



**RESOURCE PACK FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY  
EDUCATION IN PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS**



## **BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) AT PRIMARY LEVEL**

- Schools should have an RSE policy.
- All teachers should be familiar with the RSE policy.
- A forum should be provided for teachers within the school for discussion of issues relevant to RSE.
- Schools should provide children with a broad Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme, of which RSE is an integral part.
- If schools are using an outside facilitator for RSE the facilitator should be aware of the school ethos and the school's RSE policy and should agree to present his/her material in that context. Guidelines on the use of outside speakers can be found on P32 of the SPHE Teacher Guidelines. (The SPHE Post-primary website also has guidelines on outside speakers in Section 7 of the School Handbook. [www.sphe.ie](http://www.sphe.ie)).
- The classroom teacher should be present in the classroom with any outside speaker.
- If using an outside speaker the classroom teacher should design the SPHE programme in such a way that his/her lessons lead in to the lessons presented by the outside speaker and follow on from them.
- Research has consistently shown that parents are supportive of the RSE programme. Schools are advised to keep parents informed about RSE. This can be done by some or all of the following: including parents fully in policy development, making new parents aware of the RSE policy, organising information evenings, sending home the home/school links pages at the end of each RSE lesson, making copies of the parent information booklet 'RSE Going Forward Together' available to parents, or informing parents that they can look at copies of the RSE resource materials in the school.



## RSE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The booklet 'Relationships and Sexuality Education – Policy Guidelines' is a step by step guide to developing an RSE policy; copies of the booklet\* should be made available to all members of the policy committee

### **Preamble**

- It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that RSE is taught in the school.
- A teacher does not have to teach the lessons on the sensitive issues if he/she does not wish to.
- Schools are not required to ask parents to sign a permission slip to allow their child to attend lessons on the sensitive issues in RSE; RSE is an integral part of the SPHE curriculum
- Where parents wish to take their child out of the lessons on the sensitive issues a school can ask them to put this in writing. A school is advised to consult with parents on how to manage the opting out process in the best interests of the child.

### **Why an RSE Policy?**

- It enables a process of consultation between Board of Management, teachers and parents to take place.
- It provides a safety net for the teaching of RSE in that it ensures RSE will be taught in a consistent and agreed way. Individual teachers should not express their own personal beliefs and values when teaching RSE but should articulate the ethos and value system expressed in the RSE policy.

### **What Should an RSE Policy Contain?**

- Issues of concern should have been raised and clarified during the consultation process. The policy should give guidance to teachers on how to approach the moral and ethical issues relevant to RSE. Topics such as homosexuality, contraception, abortion, masturbation are not in the primary RSE/SPHE programme, but children may ask questions about these subjects. The policy statement can provide general guidance for teachers on how to respond. Possible ways of responding are either to say to a child that these are topics which they will learn about as they get older or to give the child a brief age appropriate response.
- Practical issues to do with the management of teaching RSE such as multi-class situations, teaching boys and girls together, the right of parents to opt their child out of the sensitive issues etc will be included in the policy. See 'Relationships and Sexuality Education – Policy Guidelines' P.10 for further information.



- Schools may wish to include some information about the content of the lessons on the sensitive issues and the language which will be used either in the policy or in an appendix to the policy.

\* Copies of the RSE Policy Guidelines are available free of charge from the RSE Office Tel 01 857 6422



## **SUGGESTED LESSON PLANS FOR TEACHING SOME OF THE SENSITIVE ISSUES**

RSE IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SPHE. LESSONS DEALING WITH THE MORE SENSITIVE ISSUES SHOULD ONLY BE TAUGHT IN THE CONTEXT OF SPHE AS A WHOLE AND NOT AS STAND ALONE LESSONS

BEFORE STARTING ANY PROGRAMME OF SPHE WITH A NEW CLASS THE TEACHER IS ADVISED TO HELP THE CLASS TO DRAW UP A LIST OF AGREED RULES OF BEHAVIOUR, SOMETIMES CALLED A CLASS CONTRACT. THIS MAY NEED TO BE REVIEWED PRIOR TO TEACHING SOME OF THE LESSONS SUCH AS THOSE OUTLINED BELOW.

### **NAMING THE PRIVATE PARTS OF THE BODY.**

Under the Strand Unit 'Taking Care of My Body' (P 17 in the SPHE Curriculum Document) children in Senior Infants are expected to be able to 'name the parts of the male and female body using appropriate anatomical terms'.

Two possible methodologies for teaching this are:

- a) The lesson 'My Body' on P148 of the Junior and Senior Infants RSE Resource Materials.

Or

- b) Use an image of a boy and girl on a beach in swimwear as a prompt to ask questions such as: what are the children doing, are they happy, what are they wearing, what parts of their body can you see, what parts of their body can you not see. This exercise can be used to generate a variety of vocabulary for parts of the body, including the genitals.

### **NOTES FOR THE LESSONS**

- Read p148-149 of the lesson 'My Body' prior to teaching either lesson
- Penis and vagina are appropriate words to give children for the private parts of their bodies.
- Teachers might wish to explain that we use the term private parts because we usually keep these parts of the body covered up.
- It is possible to buy anatomically correct dolls for this lesson. They are available in some toy shops. The Gault Catalogue



(01 427 3100) has boy and girl dolls called Just Born Twins for €23.50 per doll. Dolls would be particularly useful for teaching children with special needs

- It is possible to teach this lesson to Junior and Senior Infants if they are in the same room, but it would be advisable to wait until the second or third term
- Parents should be made aware that these words will be taught.

### **THE BABY GROWING IN THE WOMB**

Under the Strand Unit 'Growing and Changing' (P41 in the SPHE Curriculum Document) children in Third/Fourth Class are expected to be able to 'discuss the stages and sequence of the development of the human baby from conception to birth'

#### **Suggested Methodology:**

'Preparing for New Life' on P69 in Third and Fourth Class RSE Resource Materials.

'The Wonder of New Life' on P169 in Third and Fourth Class RSE Resource Materials. This lesson can be taught in two parts:

a) Photocopy the cards from p173-p178, cut them out and laminate them. Introduce the topic by referring to the earlier lesson (on P69). Form the children into groups of four to five children. Then give the children the laminated cards with the pictures and the months. Give them time to try to match the cards and ask questions.

b) Read the information on P171. Then give the children all three sets of cards and ask them to match them up. Take questions. End the lesson by asking the children to do the writing activity 'Diary of a New Baby' on P180

#### **NOTES FOR THE LESSON**

- If the children ask how did the baby get into the womb the teacher can respond by saying that the baby grew from a little seed or by saying that we'll get to that part of the story when they are older
- A possible supplementary activity would be to ask children if their parents have any scan photographs of themselves or their sisters and brothers. Children can bring the photos in and talk about them.



## **PUBERTY AND NEW LIFE**

Under the Strand Unit 'Taking Care of My Body' (P56 in SPHE Curriculum Document) children in Fifth/Sixth Class are expected to be able to 'identify and discuss the physical and other changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty and understand that these take place at different rates for everyone'

Under the Strand Unit 'Growing and Changing' (P58 in the SPHE Curriculum Document) children in Fifth/Sixth Class are expected to be able to 'understand sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of loving committed relationships'

### **Lessons which are relevant for these topics are:**

- 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, Growing and Changing on P195
- Walk Tall Books 5 and 6 Unit 2 Feelings
- 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, Feelings and Emotions on P69 and P175
- 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, My Body Grows and Changes on P81 and Growing and Changing on P183
- 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, The Wonder of New Life on P93, Caring For New Life on P103 and A Baby is a Miracle on P209.
- 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, Different Kinds of Love on P141

## **Suggested Methodologies**

**Lesson One.** The aim of this lesson is to allow the children time to reflect on the emotional changes that they may be experiencing as they get older. Use the lesson Growing and Changing on P195 of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials, beginning with the worksheet on P200 but adapting the age at the top of the right hand column to suit the age of the class. Use the questions at the bottom of the worksheet to stimulate discussion about growing up. Conclude the lesson by using some or all of the activities on pages 201 to 203.

**Lesson Two.** This lesson is a continuation of the last one with the aim of allowing the children time to explore their emotions about growing up. P60 in Walk Tall Book 5 suggests a number of non-verbal ways of helping children to express their feelings. If the children are reticent about expressing their own feelings the teacher can read out the situations on pages 58-60 in Walk Tall Book 6 and ask the children to mime or paint the feelings that they would imagine someone else would



feel if this happened to them. The teacher concludes the lesson by explaining that growing up can be both an exciting and confusing time for people and that it is normal for young people to find that their emotions

**Lesson Three** The aim of this lesson is to explain the physical changes that happen to boys and girls during puberty. The teacher photocopies, enlarges and laminates copies of the body outlines of the girl and boy on pp85 and 87 in the Fifth/Sixth Class Resource Materials. The teacher divides the class into groups of four, ideally two boys and two girls. Each group is given a copy of the outline of the boy's and girl's body. They are asked to draw or write on the sheet the physical changes that happen to boys and girls. If the children write in felt pen the laminated sheets can be reused. The teacher writes the feedback on the board, giving clarification and explanation as necessary, using the information on pp84-88. The teacher can also explain the need for greater attention to hygiene.

**Lesson Four** The aim of this lesson is to explain the reproductive system of males and females. The teacher photocopies, enlarges and laminates copies of the male and female reproductive organs on pp85 and 87. Divide the class into same sex pairs and give each pair a copy of the male and female reproductive system. Ask them if they can trace the journey of the egg and sperm using a felt pen. The teacher then puts up the same diagrams on an overhead and talks about the journey of the egg and the sperm, using the information on pp. 84-88. The teacher also explains what the words on the diagrams mean and takes questions from the children

**Lesson Five** The aim of this lesson is the same as for lesson four. The teacher gives the children in same sex pairs the diagrams of the male and female reproductive organs with the words blanked out. The children try to fill in the correct words. The teacher takes the answers and corrects any misunderstandings. Using the diagrams on an overhead the teacher explains how intercourse takes place, stressing the importance of loving commitment in relationships as intimate as sexual relationships.

**Lesson Six.** Different Kinds of Love on P141 of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Class Resource Materials

**Lesson Seven** Show the class a DVD on growing up such as the Busy Bodies DVD. Take questions from the class.



## NOTES FOR THE LESSONS

- It is important that parents are given information about the content of the lessons before they are taught.
- There are many ways of teaching these topics; this outline suggests some possible methodologies. Schools are advised to find strategies that best suit their children
- Children should be familiar with the idea of agreeing a contract on classroom behaviour. This might need to be renewed prior to teaching these lessons
- Schools will make their own decisions about whether to teach these topics to Fifth or Sixth Class children, and on whether they will present the lessons as a sequence or divide them up.
- It is generally advisable to teach boys and girls together but there may be reasons to teach some parts of the programme separately. A school may decide to give girls more information on menstruation than they give boys.
- Children should be encouraged to ask questions about RSE as they would about any other subject but teachers will also make decisions about whether it is appropriate to answer all questions, see note below.



## **ANSWERING QUESTIONS**

While it is important to create an environment in which a child feels free to ask questions, it is also important that a safe environment is created for all the children in the class. Teachers are advised to set boundaries in the teaching of RSE as they would in any other subject.

When deciding whether it is appropriate to answer a question or not the teacher should consider:

- The age and stage of development of the children
- The ethos the school
- The RSE policy
- The content objectives of the SPHE curriculum guidelines

Suggested ways of setting limits are to say:

- I'll do my best to answer your questions but I may not be able to answer all of them
- Would you be able to talk to your mum or dad about that?
- That's something you'll learn about as you get older.
- We agreed in our contract that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions.

## **RSE FOR CHILDREN WITH MILD LEARNING**



## **DISABILITIES**

THE NCCA 'GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH GENERAL LEARNING DISABILITIES' ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)) HAS A WEALTH OF INFORMATION AND MATERIAL FOR TEACHING SPHE TO STUDENTS WITH GENERAL LEARNING DISABILITIES.

Many students with mild learning disabilities lack confidence and need opportunities to develop the following skills through a structured SPHE/RSE programme:

- Development of positive self esteem
- Social and communication skills
- Appropriate expression of feelings
- Safety and Protection Skills
- An understanding of their body and the changes that take place at puberty

### **When teaching RSE it is worth remembering that:**

- The education of the child should be needs led, meaning that the teacher should try to establish what the needs of the student are. This can be done through consultation with the parents and with the student him/herself.
- Close and ongoing co-operation with the parents is advisable. They may find the subject of sexuality in relation to their child difficult to cope with and may need information and support.
- An Individual Education Plan for the student may need to be developed in consultation with parents.
- The development of interpersonal skills and knowledge about one's body is dependent on the development of communication and language skills. This is the most fundamental skill that students need in order to describe themselves, to relate to their peers, and to interact with the outside world.
- Inappropriate behaviour is not necessarily sexual but may stem from the fact that the child is stressed, bored, lonely or lacks access to other sensory experience. This should be borne in mind when helping a student to understand the boundaries between public and private behaviour.