

# **Abbey Community College**

## **Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy**

### **1. Our School**

Abbey Community College is a co-educational secondary school. It was established in the year 2000 by County Kilkenny VEC and is under the joint trusteeship of County Kilkenny VEC and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary. It currently has an enrolment of circa 670 students.

### **2. Our School Philosophy and Mission Statement**

Abbey Community College is committed to enriching through education the lives of the people in its care and encouraging them, in turn, to bring life to others. This school community commits itself to maintaining a safe, positive, structured, caring environment where the spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, social, personal and aesthetic development of the school community is paramount. It recognises that parents/guardians are the primary educators and home is the natural environment in which Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should take place.

### **3. Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education**

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

### **4. Relationship 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 Relationship and Sexuality Education Programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern.

### **5. The Aims of our Relationship and Sexuality Programme (RSE)**

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

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

### **6. To what will this policy apply?**

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in other classrooms other than SPHE/RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with RSE policy.

### **7. To whom will this policy apply?**

This policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators and will be freely available to all personnel.

## **8. Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationship and Sexuality Education in our school**

The Principal will make arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE Programme and the deployment of staff. Teachers will follow the guidelines and lesson plans drawn up by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

- One timetabled period per week will be allocated to SPHE and out of the SPHE Programme in the year; **six timetabled periods will be assigned to RSE.**
- RSE is included in the Transition Year programme.
- Fifth and Sixth Year: RSE will be an integral part of the Religious Education Programme (minimum of six lessons per year).

## **9. The division between biological and non biological aspects of sex education**

The school policy is that the Science/Home Economics and SPHE Departments deal with the biological aspects of reproduction.

## **10. Classroom Issues**

### **Participation**

SPHE is a core curricular subject on the Junior Cycle Curriculum. Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) is one module of the programme. Parents/Guardians should be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of enrolment of the student. While all partners in the school community – teaching staff, parents and management – are agreed on the programme we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent/guardian who so wishes to request that his/her son/daughter should not participate in the programme. The school will respect this choice. Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students. Parents/Guardians wishing to withdraw their son/daughter must contact the Deputy Principal in the first instance. After discussion with the Deputy Principal, if the Parent/Guardian still wishes to withdraw their child from RSE, then this request should be made in writing to the Deputy Principal in September of each year; otherwise the student will take part in the RSE classes.

### **Answering Questions**

While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked and should set appropriate limits. Inappropriate questions will not be answered by a teacher in class. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included on the curriculum. On these and all questions asked, teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school.

### **Management of Information**

It is school policy that if a teacher receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused (*as defined in **Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children***), the teacher should, in the first instance, report the matter to the Principal/Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or in exceptional circumstances to the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

The Principal/DLP will decide whether to inform the parents/guardians and /or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling. Although there is no legal duty on a teacher, or a Principal/DLP, to inform the parents/guardians of matters which a child has confided to them:

- Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality
- Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents/guardians if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents;
- 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.

Where the matter is reported to the Principal/ (DLP) and he or she is satisfied on advice that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, a report should be made to HSE as per the school's Child Protection Policy, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills' *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary*.

The Principal will report to the Board of Management as per section 4.3 of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary*.

It is essential that all times the matter be treated in the strictest confidence and not discussed except among the parties mentioned above.

### **Outside Speakers**

Outside speakers are invited to speak at Abbey Community College and will be directed to the school's website for the school's RSE policy.

While visitors to the classroom can be immensely valuable as part of the SPHE programme, the delivery of the programme remains the responsibility of the teacher. In light of this, it is recommended that where visitors/outside agencies are used to support SPHE, the SPHE teacher may remain with the class group during the visit.

(Appendix: Details of outside speakers and agencies.)

### **Sexual Activity**

Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and the RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of Sexual Activity. It is advisable that teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years for both males and females.

### **Family Planning**

The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of Family Planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE Programme. The RSE Programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of family planning.

## **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. The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. The Equal Status Act, 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including homosexuality. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of sexual orientation.

## **Sexually Transmitted Infections**

Creating awareness of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) is undertaken in second level schools. Information on STIs is mainly addressed in the Senior Cycle. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the issue of Sexually Transmitted Infections.

## **Special Needs**

Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up.

## **11. Links to Other School Policies**

School policies being examined or reviewed, should be considered with reference to the school's RSE Policy; while the implications of other school policies for the RSE policy also need to be considered, such as:

- Child Protection Policy.
- School's Guidance Plan.
- Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Substance misuse Policy.
- ICT Policy.

## **12. Provision of Training and Staff Development**

Abbey Community College has appointed an SPHE Convenor. SPHE Support Service offers training and support to teachers in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE/RE and the school will endeavour to up skill and train the SPHE/RE teachers in this important area of the SPHE Curriculum on an ongoing basis.

## **13. 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.

## **14. Monitoring of Policy**

The implementation of the RSE policy will be monitored at SPHE/RSE department meetings and other meetings deemed necessary by the Principal or Board of Management.

## **15. Evaluating and Reviewing the RSE Programme**

The school will review this policy periodically after its ratification by the BOM. The RSE policy may be reviewed and amended, prior to that date, where necessary.

**This policy should be read in conjunction with the Abbey Community College  
Child Protection Policy**

### **Appendix**

#### **Rationale – why is it necessary?**

- 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).
- Circular M4/95 and M20/96 and 0037/2010 request schools to commence process of RSE policy development.

#### **Resources**

Programmes and schedules of work are to be found in SPHE subject planning folder and are periodically review and updated.

<http://www.sphe.ie/resources.aspx>

#### **Outside Speakers and Agencies**

- Squashy Couch Adolescent Health and Information Project Waterford
- That's Life Education Programme Nurse - Margaret Crean  
(Outline of both courses to be found in SPHE subject planning folder)

#### **Continued Professional Development (CPD)**

CPD is encouraged and support by the school.