



Coláiste Iósaef Community College

Roll No. 76070A

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy



Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy in Coláiste Iósaef Community College

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive.

Background

Relationships and sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly in the life of an adolescent. Adolescence is marked by the onset of physical sexual maturity. This stage of development is also marked by the establishment of first significant boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, by the first experience of sexual attraction and by the experience of falling in, and out of love. There is greater freedom, responsibility and exposure to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality, issues of sexual orientation and the place of sexuality in personal and social life. Sexual development calls for the critical evaluation of the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values with which adolescents are bombarded.

Building on work done in primary school, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) at post-primary level seeks to provide opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will enable them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Mission Statement

Coláiste Iósaef strives to support and encourage each individual within the school community to reach his/her full potential in a caring environment.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

The Aims of our RSE Programme

- a) To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- b) To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- c) To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others.
- d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- e) To enable students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.
- f) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

We aim to provide our students with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

Objectives:

We hope to enable students to:-

- Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- Develop a positive sense of self awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals.
- Understand Human Physiology with particular reference to the Reproductive Cycle and Human Fertility.
- Understand Sexual Development and identify and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
- Value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal, moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.

- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety.

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 SPHE in Junior Cycle and RSE in Senior Cycle Religious Education; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians and visiting speakers.

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.
- 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.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media.

In Coláiste Íosaef, RSE provides structured opportunities for students to acquire a knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

This approach gives opportunities to students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

This means building on the primary programme and providing students with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, and so make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

In Coláiste Iósaef, RSE is taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education in Junior Cycle and in Religious Education in Senior Cycle.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Programme in Coláiste Iósaef aims to provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Topics for RSE at Junior Cycle include:

Human Growth & Development

- An understanding of physical and emotional changes at puberty
- Fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth
- Sexually transmitted infections
- An awareness of the consequences and implications of sexual activity

Human Sexuality

- Understanding and respecting what it is to be male or female
- An appreciation of the roles of women and men in society
- Awareness of discrimination
- Personal safety
- Sexual orientation

Human Relationships

- Developing skills regarding making and maintaining good relationships and friendships
- Family roles and responsibilities
- Group behaviour and resolving conflict
- An understanding of how peer pressure works

Topics for RSE at Senior Cycle include:

Human Growth and Development

- Fertility and family planning
- A deeper understanding of pregnancy and the developing foetus

Human Sexuality

- Treating women and men with equal respect
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual abuse, rape, legal right: voluntary and statutory agencies
- Making moral and healthy choices regarding sexual activity

Human Relationships

- An awareness of what constitutes a loving relationship
- The long-term commitment involved in marriage
- Parenting and family life

In planning for RSE at Senior Cycle, we take account of what was covered in Junior Cycle so that the students experience a comprehensive developmental programme of RSE during their years in Coláiste Iósaef.

The policy is intended to promote and guide students from Transition Year to 6th year with Relationship and Sexual Education.

The programme will be introduced to students in the following ways:

- Transition Year - 6 lessons
- 5th Year - 6 lessons
- 6th Year - 6 lessons

Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education

The *Draft 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. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills-all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.



The Organisation and Management of RSE within Coláiste Iósaef

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.

Informing and Involving Parents:

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school office.

Offering Advice:

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception-however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with educational information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

Explicit Questions:

It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from SPHE coordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal. The

Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

- a) Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality.
- b) Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal decided that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents.
- c) Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information.
- d) Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential- the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools state in 4.1.1 and 4.2.1 -

4.1.1

If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.

4.2.1

If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.

The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education

The Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction. In Junior Cycle Home Economics & Science, in Senior Cycle Biology & Home Economics.

Withdrawing Students from the RSE Programme:

Parents/guardians do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so-sometimes we can resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent/guardians request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent/guardian. (See also appendix 1)

Using visiting speakers and others

- a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.
- b) The SPHE Co-ordinator or senior Cycle religious education teacher will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Issues to consider are:
 - i. The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
 - ii. Will the visitor be accompanied by teaching staff?
 - iii. Will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
 - iv. How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
 - v. How will the visit be built upon and followed up?
- c) Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work.
- d) In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.
- e) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- f) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged.
- g) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.
- h) At the end of the session a vote of thanks should be given by a pupil and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.
- i) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could appear in the School Newsletter.

Homosexuality

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

Contraception

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

Special Needs

Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

Abortion

This topic will also be discussed in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issue in a non-directive way.

Ongoing Support, Development and Review

Training:

- All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be 'experts' on the issues concerned. However, they do require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as

counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.

- The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

Resources:

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the RSE programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

- pupil feedback;
- staff review and feedback;
- parental feedback.

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at certain pre-determined times under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others. The SPHE co-ordinator and Religion co-ordinator will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

- To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:
- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE & RE for all students
- Resource materials are available to teachers
- Appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it
- Staff are aware of the policy
- Students are aware of the policy
- Parents/guardians are aware of the policy
- Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents/guardians, and members of board of management.

Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

- we discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)
- we consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other pupils, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme;
- we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,
- we point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme;
- we also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
- we offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.