# Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

**Coláiste Iósaef**

# Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy in Coláiste Iósaef

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

**Introductory Statement and Rationale**

The following policy was drafted by the RSE policy committee and the guidance staff, in conjunction with the SPHE teachers, the Parents' Council and the Students' Council. The RSE policy is an accumulation of consultation, collaboration and research, and it is hoped that this document will be comprehensive and informative and will provide guidance and direction to all in the teaching of RSE.

**School Mission Statement**

Our mission in Coláiste Iósaef is the holistic education of the individual, enabling students to become responsible, caring members of society as well as encouraging them to reach their full potential. In our daily lives we value the principles of justice and mutual respect embracing all denominations and cultures. We endeavour to nurture and maintain a school community which involves the partnership of staff, students, parents, trustees and the local community. In the pursuit of this ideal we provide a broad and balanced range of curricular and extra- curricular experiences for all students.

**Relationship to the School Mission Statement**

The mission of Coláiste Iósaef is the education of the individual as a whole person. 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 ethos of Coláiste Iósaef, which is to teach moral values, attitudes and behaviour patterns which engender respect towards oneself and others, 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.

**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.

**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.

**Definition of RSE**

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education 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.)

**Aims of our RSE Programme**

**Relationships and Sexuality education, which is located in the overall framework of SPHE has its own specific aims:**

- 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 child to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction.

**Aim of SPHE at Junior Cycle**

The Junior Cycle short course in SPHE aims to develop student's positive sense of themselves and their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. It also aims to build the capacity of young people to develop and maintain health relationships. (NCCA Short Course Specification 2016 p 5)

**Aim and Objectives of SPHE at Senior Cycle**

**Aim**

Senior cycle SPHE aims to support students in making choices for health and wellbeing.

**Objectives**

The objectives for SPHE in senior cycle are to:

- develop self-awareness through opportunities to reflect on thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings
- enhance students' knowledge and understanding of essential health concepts and the wider influences on health and wellbeing to enable informed decision making
- develop students' self-efficacy; the confidence to think and behave independently especially in the face of social pressure
- strengthen students' capacity to emphasise with another person's situation, feelings and

motives in order to enhance relationships with other people

- develop coping strategies for adolescence and adult life in support of greater resilience
- develop students' health literacy skills, including the ability to obtain, critically evaluate and act on health information in support of health and wellbeing
- develop a willingness to participate in the creation and maintenance of healthy communities and environments.

**Relationships and Sexuality**

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle S.P.H.E and the Wellbeing curriculum.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. SPHE provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources. (NCCA, Short Course Specification 2016 p4)

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.

**Guidelines for the management and organisation of RSE in our School**

**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, carries the greatest likelihood of success. The values inherent in the programme should be consistent with the core values of the school ethos.

- To ensure an adequate response to the needs of all students, specific provision for RSE is made within the schools Social, Personal and Health Education programme at both Junior and Senior Level.
- At Junior Cycle, SPHE is allocated two class periods per week for 1st years, 2nd and 3rd years receive one class period per week.
- At Senior Cycle RSE will be covered as part of the Life skills programme which is also allocated one class period per week.
- All the resource materials for RSE developed by teachers are in line with the NCCA RSE curriculum guidelines.
- 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, Psychology, Religious Education and during school developed programmes in Social Personal and Health Education.
- Counselling and Chaplaincy Services, Guest Speakers, Pastoral care teams, tutors and year heads, management and the Student Support Team also deal with support pertaining to SPHE and RSE.

The teaching methods for the Relationships and Sexuality module within SPHE and Lifeskills will be based on sound pedagogic 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.

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. Parents/Guardians are welcome to view the full teaching resources for SPHE/RSE.

**Provision of Training and Staff Development**

Inservice training in RSE is one of the key elements in promoting its inclusion. Management is responsible for 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 second or third year, it is important that the teacher has other contact with the class e.g. subject or tutor.

As part of the RSE programme all teachers will have access to RSE teaching materials.

**Inclusion of Parents and Guardians**

Our school is committed to working with parent(s)/guardian(s) and acknowledges that parents 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 first years and new students will be provided with a summary of the three year SPHE/RSE programme. Parents will be informed every year about the commencement date of RSE.

**Participation**

Each parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes but parents are encouraged to provide alternative RSE at home. The school will respect this choice. It will be necessary for parents 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. **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.**

**Sensitive Issues**

Class discussion will be of a general nature, and will be respectful of all 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, Yearhead, Student Support Team, Chaplain and/or Guidance Counsellor.

**Confidentiality**

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE class there will be times when they do 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 child, or a teacher ascertains that a child is at risk, the appropriate action will be taken, i.e. follow the child protection procedures and guidelines for post primary schools.

**Sexuality, Gender Identity and Sexual Health**

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

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

**Sexual Activity**

Teachers must inform students of the age of consent, which following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences Act), is 2017, is 17 years for both males and females, and for homosexual and heterosexual sex. If a teacher becomes aware that a student is sexually active under the age of consent the teacher must inform the schools DLP.

**Additional 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.

**Referral**

While it is acknowledged that teachers have a professional responsibility to impart the SPHE course content, 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 Coláiste Iósaef ethos.

**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

**Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities**

**How staff will be informed**

The policy will be available for all staff in the school to view. It will be included in the policy documents and it will be put up on the schools virtual learning environment system. Copies will be distributed to all individual SPHE teachers

**How Parents and Students will be informed**

Present students will be informed of this policy in their SPHE/Lifeskills and Religion classes. The policy will be available for parents to view on the school website. The aims of SPHE, the programme outline, along with the RSE policy will be given to parents of incoming students to the school.

**Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy**

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis. This practice will be coordinated by the policy committee. Parts of the policy may be adjusted from time to time in line with changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents and 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.

**Ratified by the Board of Management:**

**Review Process**

The policy will be reviewed in line with Coláiste Iósaef procedures regarding policy reviews and updates.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

(Chairperson of Board of Management) (Principal)

Date: _____ Date: _____

Date of Policy Review: _____