Stay Safe Programme

Aim:

To teach children personal safety skills so that they can look after themselves in situations that could be upsetting or dangerous.

Content:

The lessons cover the following areas:

- ❖ feeling safe and unsafe.
- ❖ friendship and bullying.
- ❖ touches.
- ❖ secrets and telling.
- ❖ strangers.

Children participating in this programme will learn:

- ❖ to distinguish between safe and unsafe feelings.
- ❖ what to do if lost.
- ❖ what to do if the phone or doorbell rings when they are alone in the house.
- ❖ the importance of friends in children's lives.
- ❖ what to do if bullied.
- ❖ stay safe rules: Say No / Get Away / Tell.
- ❖ why not to bully others.
- ❖ appreciating normal, appropriate touches.
- ❖ that unsafe touches should never be kept secret.
- ❖ how to respond to inappropriate touches (Stay Safe Rules).
- ❖ good and bad secrets.
- ❖ that some secrets should not be kept.
- ❖ who and how to tell if in trouble.
- ❖ about strangers and safety strategies.

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R.S.E. / Stay Safe topics covered every year

Infants, First and Second Classes:

Strand Unit: Taking care of my body

Knowing about my body (10 minute lesson approx.)

- ❖ Name parts of the male and female body, using appropriate anatomical terms.

Strand Unit: Safety and protection

Personal Safety

- ❖ Identify situations and places that are safe and those where personal safety might be at risk.

Third and Fourth Classes:

Strand Unit: Taking care of my body

Knowing about my body

- ❖ Realise the importance of caring for and treating his/her own body and that of other with dignity and respect.

Strand Unit: Growing and changing

Birth and new life (40 minutes approx.)

- ❖ Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human body, from conception to birth.

Strand Unit: Safety and protection

Personal Safety

- ❖ Identify people, places and situations that may threaten personal safety.

Fifth and Sixth Classes

(3 hours approximately)

Strand Unit: Taking care of my body

Knowing about my body

- ❖ Recognise the importance of treating his/her body and others with dignity and respect.
- ❖ Identify and discuss the physical and other changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty and understand that these take place at different rates for everyone.
- ❖ Understand the reproductive system of both male and female adults.
- ❖ Become aware of some communicable diseases and explore how diseases and infections spread.

Strand Unit: Growing and changing

As I grow I change

- ❖ Explore patterns of development and growth, comparing present development with that of earlier stages: physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.

Birth and new life

- ❖ Understand sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of marriage involving a committed, loving relationship.
- ❖ Discuss and explore the responsibilities involved in being a parent and the emotional and physical maturity required to be a parent.

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Strand Unit: Safety and protection

Personal Safety

- ❖ Identify situations and places that may threaten personal safety.

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Appendix

Sexual orientation – Advice for Primary Schools

General Points

Schools can foster a culture that is accepting of difference. This can be expressed where appropriate, rather than making the assumption that everyone understands it.

An integral part of R.S.E. is learning to respect others; this will include respect for families or individuals who are different from the norm

The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 provide protection against discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is sexual orientation. The Acts oblige those who manage schools to protect students and staff from discrimination or sexual harassment

If children are using the word "gay" in a negative fashion it is better not to ignore it in the hope that it will go away. The same advice would apply for any instance of bullying.

In ANTI-BULLYING PROCEDURES FOR PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS
September 2013

Bullying is defined as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. These procedures make clear that this definition includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic bullying and racist bullying).

These procedures outline key principles of best practice for both preventing and tackling bullying and require all schools to commit to these principles in their anti-bullying policy.

The key principles are:

- o A positive school culture and climate;
- o Effective leadership;
- o A school-wide approach;
- o A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact;
- o Implementation of education and prevention strategies (including awareness raising measures);
- o Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils;
- o Supports for staff;
- o Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies);
- o On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy

Practical Suggestions

In the event of name calling the following actions are suggested. With older children (from Fourth Class) the following explanations will be used:

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- ❖ the majority of people are attracted to people of the opposite sex. This is called being heterosexual. Some people are attracted to people of the same sex. This is called being homosexual or gay.
- ❖ To give this information in an open and straight forward way may help to remove the secrecy which is necessary for any bullying to flourish.
- ❖ Homophobic insults should be treated in exactly the same way as other insults.
- ❖ With younger children the teacher can calmly explain to the child that such words are hurtful to the other person and not acceptable.

R.S.E. Contract

- ❖ Be sensible. No giddy behaviour.
- ❖ Respect your class mates: The same way – You – would like to be respected.
- ❖ Respect the adult by listening.
- ❖ Use appropriate language.
- ❖ Wait for question time.
- ❖ Teacher will only answer some questions. You may like to ask questions at home.
- ❖ Wait for DVD time.
- ❖ Remember what is discussed in class is only for you and your family.

Resources

- ❖ Relationship and Sexuality Education (A partnership between Home and School).
- ❖ Social, Personal and Health Education – Teacher guidelines.
- ❖ Stay Safe.
- ❖ Grow and Love.
- ❖ R.S.E. (S.P.H.E. Education) Department of Education and Skills.
- ❖ Walk Tall.
- ❖ P.D.S.T. Website R.S.E. (resources also available).
- ❖ Making the Links.
- ❖ Busybodies DVD (www.healthpromotions.ie)
- ❖ Busybodies parents' booklet.
- ❖ Resources – Anatomical Dolls.
- ❖ Health Ed., Prim Ed.
- ❖ Stay Safe (versions for Special Needs Children)

To be reviewed May 2019.

Signed: William Byrne
Chairperson BOM

Date: 14th June 2017