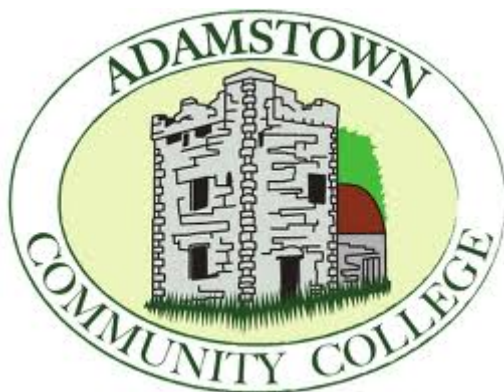


Adamstown Community College



Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction

Adamstown Community College is a co-educational, multi-denominational, community college and was established in 2009 by County Dublin VEC (now the DDLETB). The policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality, and applies to all classes, not just those specifically designated for RSE instruction.. It is important for all teachers to be familiar with the RSE policy and its content.

Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education

RSE aims to provide age-appropriate opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in a moral, caring and responsible manner. The curriculum is designed as a developmental process that cultivates a healthy attitude towards oneself and others, particularly in the area of sexuality, relationships and gender identity. The curriculum is delivered using a spiral approach that allows for the deepening of topics as students mature.

Rationale

Sexuality is a vital aspect of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. It is the responsibility of schools, in consultation with parents/guardians, to provide students with the education and support they need to navigate these messages.

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.

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school

Teaching RSE raises spiritual, moral, and ethical issues. It is important that teachers of RSE express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views. Teachers must deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc.

Objectives

Relationships and Sexuality Education in Adamstown Community College is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education. The objectives of RSE include:

- Helping students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- Promoting an understanding of sexuality.
- Fostering a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationship with others.
- Providing knowledge and fostering respect for reproduction.
- Enabling students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.
- Providing opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

In a course of such limited duration these aims are aspirational (see appendix 1 for course outline).

Provision of training and staff development

The Principal will make every effort to facilitate teachers to obtain relevant training in the areas of, relationships and sexuality education bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible. The school aims to maintain a core group of

teachers who will deliver the RSE program, with a number of this core team receiving further training in order to teach RSE at senior level.

All teachers involved in this work require sensitivity to the needs of the class group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and a readiness to refer to more expert advice if necessary.

Implementation Arrangements

The Principal will make arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE Programme and the development of staff. Teachers will follow the guidelines and lesson plans drawn up by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Junior Cycle students are timetabled for one period of SPHE per week, during which a minimum of four periods will be dedicated to RSE each academic year. RSE is an integral part of the Leaving Certificate Applied Social Education programme. Students in Transition Year and the traditional Leaving Certificate will receive a minimum of four lessons of RSE per year.

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

Timetabling of RSE

Junior cycle students will have one period of SPHE per week, with RSE included as a module in the second term of the school year.

Senior cycle students will receive a minimum of 4, 58-minute RSE classes per academic year as part of their SPHE/Religious Education curriculum.

In senior cycle, there will be a bi-annual rotation of SPHE and Ethics and Philosophy subjects.

The RSE curriculum will be delivered with respect to the age of the students, limits of confidentiality, and creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment. Special considerations will be made for students with unique circumstances, in consultation with the Care Team.

Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships, sexuality and gender is seen by the school as very important. This policy has been developed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. Hard copies of this policy are available on request from the school office.

The school's role is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information, or counselling. Teachers may provide information about where to receive confidential sexual advice and treatment.

Teachers may choose not to answer explicit questions in class and should seek advice from the SPHE coordinator or the principal when needed. When deciding whether or not to answer a question, the teacher should consider the age and readiness of students, the RSE program content, the school's ethos, and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality

The school has a strict confidentiality policy in place, but in situations where a student is at risk of abuse or in violation of the law, the teacher must immediately report to the DLP, who will decide whether or not to inform parents and/or appropriate authorities. Teachers must use professional judgement to decide when to maintain confidentiality and must inform students when a conversation can no longer be kept confidential. The Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary schools must always be followed.

Biological and Non-Biological Aspects of Sex Education

The school policy states that the Science Department primarily covers the biological aspects of reproduction while other subjects and school programs address the non-biological aspects of relationships and sexuality education (RSE).

Withdrawing students from the RSE program

If a request is made by a parent to withdrawal their child from the RSE program, the school will handle the request in the following manner:

- The school will have a meeting with the parent to discuss the nature of their concerns.
- The school will consider options to address the parent's concerns while maintaining the integrity of the RSE program and ensuring that it remains inclusive for all students.
- If a student is withdrawn from the program, the school will take steps to minimize any embarrassment or disruption for the student.
- The school will inform the parents that their child may receive inaccurate information from their peers and offer them access to accurate and appropriate resources.

- The school officials such as the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, and if needed the Principal will be involved in the above-stated process.

It is a legal requirement of schools to provide RSE to students at Junior and Senior Cycle. Requests to withdraw from the RSE programme must be made by parents in writing. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent requests to withdraw their child, that request must be granted. A new request to withdraw their son/daughter from participating in the RSE programme must be made in writing each year or it will be assumed that the withdrawal request has elapsed at the end of each academic year.

Visiting speakers and others

The school policy states that the majority of the RSE program is best delivered by teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, the program can be enhanced by the use of visiting speakers, as long as they are used in addition to, and not instead of, the planned RSE curriculum.

The SPHE co-ordinator will inform the visitor/s that a copy of this RSE policy is available on the school website. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the manner of delivery of the RSE program. Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and how their contribution should fit into the scheme of work.

Sexual Orientation

The school recognizes that all sexual orientations are a natural part of human diversity and will be discussed during the RSE program. The program provides an opportunity to correct misconceptions, assumptions, and address prejudice. The school is committed to creating an inclusive and respectful environment for all students and is in compliance with the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004, which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and other grounds.

It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation, and they should be offered support from the Care Team.

Abortion

This topic will be addressed in an age-appropriate and open manner, considering all aspects of the issues in a non-directive way.

Sexual Activity

It is advisable for teachers to give students information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years of age for all students. The school will also provide education on the physical, emotional, and legal consequences of sexual activity, encouraging students to make informed and responsible decisions.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

The RSE program addresses STIs as one of its objectives, with a focus on awareness and prevention. While the topic is mainly addressed in Senior Cycle, the school recognizes that rates of STI transmission are increasing and therefore it is important that the subject is addressed at all levels of the RSE program. The school will provide students with accurate and current information on the causes, symptoms, and prevention of STIs.

Contraception

This topic will be addressed within an age-appropriate and open manner, considering all aspects of the issue in a non-directive way. The school will provide students with accurate and current information on the different types of contraception, their effectiveness, and their potential risks and side effects. This topic is also dealt with in Science classes.

Special Needs

Children with special needs may require additional support in understanding the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need additional support in recognising what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable; protecting themselves from potential abuse.

Links to other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery

The implication of other school policies for the RSE policy has been thoroughly considered. The policies that have been taken into account include the Child Protection Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, SEN Policy, and Substance Use Policy.

Links to curriculum delivery:

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is timetabled in Adamstown Community College as part of the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle core curriculum. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and

others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality.

Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics.

Review and Evaluation

Adamstown Community College is committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. This will be done through:

- pupil feedback;
- staff review and feedback;
- parental feedback.

The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Appendix 1

Junior Cycle RSE Learning Outcomes

1st Year

- have an appreciation of their personal talents and those of others
- have explored some aspects of stereotyping in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity
- have a knowledge of the physical, emotional and psychological changes related to adolescence
- have a clear understanding of the male and female reproductive systems
- be sensitive to the need for respect for one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others

2nd Year

- 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 analysed some of the influences that shape views of sexuality
- have developed their skills for communicating in relationships
- have further developed their decision-making skills
- be aware of the potential for danger in forming new relationships
- have a basic knowledge of sexually transmitted disease
- have a knowledge of some help agencies and their role

3rd Year

- have practised communication skills and skills for enhancing self-esteem
- have reviewed their understanding of the adolescent stage of human growth and development
- have identified and recognised the importance of respect, rights and responsibilities in relationships
- be aware of the causes of conflict in relationships
- be prepared to deal with such situations of conflict by approaching them using Restorative Practice (RP) ideologies

Senior Cycle RSE Learning Outcomes:

- 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 empathise 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.

Human Growth and Development

- understanding the function and structure of sex organs
- awareness of fertility
- awareness of the importance and methods of family planning
- understanding of pregnancy and the development of the foetus
- appreciation of the importance of health care during pregnancy
- recognising the range of human emotions and ways to deal with these
- an understanding of the relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted diseases with particular reference to HIV/AIDS

Human Sexuality

- Understanding of what it means to be biologically male or female, as well as other identifiable genders
- consideration of each person's role in relationships and in society
- awareness and understanding of sexual orientations and genders
- exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality
- understanding the concept of sexual harassment and its different forms
- awareness of sexual abuse and rape, including legal issues and the identification of help agencies in these areas
- skills for making choices about sexual activity, and understanding legal regulations surrounding consent
- exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society

Human Relationships

- understanding the nature of peer pressure
- developing skills for resolving conflict, by following RP ideologies
- development of an awareness of the complex nature of love and loving relationships