Rath Dara Community College
SPHE Policy.

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School Mission Statement:

Our mission at Rath Dara Community College is to work together as a school community to create an educational environment that is positive, caring, safe and inclusive. We embrace diversity, promote inclusion and foster mutual respect. We focus on excellence in education through a progressive, individualised student-centred learning environment that supports the unique needs of the individual. This enables us to challenge, encourage and celebrate students' success in reaching their social, academic and emotional goals.

Aims of the SPHE/ RSE Programme:

The SPHE programme aims to enhance students' understanding of themselves and foster a positive sense of self-worth. It aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for leading enriching and healthy lives. The programme is designed to empower students to establish, foster and sustain respectful and loving relationships with themselves and others. Additionally, it seeks to strengthen their ability to make a constructive contribution to society.

Objectives of SPHE/RSE Policy:

The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how SPHE and RSE is taught in Rath Dara Community College.

1. It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
2. It will articulate the rationale of the RSE programme.
3. It will clarify the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all within the school community in relation to the RSE programme with reference to school staff, students, parents/guardians, and the Board of Management/patron.
4. It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians, and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school's mission.
5. It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

Scope and Applicability of Policy

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

- Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10, C37/2010 and best practice guidance from the NCCA and Department of Education.
- The Education Act 1998, as it 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 which 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.
- Guidance from the SPHE Department and SPHE Co-ordinator, parents, staff and students and the school's Board of Management

Rationale and Purpose of SPHE/RSE Policy

SPHE gives students a framework to learn important skills and values for overall wellbeing (physical, emotional, social, and spiritual). It is built on respect, equality, inclusivity, and empathy, helping young people grow in positive ways. Adolescence is a key time for figuring out who you are. SPHE guides students in making good decisions, building self-confidence, and handling challenges. It helps develop life skills like self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills.

These skills are essential for dealing with life's changes and challenges. A key part of SPHE is Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). RSE helps young people understand their identities and values in relationships through open and safe classroom discussions led by experienced teachers. This safe space is crucial for exploring relationships, sexuality, and healthy sexual expression. SPHE uses interactive and reflective teaching to create a supportive environment that boosts self and social awareness. It aligns with junior cycle wellbeing indicators of being Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected, and Aware, and forms a core part of a school's Wellbeing programme.

Provision of Training and Staff Development

The Principal manages the assignment of teachers for SPHE and RSE, favouring those who show real interest in these subjects. While not all teachers need to be experts, they must be sensitive to student needs, answer questions honestly, and know when to ask for expert help. General teaching skills also support RSE. A core team of specialised SPHE teachers has been formed to strengthen the programme. They receive ongoing training to confidently cover all topics. Rath Dara Community College is dedicated to providing expert training within budget limits, ensuring high-quality teaching.

Both the Principal and the SPHE coordinator encourage teachers to pursue professional development. Additionally, Rath Dara Community College will supply suitable teaching resources, budget permitting. This comprehensive support system is designed to improve the effectiveness of the SPHE/RSE curriculum, ultimately benefiting students.

Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality education is seen by Rath Dara Community College as very important. The policy has been designed in consultation with the parents' representatives and the views expressed by parents will be considered when the policy is being reviewed.

A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian on request to the general office and available on the school website.

Participation and Parents' Request for Withdrawal

RSE is a required part of the SPHE programme for both Junior and Senior Cycle. However, according to The Education Act 1998, Section 30 (2)(e), students do not have to attend classes that conflict with their parents' beliefs. For students 18 or

older, the decision is up to the student. Parents can choose to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes, but it's recommended they provide alternative education on relationships and sexuality at home.

Classroom Withdrawal

Note that throughout the school year, teachers naturally include discussions on relationships and sexuality in various lessons. This means that even if a student is withdrawn from specific RSE classes, some related topics might still come up as they overlap with areas like healthy choices, self-understanding, and emotional wellbeing. At junior cycle, topics such as puberty, reproduction, personal hygiene, sexual orientation, gender identity, and romantic relationships are usually covered in a focused period later in the year once a safe classroom environment is established.

Procedure for Withdrawal

Should a parent or guardian decide to exempt their child or children from certain components of the SPHE/RSE programme the parent should contact the school to speak with either the Principal, a member of the senior management team or the SPHE Coordinator.

Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so

If the parent/guardian still wishes to remove their child/children from the RSE class the parent/ guardian will have to collect the student from the school and return after the class.

Please note:

Rath Dara Community College is unable to assume responsibility for any information from the SPHE/RSE lesson that students might share with their peers after the lesson has concluded.

Parents'/ guardians are encouraged to have a conversation with their child/children

about being withdrawn from parts of the SPHE/RSE programme. This discussion can help ensure that they understand the reasons for the withdrawal, preventing any unexpected confusion or surprise should they be directed to a different location during those class times.

Additional Considerations:

Teacher versus Facilitator:

In SPHE, teachers shift their role to become facilitators rather than being seen as all-knowing experts. This change recognises that the topics in SPHE often involve a wide range of experiences and perspectives among students. By acting as facilitators, teachers create an environment where everyone can participate and explore topics together. Instead of simply providing all the answers, teachers guide discussions and encourage students to think critically and respectfully about complex issues, mirroring the diversity found in real life.

Sexual Orientation:

Most young people begin identifying as LGBTQ+ around age 12 and often share this with others by age 16. In SPHE classes, teachers treat all sexual orientations equally, fostering acceptance and understanding of all sexual orientations. When discussing sexual activity, teachers explain the three types of intercourse, without describing specific behaviours or acts. The focus is on clear definitions rather than detailed descriptions of sexual activities.
Teachers focus beyond an exclusively heteronormative lens in the SPHE/RSE classroom and recognise that relationships exist in diverse forms.

Pronouns:

If a student requests a change of name or pronoun, Rath Dara Community College responds with compassion and empathy, working with the student's parents or guardians to determine the best support and approach. In the school community, some teachers, students, and support staff choose to use pronouns as a way of expressing their identity. For educators, the choice to share their own pronouns is

personal, reflecting their decision to disclose that aspect of their identity. This approach respects teacher autonomy and models a culture of consent and individual choice within the classroom. By handling pronoun sharing with sensitivity and care, teachers help create a more inclusive and understanding environment for everyone.

Supporting Students with AEN (Additional Education Needs)

Children and young people with Additional Education Needs may require extra support during SPHE/RSE lessons. This support might include alternative learning materials such as visual aids or simplified language to accommodate various learning styles. Teachers can also offer extra time for comprehension, repetition, or clarification, ensuring every student can fully engage with the curriculum. Collaborating with special education teachers or support staff helps identify specific accommodations or modifications as needed.

Students with intellectual disabilities typically progress through sexual development stages at the same age as their peers. However, they may lack the cognitive or emotional maturity to fully understand the physiological and psychosocial changes they experience. They might also be less aware of behaviours that could increase their risk of sexual exploitation.

SPHE/RSE teachers tailor classroom content using AEN-specific resources and support, enhancing understanding and learning while safeguarding the safety and wellbeing of all students.

Supporting EAL students

Support can be offered to EAL students during SPHE /RSE lessons. this support may include using multilingual resources, subtitles on videos and collaborating with EAL teachers.

Links to Other Policies:

The policies at Rath Dara Community College work together to form a unified and cohesive framework. Below is a list of policies that complement the RSE Policy at Rathdara Community college, with each one mutually reinforcing the others:

- Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Substance Misuse Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Health and Safety Statement
- Data Protection Policy
- Critical Incident Management Plan

Code of Conduct and Bí Cineálta Anti-Bullying Policy:

At Rath Dara Community College the priority is to provide a safe, positive, and supportive learning environment. The Code of Conduct guides the school community in upholding the school ethos, fostering relationships, and following policies and procedures that promote good behaviour for learning while preventing unacceptable conduct.

The Anti-Bullying Policy (Bí Cineálta) addresses the significant negative impact bullying can have on both the short- and long-term physical and mental wellbeing of students. Bullying, whether online or offline, is a targeted behaviour that causes physical, social, or emotional harm. It is repetitive and involves an imbalance of power between individuals or groups.

Both policies are essential within the SPHE classroom. It is important for students to understand that while they have the freedom to express their opinions, their words can significantly affect others. Students should therefore communicate their thoughts in a respectful manner that considers the feelings and rights of their peers. Teachers are responsible for monitoring discussions in the SPHE/RSE classroom to ensure respect is maintained; otherwise, immediate action will be taken in line with these policies.

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.
Below is a list of resources used in the SPHE/RSE Classroom.
This list is non- exhaustive.

Junior Cycle:

- NCCA Toolkit of Resources
- SPHE 'You've Got This!' Series of SPHE Books (Junior Cycle)
- Webwise 'Lockers' Resource
- Webwise ' BinCtrl' Resource
- Webwise' Connected' Resource
- Webwise 'The Respect Effect' Resource
- B4uDecide Resource
- University of Galway 'Activating Social Empathy'
- Planet Youth – Sleep Lessons
- BodyWhys #morethanaselfie
- HSE SPHE Lessons

Senior Cycle

- NCCA Toolkit of Resources
- Mindout – Mental Health Resource
- Active Consent
- ConsentED
- Headstrong Mental Health Resources

Websites:

- www.healthpromotion.ie
- www.webwise.ie
- www.thinkcontraception.ie
- www.tes.ie
- www.ted.ie

- www.Kahoot.ie
- www.belongto.org

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme

The RSE programme will be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis by the SPHE team and adopted by the Board of Management. The opinions of staff, parents and students will be included as part of the review. The RSE policy will be reviewed every two years.

Appendix A: Junior and Senior Cycle Specifications:
Learning Outcomes explored in the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023
Strand 1:

1.1 explore the physical, social and emotional changes that happen during adolescence
1.2 reflect on their personal strengths and values and how they bring these into relationships
1.3 explore the range of influences and life experiences that can impact on self-image and self-esteem and identify ways to nurture a positive sense of self-worth
1.4 recognise the factors and influences that shape young people's self-identity, such as family, peers, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnic background, dis/abilities, religious beliefs/worldviews
1.5 reflect on gender equity and how gender stereotypes impact on expectations, behaviour and relationships
1.6 discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion3 and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments
1.7 communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others
1.8 reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy and discuss ways that it can be expressed
1.9 demonstrate self-management skills, including setting personal goals, delaying gratification, and self-regulation of thoughts, emotions and impulses.

Strand 2:

2.1 consider the multifaceted nature of health and wellbeing, and evaluate what being healthy might look like for different adolescents, including how food, physical activity, sleep/rest and hygiene contribute to health and wellbeing
2.2 investigate how unhealthy products such as nicotine, vapes, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drinks are marketed and advertised
2.3 discuss societal, cultural and economic influences affecting young people when it comes to making healthy choices about smoking, alcohol and other addictive substances and behaviours, and how harmful influences can be overcome in real-life situations
2.4 demonstrate skills and strategies to help make informed choices that support health and wellbeing and apply them in real-life situations that may be stressful and/or involve difficult peer situations

2.5 discuss the physical, social, emotional and legal consequences of using addictive substances - immediate and long-term
2.6 consider scenarios where, for example, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, food and electronic devices might be used to cope with unpleasant feelings or stress, and discuss possible healthy ways of coping
2.7 assess the benefits and difficulties associated with their online world and discuss strategies for dealing with a range of scenarios that might arise
2.8 discuss how to share personal information, images, opinions and emotions in a safe, responsible and respectful manner online and in person
2.9 explore why young people share sexual imagery online and examine the risks and consequences of doing this 2.10 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information, supports and services about health and wellbeing.

Strand 3:
3.1 reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships
3.2 examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships - friendships, family relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships
3.3 identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships
3.4 appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others
3.5 consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health
3.6 appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways
3.7 explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices
3.8 appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective
3.9 explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
3.10 discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression
3.11 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

Strand 4:
4.1 discuss the fluid nature of emotional wellbeing and ways to nurture and protect it
4.2 recognise and acknowledge their emotions and recognise the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour
4.3 consider the impact of stress and draw upon a variety of techniques to help self-regulate emotions and cope with the day-to-day stresses of life
4.4 discuss ways to support themselves and others in challenging times and where/how/when to seek support, if needed

4.5 explore how emotional wellbeing can be affected by factors within our control, such as sleep, diet, exercise, substance use and online exposure, and factors beyond our control
4.6 recognise different kinds of abusive and bullying behaviour that can occur in interactions online and in person
4.7 explain why noticing and responding to different kinds of abusive or bullying behaviour that can occur in person and online is important and discuss appropriate responses including, why, how, where and when to report
4.8 identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up
4.9 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information and services aimed at supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Senior Cycle SPHE Curriculum 2011

Areas of Learning:
There are four areas of learning in the 2011 SPHE Senior Cycle Specification, one of which is RSE.
In the RSE area of learning, students learn about:

Students Learn About	Students Should Be Able To
self-awareness and personal skills	• compare what they value in relationships with what is valued by significant other groups, e.g. family, church, older people, friends, different cultures • compare what they value in relationships with the values portrayed in relationships in the media • identify the personal strengths that they bring to relationships • construct a personal life plan including consideration of their personal, social and vocational goals and the place of parenthood in this plan • analyse the concepts of love, being in love and the importance of love in its various aspects, including closeness, intimacy, distance, pleasure and commitment
relationship skills	• demonstrate genuineness, empathy and respect in different types of relationship scenarios • demonstrate relationship skills which support the setting up, maintenance and ending of relationships • design an awareness campaign highlighting different ways to negotiate sexual relationships in order to avoid unwanted sexual activities and/or unprotected sexual intercourse

	• devise an SPHE class for junior cycle students which focuses on healthy and safe engagement in online and virtual communications
sexual and reproductive health	• explain the different stages of adolescent development, including the physical, emotional and sexual changes that take place in puberty • explain the reproductive process including an understanding of fertility from both a male and a female perspective • research sexually transmitted infections including Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) and the importance of early medical intervention for STI's • compare different methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy • examine different lifestyle choices about sexual activity, the arguments for delaying sexual activities and the consequences of being sexually active for themselves and their personal relationships • discuss the complexity of moral, social and cultural issues that impact on sexual behaviour including the pressure on youth to be sexually attractive and sexually available • discuss different cultural values and beliefs about sex and sexual health
sexual identity	• distinguish between sexual activity, sexuality and sexual orientation • clarify their understanding of and comfort with different sexual orientations • demonstrate how to relate respectfully to others of a different sexual orientation
parenting	• compare their understanding of the responsibilities of being a parent/guardian with parents/guardians' understanding of their responsibilities • discuss the role of commitment and relationship skills in marriage and other committed relationships, that help to support lasting relationships and family life • compose an 'open' letter to adults/guardians emphasising the importance of supportive adult/child relationship on the development of self-esteem and independence and how this might be achieved • design a scenario which explores the consequences of crisis pregnancy, teenage pregnancy and/or parenthood for different males and different females
personal rights and personal safety	• argue in support of their right to personal safety, privacy and their own space, and the consequences for them when these are not respected • explain what sexual harassment is, including issues of power and control • make a short presentation explaining sexual harassment and the law as it applies to it

	• demonstrate skills for dealing with sexual harassment including how to assess risk and take steps to deal with it including where to access help and support • formulate suggestions for a school policy on sexual harassment • design an information campaign highlighting safety tips to protect against rape and sexual assault including where to access help and support if one is a victim
being health literate	• discuss the law as it relates to the age of consent for sexual activity • research the services offered by statutory and voluntary agencies in the community which support the sexual health and wellbeing of young adults • describe the statutory and voluntary agencies which offer support to those experiencing relationship difficulties • evaluate the reliability and credibility of two sources of information about sexual health, sexuality and sexuality orientation. • design an awareness campaign about young people's rights and responsibilities in relation to online/virtual communications.

Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024:

Learning Outcomes explored in the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

1.1 explore the determinants of good health.

1.2 investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health, including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related.

1.3 examine social norms, attitudes and beliefs related to alcohol, tobacco/vaping and substance use.

1.4 explore the factors that influence mental health and wellbeing, including the influence of family, community, peers, school, social media, digital technology, alcohol and mood altering drugs, and one's self-image and identity.

1.5 recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour.

1.6 describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.

1.7 recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed.

1.8 discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.

1.9 explain the pathways towards addiction, the signs and consequences of different kinds of addictions and where to go and how to access help, if needed.

1.10 discuss and devise ways to safely manage social situations where their own or others' health or safety may be at risk.

Strand 2: RSE

2.1 demonstrate the awareness and skills needed for nurturing healthy in-person and online relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating effectively, navigating difficult conversations, preventing and managing conflict and dealing with break-ups.

2.2 reflect on how their attitudes, beliefs, values and identity, and those of others, can influence the dynamics of families, friendships and romantic relationships.

2.3 discuss the need for consent and the importance of care, respect, empathy, trust and mutual pleasure within a sexual relationship.

2.4 examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful attitudes and narratives.

2.5 identify and consider common signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control.

2.6 explore the root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law.

2.7 investigate the possible influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and relationship expectations and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography.

2.8 discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

2.9 understand the components of sexual health including fertility across the life-cycle, reproductive choices, sexual functioning, safer sexual practices, possible responses to an unplanned pregnancy, and how to access sexual health information and services.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

3.1 consider strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health.

3.2 demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life.

3.3 explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times and where to find support.

3.4 summarise accurately their rights, responsibilities and protections before the law as a young adult with reference to online communicating, consent, alcohol and drug use, their work-place rights and right to access services.

3.5 demonstrate the confidence and skills needed to be their own person and be able to advocate for themselves and others, even if it means standing out from the crowd

3.6 recognise when people are experiencing discrimination and demonstrate the skills needed to express solidarity in a range of situation