



## Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) Policy

### Introduction

Dominican College Wicklow is a voluntary second - level, girls-only school, with a Catholic Dominican ethos under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The RSE Policy has been developed following consultation between staff, parents, Principal and Board of Management. In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian'. 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/RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

### Policy Context

This policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Dominican College Wicklow
- The SPHE Policy
- The Pastoral Care Policy
- The Code of Behaviour
- The Child Protection Policy
- The Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- The Mobile Device Management Policy
- The SEN Policy
- The Guidance Plan
- 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 school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection procedures and has a Child Protection policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. The RSE Policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the schools Child Protection Policy are followed.

### A. Our Mission

The Dominican motto 'TRUTH' is the inspiration of our work. The mission statement of Dominican College Wicklow (DCW) is: *Finding 'Truth' through the education of the Whole Person*. Dominican education is concerned with the education of the whole person. Strong emphasis is placed on each student attaining her full potential academically, but care is also taken to ensure that each student benefits from an enriching all round education. Strong emphasis is placed on each student attaining her full potential through an enriching, comprehensive education.

In an atmosphere of trust and friendliness, students are encouraged to develop responsibility, initiative, personal growth and leadership so as to help them take their place in society as mature citizens. We help students to make sound judgements. That is done through developing a love for truth which will not be satisfied with superficial values. The values of justice, peace, reconciliation and mutual respect are paramount.



## B. Our Vision

We aspire to create a progressive learning environment of the highest quality where students grow to become independent, respectful, responsible and caring women of integrity who live by Christian values and Dominican principles.

1. Students in DCW are encouraged to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.
2. The school gives students the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, Business Studies and STEM subjects. In addition we provide Religious, moral and physical education in order to meet our statutory obligations under the Education Act (1998) and our founding objectives of supporting students in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and working life.
3. A code of behaviour has been published after consultation with students, parents & staff and the following excerpts illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:
  - The Code which is linked to the Dominican Ethos is based on the principles of respect, equality, cooperation and natural justice, has regard to the rights and responsibilities of management, teachers, students and parents.
  - Cooperative, positive, kind behaviours are the norm in DCW and such behaviours are expected and fostered throughout the school.
4. An important facet of Dominican education is the recognition and acceptance of the difference in ability and gifts and each student. Within this broad objective we aim to:
  - Create an atmosphere of Christian care and concern
  - Provide a supportive environment in which students are enabled to grow to maturity
  - Enable students to develop a healthy self-esteem
  - Provide the educational environment and facilities to enable students to reach their full potential
  - Give due regard to Religious Education
  - Provide a calm yet stimulating learning atmosphere, which encourages respect for self and others and enables students to grow in freedom.

The teaching of RSE in Dominican College Wicklow is influenced by our mission statement and characteristic spirit.

## C. Definition of RSE

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 (*RSE Policy Guidelines, DES, 1997*). 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.

## D. Aims of our RSE Programme:



RSE is located primarily in the framework of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE, now part of Wellbeing in the new Junior Cycle Framework). The aims of RSE are:

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others
- To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

In DCW RSE provides structured opportunities for students to acquire 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. Students are provided with information and taught skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today. Students are encouraged to make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives and to respect their own personal dignity and that of others. The school recognises that parents/guardians are the primary educators and home is the natural environment in which Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should take place.

### **E. Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

Wellbeing - SPHE provides opportunities for students to develop personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others. The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that SPHE is 'spiral, developmental in nature and age-appropriate in content and methodology'. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. It is therefore important in DCW to teach RSE in the context of SPHE. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which are 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 aims of an RSE programme i.e. the provision of opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way, can best be done through a full SPHE programme. SPHE operates on the basis of primary prevention i.e. prevention of social ills rather than treatment of them. It adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. Principally therefore, by providing RSE through an SPHE programme we teach young people personal skills to increase their personal effectiveness so that, in the context of their own lives, they are able to make informed decisions in relation to their own sexuality and relationship with others.

### **F. What the School Currently Provides**



Formal examples of Wellbeing - SPHE/RSE in action in DCW include the teaching of Healthy Living (Health Service Executive, Student Workbook, 1<sup>st</sup> Year), Healthy Times (HSE workbook, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year) and Health Choices (HSE workbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year) and 'TRUST' - Teaching Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching for Senior Cycle. All Junior classes are timetabled for one period of SPHE each week. RSE lessons at Junior Cycle receive a minimum of six class periods, as required. RSE is scheduled at Senior Cycle as a block of classes, taught across at least six weeks in January/February each year.

Some aspects of Wellbeing - SPHE and/or RSE are approached during subjects such as Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Home Economics, Physical Education, Religious Education, and Science. Some are taught informally using a cross curricular approach and support what is taught in Junior Cycle SPHE [part of Wellbeing in the Junior Cycle Framework] (see SPHE Policy) [e.g. CSPE/RE – values, rights and responsibilities]. Where there are cross-curricular links with SPHE/RSE the school ethos is respected at all times and informs what is taught.

The RSE programme is supported by the Pastoral Care of the Management and Staff and the Care Team. The school at present offers RSE primarily through the SPHE programme which is taught at both Junior and Senior Cycle.

Junior Cycle topics covered include:	Senior Cycle topics covered include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Circle of Life</li> <li>• Communication and Respect</li> <li>• Feelings and Adolescence</li> <li>• Saying How I Feel</li> <li>• Body Awareness-Body Care</li> <li>• Hygiene Hints!</li> <li>• Common Senses</li> <li>• The Image of Me</li> <li>• The Words we Use</li> <li>• Puberty</li> <li>• Human Reproduction</li> <li>• The Miracle of New Life</li> <li>• Pregnancy and Birth</li> <li>• How I Relate</li> <li>• Family Ties</li> <li>• You've Got a Friend</li> <li>• Boy/Girl Relationships</li> <li>• Don't Box Me In!</li> <li>• Self-Esteem</li> <li>• Peer Pressure</li> <li>• Take Care!</li> <li>• Time to Reflect</li> <li>• Teenage Pregnancy</li> <li>• Respect and Tolerance for Difference</li> </ul>	<p><b>Human Growth and Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Understanding the structure and function of sex organs</li> <li>. Awareness of fertility</li> <li>. Awareness of the importance and method of family planning</li> <li>. Understanding of pregnancy and development of the foetus</li> <li>. Appreciation of the importance of health care during pregnancy</li> <li>. Recognising the range of human emotions and ways to deal with these</li> <li>. An understanding of the relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted infections.</li> </ul> <p><b>Human Sexuality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Understanding of what it means to be male, female, gender fluid etc.</li> <li>. Consideration of male and female roles in relationships and in society</li> <li>. Exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality</li> <li>. Understanding the concept of sexual harassment and its different forms</li> <li>. Awareness of personal boundaries, consent, recognising respectful relationships, appropriate and inappropriate relationships</li> <li>. Skills for making choices about sexual activity</li> <li>. Exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society</li> </ul> <p><b>Human Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Understanding the nature of peer pressure</li> <li>. Developing skills for resolving conflict</li> <li>. Development of an awareness of the complex nature of love and loving relationships</li> <li>. Understanding of marriage as a loving commitment</li> <li>. Deeper awareness of the importance of family life</li> </ul>



The teaching of the RSE programme is age-appropriate as directed by the DES-NCCA RSE Programme and Guidelines.

Some resources used may include:

Healthy Living – HSE Teacher’s Manual & Student Workbook.

Healthy Times – HSE Teacher’s Manual & Student Workbook.

Healthy Choices – HSE Teacher’s Manual & Student Workbook.

‘TRUST’ - Teaching Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching for Senior Cycle.

‘Growing Up Gay and Bisexual in Ireland’ programme (SPHE-PDST).

‘Lockers’ (SPHE-PDST).

Irish Family Planning Clinic – teaching kit.

DVDs: ‘Busy Bodies’, 20 minutes long. Adolescent development video. Produced by the Health Promotion Department, Southern Health Service Executive.

‘The Human Body’, BBC TV series available on DVD from HMV or other music stores. The whole dvd is 344 minutes long with a 45 minute section on what happens to the body during puberty and another 45 minute section on conception and the development of the baby in the womb.

‘I Don’t Believe It’: The video shows the effect of an unplanned pregnancy on a young girl, her boyfriend and her parents, in a story format. website: [www.cura.ie](http://www.cura.ie)

Books: ‘Let’s Talk About Sex’, Walker Books. (Available from most bookshops).

‘Understanding The Facts of Life’, Usborne Books. (Available from most bookshops).

## G. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in DCW

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE programme and the deployment of staff are made by the Principal.

2. Informing and Involving Parents:

Parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents’ role in education concerning RSE is regarded as very important in DCW. The RSE Policy is available to download from [www.dominicanwicklow.net](http://www.dominicanwicklow.net) or a copy of the policy will be made available to any parent upon request to the Admin. office. This policy has been designed in consultation with the Parents’ Association and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. Parents have a responsibility to become involved, to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their daughters for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas and discuss areas covered in RSE/SPHE. Parents are welcome to view the programme and may speak to the RSE teacher if they have any concerns. Parents are notified in writing by the school at least one week in advance of formal RSE lessons being taught at Junior and Senior Cycle. Parents’ right to withdraw their daughter from RSE lessons is made clear in the notification, as well as alternative supervision arrangements. 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 who so wishes to request that his/her daughter should not participate in the programme.

3. 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 education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other health professionals. Information offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the student.

#### 4. Explicit Questions:

It is natural that students should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the RSE programme. It may not be appropriate however to deal with some explicit questions in class. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. 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 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. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed among students outside of the RSE lesson.

#### 5. Confidentiality:

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students but we cannot guarantee confidentiality. It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the DLP (Principal.) The DLP (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 will 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 decides 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 Procedures for Post Primary schools (DES, 2011) state in 4.1. and 4.2.1:

If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused or neglected, or is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect he/she shall, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report shall be made and placed in a secure location by the DLP. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in section 1.9 of these procedures, shall be borne in mind. The supports of the school shall continue to be made available to the child [4.1].



In cases where there are concerns about a child, but the Designated Liaison Person is not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, the DLP shall seek advice from the HSE Children and Family Services. In consulting the HSE, the DLP shall be explicit that he/she is requesting advice and consultation and that he/she is not making a report. At this informal stage the DLP need not give identifying details. If the HSE advises that a report should not be made, the DLP shall as soon as possible inform the Board of Management of this fact. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the child, no details of the case should be disclosed to the Board of Management unless there are issues which need to be addressed directly by the Board of Management. If the HSE advises that a report should be made, the DLP shall act on that advice [4.2.1].

#### 6. The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:

The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

#### 7. Timetabling

The RSE programme follows the general outlines for each year group drawn up by the NCCA & DES. The content is taught in six class periods (minimum) per year as follows:

First, Second and Third Year: RSE will be an integral part of the Wellbeing - SPHE programme, which is timetabled for one period per week.

Aspects of RSE will be covered during the compulsory 'Women's Health' module in Transition Year.

Fifth and Sixth Year: RSE will be an integral part of the Religious Education Programme.

#### 8. Withdrawing students from the RSE programme:

- I. The Education Act (1998; section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their daughter from all or any aspect of RSE – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme.
- II. Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the formal RSE Programme.
- III. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a parent's written request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied for that academic year. Each subsequent academic year requires a written withdrawal request from the student's parent. A written request to withdraw a child from RSE lessons should be made in the student's Homework Journal.
- IV. If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, parents must give a notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their daughter. The student will be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.



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

- I. We discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's parent and, if appropriate, attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the RSE teacher and Year Head, - the Principal may become involved if necessary).
- II. 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 students.
- III. We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn from RSE there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- IV. We also point out that students may sometimes receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- V. We offer parents access to appropriate information and resources.

#### 9. 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 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 include:
  - 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 students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.
- e) The Deputy Principal and the Admin. Office staff should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- f) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged with the catering staff.
- 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 student 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 Weekly Schools News in the local media.

#### 10. Out-of-School Factors

The school also recognises the many out of school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence - the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their





they are encouraged to work in collaboration with teachers of Science/Biology and RE to foster appropriate cross-curricular links. Teachers of RSE in DCW do not necessarily have to be 'experts' on the issues concerned. However, they do require sensitivity to the needs of the class, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and a willingness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to SPHE.

2. Senior Management and the Board of Management facilitates teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and Supervision/Substitution rota, and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

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

**Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme:**

Senior Management and RSE-SPHE teachers are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the RSE programme. Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

a) student feedback: feedback is sought from the students by the RSE teachers; a confidential survey of students, administered by the SPHE-RSE teachers, is conducted once the RSE lessons are completed. The survey questions are based on the TRUST pack survey. Collated results may be made available by the RSE teachers to Senior Management for the purpose of School Self Evaluation

b) staff review and feedback

c) parental feedback, including at parent-teacher meetings and Parents' Association meetings.

Feedback is sought as part of our School Self-Evaluation process and helps to inform future planning.

Ratified by the Board of Management on:

Signature (Chairperson): 

Date of next review: September 2020



behaviour within these relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material on video, television and through music. The RSE programme will attempt to heighten the student's awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

#### 11. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Identities, orientations and related issues

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

#### 12. Sensitive issues e.g. sexual activity, abortion & contraception

Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines. RSE 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 of age for both males and females. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. There is a lesson on family planning in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P77. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, and this is done within the values and moral framework of the ethos of DCW.

#### 13. Students with Additional Needs

Students who have additional educational 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.

### **H. Ongoing support, development and review training:**

Teachers of RSE attend, and are encouraged to attend, continuing professional development (CPD) courses offered in the region. They use their professional judgement to their approach to teaching RSE in the context of the Catholic ethos of DCW and its characteristic spirit and mission as well as the DES-NCCA guidelines. The SPHE Coordinator, RSE teachers and Senior Management Team endeavour to answer any queries that may be posed by parents, students, teachers or Board of Management members in relation to this policy and RSE programme. The Board of Management and Senior Management Team are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE, to providing relevant RSE school resources and supporting efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE. It is the responsibility of the B.O.M. to ensure content is covered by another teacher or an outside speaker.

1. SPHE / RSE teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively in their planning, teaching and evaluation of the RSE programme and to share professional good practice in the best interest of students. Further,