

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

Rockbrook Park School

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Young people "flourish in an environment where there is a whole-school approach to the holistic growth of students and where there is a shared belief in their potential for development, learning and wellbeing" (DES Circular 0023/2010). To this end, every Board of Management of a post-primary school is required to approve a school policy and implement a programme in RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education) as part of its Junior Cycle social, personal and health education (DES Circular 0037/2010). Post-primary schools are also required to have an RSE programme at Senior Cycle.

The RSE policy herein is the outcome of wide consultation and agreement across the school community in Rockbrook. The policy is reviewed by the school Board of Management every three years. This policy places our RSE programme in the context of our school's mission, values and ethos and the needs and wishes of our students and their families. It has always been recognised that school life should "promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school" (Education Act, 1998).

Scope of policy

While this policy refers specifically to RSE delivered as part of a planned programme, it also applies across the school to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality, regardless of the subject, short course or activity (discussion related to relationships and/or sexuality education may be part of Religious Education, Science, Biology, Philosophy, PE, Art, mentoring etc.).

This policy applies, as with all policies, to the collective school community: school leadership, teachers, admin and other staff, students, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators. The effectiveness of the RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy implementation by everyone.

School context

To understand this policy fully one should be mindful of the school's Catholic ethos, its particular focus on character education, its commitment to partnership with parents in their children's education and the relevant prevailing influences in the wider culture.

In Rockbrook, RSE is integral to the whole-school focus on student personal development and wellbeing which is our 'Men of Character' programme.

The goal of character education is to help young people to develop the virtues that will enable them to flourish personally and socially. The school places a lot of store on educating boys to be well-balanced young men, hard-working independent thinkers who are committed to moral principles in their lives and take responsibility for their actions.

Parents are at the heart of Rockbrook. The school seeks to reinforce the Christian values of the home. The palpable family tone connecting students, staff, and parents in Rockbrook helps ensure the transformative nature of the character education programme.

The school's unique mentoring system fosters a friendly cordial atmosphere in the school, encourages trust, and helps build a high degree of cooperation between the teaching body, parents and students in the school.

Giving children an adequate preparation for adult life, particularly with regard to their education in relationships and sexuality is increasingly more difficult in modern society. The general culture no longer reflects a Christian view of society. The challenge for the school is to provide an appropriate

education while ensuring students experience a Catholic culture which they can carry forward with them in life.

Definition of RSE

RSE is a broad-ranging programme in which students learn to develop as persons, with particular reference to their personal relationships and the development of human sexuality. In its RSE programme the school will take particular cognisance of:

- the primary duty of parents in the education of their children, and the right of the young person to be adequately informed by his own parents on sexual and moral questions.
- the school's concentration on an integral approach to education helping each pupil achieve his age-appropriate intellectual, spiritual, emotional, cultural, human and social maturity through an all-round education.
- the importance of character education as education in virtue.

The aims of our RSE Programme

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote a positive understanding of sexuality as part of the whole person.
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationships with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for procreation and for new life.
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school.
- 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 towards others.
- Understand how human sexuality is an integral part of their humanity.
- Appreciate human sexuality as a gift for love and for life.
- Know their body and how it functions.
- Appreciate the value of living chastity.
- Understand the risks associated with the trivialisation of sex.
- Be able to act responsibly in their relationships.
- A deeper appreciation of, and respect for, themselves and others.
- Recognise their duty of care and responsibility to others, who are made in God's image and likeness.
- Appreciate the value of marriage and family, permanent loving relationships and the responsibilities of parenthood.
- The importance of loyalty, fidelity and self-restraint.
- Formation of conscience in accord with spiritual values.
- Human sexuality is a sacred mystery, and this principle, informed by Christian reverence and realism, must guide any programme of education for love.

Partnership with parents

While the qualified classroom teacher is a well placed professional who can work sensitively and consistently with students and a powerful, albeit indirect, impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviour, parents nevertheless are the primary educators of their children and the school sees their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality as critical. The school seeks to inform parents with regard to the school's RSE policy and its implementation, and where possible provide work in partnership with parents wishing to educate their children in RSE within the family.

As part of their overall responsibility in the education of their children, it is the right and duty of parents to provide sex education to their children. The school's role is a supplementary one, presuming that many parents carry out this task at home. As in all education, the example given in the home is paramount. Parents also need to be aware of the need to counteract strong cultural forces which may not be supportive of the education which parents wish their children to receive, and thus the need for the strong countervailing influence of the home.

We recognise the right of any parent to request that his or her son should not participate in the programme.

Helping parents in their responsibilities

The school will seek to assist parents in their parental role by

- providing an RSE programme following a prescribed syllabus in keeping with ethos of the school
- send a letter home to first year parents in advance of the programme being covered in the classroom
- providing education programmes for parents in school around challenges they face (e.g. difficulties presented by social media, pornography, politicised sexual cultures; informing parents on child safety and child protection issues)
- work with Family Enrichment Ireland in promoting their family support programmes for parents.

Guidelines for the delivery of RES in the school

Understanding parameters:

The school's function is to provide a general education about RSE, in keeping with its ethos and characteristic spirit. It will not offer advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour or contraception which are not in keeping with the principles outlined in this policy. Issues that arise in class will be addressed in a manner that reflects the ethos of the school and the Child Protection guidelines of the school.

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 the Principal or the SPHE co-ordinator. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the CP policy, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality:

Teachers avoid seeking personal information from students or asking that family information be divulged.

The whole person

Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. Given the paramount nature of a holistic education, and the spiritual nature of the person, these aspects will be discussed across a range of topics within the RSE Programme.

Using visiting Speakers and Others:

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best covered by 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. 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.

Special needs:

Students 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. Within reason mentors may be able to play a supportive role here, but should discuss such matters first with the Principal.

Training:

All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be experts on the issues concerned. However, they are required to be sensitive to the needs of the group, to be able to deal with questions openly/honestly and prepared to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field.

Resources:

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by the staff involved as beneficial and which have been approved by the Principal.

Mentoring:

It is not envisaged that mentors would be part of RSE provision in the school, but from time to time they may find themselves in counselling situations. At such times, mentors should ensure they adhere to the principles outlined in this policy, and be ready to explain or communicate this policy to parents on request.

RSE curriculum by year

FIRST YEAR

Many students in first year are only emerging from a period of 'innocence' when they have no particular interest in sexual problems and they prefer to associate with children of their own sex. RSE should be indirect, but at the same time, not naïve. Children may have sexual information (from mass media, peers) but without any understanding of moral principles. They must be aware of the need of modesty in behaviour, a strong idea of personal space and of how to be reserved towards strangers. As boys emerge into puberty, parents should be providing their sons with more detailed explanations about sexuality in the framework of marriage, family and fatherhood. Details and sufficient information about the bodily and psychological characteristics of girls should be provided. The school can support this work by educating in fatherhood and motherhood. Respect for women (mother, siblings, other girls) is a vital part of this education, as is avoidance of peer groups who do not show each other this respect. At the same time a young person's moral conscience should be formed to help him exercise judgment on his feelings and emotions.

Relationships

1. Coping with change (new school, new interests)
2. Joining a new group; appreciating difference; understanding other as other
3. Building friendships
4. Bullying is everyone's business

Objectives

- To understand the social need within us not to be alone (we are social by nature)
- To explore the qualities in friendship (interest in others, understanding, giving)
- To see exclusion as a form of bullying
- To help students understand their responsibilities to those around them.

Sexuality

1. The human body as the physical expression of the person. Modesty in dress and behaviour. This should extend to the way matters are discussed and the use of language. Coarseness of any sort should be avoided, so that respect for human sexuality as a great good is not undermined.
2. What it means to be a man or a woman.
3. Changes at adolescence (social, emotional and physical) – and the purpose of these changes
4. Respecting myself and respecting others (seeing them in their fullness, and not just as sexual beings). The natural desire 'to know', and the danger of pornography.
5. Understanding our sexual powers and understanding the reproductive system as the source of new life.
6. An understanding the connections between love, commitment and sex

Objectives

- To help students understand the idea of a person (spiritual, emotional, physical inter-linkages)
- To help the students to understand the physical, emotional and psychological changes that take place during adolescence. To help the students to appreciate that these changes occur at different times and at different rates, depending on the individual
- To enable the students to clarify their information on the male and female reproductive systems, intercourse, and conception
- To broadly consider some harmful contemporary attitudes to sexuality (mainly pornography and use of others / commodifying the person)

Outcomes

As a result of participating in these modules, students should:

- have an appreciation of what it means to be a person
- have a knowledge of the physical, emotional and psychological changes related to adolescence and an understanding of their sexual powers
- have a clear understanding of the male and female reproductive systems and their purpose
- be sensitive to the need for respect for one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others.

SECOND YEAR

Students in second year are now adolescents and part of a peer group for whom sexuality is a common topic. At this age it is important that they receive complete and clear answers to most normal questions that may arise, realising they do not have the emotional maturity to deal with some topics in depth. There should be a strong emphasis on personal character development, on the importance of struggling to be good, on understanding how peer pressure works and how to resist it. Respect for girls, as shown in their language or behaviour, should be emphasised. They should be warned about the challenges ahead in managing one's emotions. They should be alert to the power of influence for good or ill of entertainment media, and the damaging long-term influence of pornography. The beauty of chastity should be presented, helping young people avoid sexual experimentation. Moral education should help young people understand the importance of intellect and will and how these can rule the passions/feelings.

Relationships

1. Friendship: being good friends with others; set example for friends
2. Friendship brings expectations and obligations
3. A good friendship is never coercive; peer pressure; exerting positive peer pressure
4. Bullying: recognising and responding

Objectives

- To help the students to reflect on and appreciate the changing patterns of friendship
- To help students realise their responsibilities to the peer group and how to exercise these
- To help the students to understand sources of bullying behaviour
- To help the students to develop strategies and skills for use when confronted with bullying behaviour

Sexuality

1. To examine the stages of development from conception to birth
2. Understanding feelings; friendships with the opposite sex
3. Respecting oneself and respecting girls.

Objectives

- To help place sexuality in the context of love leading to life
- To encourage self-mastery in all aspects of sexuality
- To help students to differentiate between different types of relationships (parents, siblings, friendships, peer group, particular friendship, friendship with opposite sex)
- To promote awareness of the feelings and emotions associated with a variety of relationships
- To identify skills necessary for making decisions, consistent with personal values and within a Christian moral framework
- To be able to turn for support and help as required, and to know who can help.

Outcomes

As a result of participating in this module, students should:

- have a knowledge of the developmental stages from conception to birth
- have a heightened awareness of the emotional aspects of a range of relationships
- have developed their skills for communicating in the peer group and in personal relationships
- have further developed their capacity for reflection and decision-making skills
- be aware of the potential for danger in forming new relationships
- know how to ask for help.

THIRD YEAR

At this age students are now mixing with others who are promoting sexual experimentation, as well as drug or alcohol use. They may be passing through a rebellious phase at home, and may be challenging the boundaries set for them (by home or school). It is important that such challenges are responded to by parents and teachers by providing good reasons for wholesome behaviour. Young people should be encouraged to view life from the point of view of where they are going, and not where they are now. This sense of vocation will give a clearer

meaning and stronger reasons to behave well in the here and now. Friendships are important to them and they need to learn how to give themselves more, so as to be true friends, and not to be afraid to correct their friends when necessary.

Relationships

1. Friendship and Relationships with others – what is important
2. Made in God's image: respect, rights, and responsibilities
3. Body image
4. Dealing with conflict

Objectives

- To help the students to identify the qualities they value in a relationship
- To enable the students to examine some of the priorities in relationships as depicted in a variety of media and to understand what are true priorities
- To develop skills for protecting rights and promoting responsibilities in personal relationships
- To develop awareness of the importance of respect in relationships
- To enable the students to identify possible sources of conflict in relationships
- To help the students to understand the role of Christian charity (and communication skills) in those situations
- To help students resist the cult of the body

Sexuality

1. Respecting oneself and respecting girls. Avoiding difficult circumstances
2. Marriage as a lifelong commitment, and a vocation in life
3. Marriage as an expression of love
4. Marriage and openness to life
5. The physical and emotional consequences of casual relationships

Objectives

- To understand the need and the ways to protect one's sexuality
- To facilitate a review of the stages of human growth and development, with particular reference to manhood
- To see manhood in the context of establishing lifelong relationship in marriage
- To reflect on virginity as a positive affirmation
- To understand the how and why of relationships without a sexual dimension
- To raise awareness of the dangers of casual sexual relationships (emotional, and physical – STD)

Outcomes

As a result of participating in this module, students should:

- have practised communication skills, skills for enhancing self-esteem and skills for managing peer pressure
- have reviewed their understanding of the adolescent stage of human growth and development as a step stone to manhood
- have identified and recognised the importance of respect, rights and responsibilities in relationships
- have an appreciation of marriage as a lifelong commitment open to life

FOURTH YEAR

There are some key ideas to be got across during the course of the year. These include: Human love as self-giving; Love and human sexuality; Married love; love open to life; respect for life at all stages; chastity as self-giving: self-mastery, chastity in marriage; vocation to marriage; fertility control within marriage; virginity; rights and duties of parents as educators; Key virtues: decency, modesty, privacy, self-control.

Topics to be covered as part of PE

Body Image; health obsessiveness; physical activity; nutrition; responding to feminisation.

Topics to be covered in visitor presentations

Understanding mental health

Pure in Heart team (role of sex in relationships of love; peer pressure)

Topics to be covered in RSE modules

The moral dimension of sexuality. Wanting to be the person we can be requires that we respect God's moral laws (the Commandments, Beatitudes).

The social nature of man (friendship; introducing sex into relationships; virginity; celibacy; marriage)

Homosexuality (orientation and behaviour)

Pornography and other addictions

Media and Politics in relation to human sexuality

FIFTH YEAR

There are some additional ideas to be got across in classes in 5th and 6th year. These include:

Key challenges facing young people: proper understanding of friendship; distortions of sex (pornography); depersonalisation of sex (prostitution; casual sex); commodification of sex (contraception, prostitution); distortion of friendship; alcohol and sexual behaviour; sexual misbehaviour; sexual violence, promiscuity; sexual addictions; abortion.

Topics to be covered as part of PE

Body image; nutrition; understanding the importance of the whole person and seeing the body apart from that vision

Topics to be covered as part of RSE

The ideas expressed above can be integrated into the topics outlined below In 5th year or they can be treated separately, or left until 6th year.

The importance and the difficulty in forming and following one's conscience needs thorough consideration. We also must respect people who come to different understandings or viewpoints than ourselves, without feeling that our viewpoint is inadequate in any way.

Made for lifelong commitments: types of commitment

Marriage – a wonderful mystery: what makes marriage work

Valuing life at all stages – including those with disabilities, elderly

Topics covered by visitors

Pure in heart team (abstinence and waiting for marriage, love and marriage)

Lifeworks team: the value of new life, contraception and abortion

SIXTH YEAR

As they students move towards manhood many still will have many doubts about the value system they wish to adopt. They are ever conscious of the wider cultural influences and may have a deep reluctance to be counter-cultural. They may also express a rebellious dissatisfaction with boundaries. The role of the teacher is to present to their intellects a fully Christian view of the person and to present it as an ideal worth striving for. Students also need reminding of their fallibility, the availability of grace in their lifelong struggle, and the personal fulfilment that can result from struggle.

Topics for covering in RE

What is a person; where do all relationships fit in; what part does sex play

Children as the fruit of marriage: fertility awareness, abstinence and continence within marriage, natural regulation of fertility

The value of children & responsible parenthood (including population control)

Personal integrity; protecting one's own sexuality from influences (media, pornography, casualness in friendships)

Personal rights, personal space, sexual assault

Sexual difference, orientation, discrimination, prejudice and the Christian understanding of the person