



**Relationships & Sexual Education (RSE) Policy
Swords Community College
2025**

**Date for Review:
December 2026**

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal (Secretary to Board)

Date: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide a written statement of the aims of the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme in Swords Community College. It will also outline the relationship between RSE and SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school.

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality is cross curricular, as such all teachers should be familiar with this policy. This policy applies to all staff, parents and all users of the school grounds including but not limited to visiting guests, speakers etc.

Our School

Swords Community College is an Education and Training Board co-educational, multi-denominational school under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board. Swords Community College opened in 2018 and aims to develop an inclusive school community that empowers its students to fulfil their full potential.

Mission Statement

Swords Community College is a learning community dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in all areas of education. The school strives to promote an inclusive atmosphere, and a caring school climate where students are encouraged and supported to reach their full potential. Swords Community College endeavours to provide person-centred holistic education; and foster the personal, social, and attributes of its students in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The school

emphasises quality teaching and learning, positive behaviour, and the recognition of achievement. All students are supported to develop their abilities, in order that they realise their full potential. Students are equipped with the confidence and self-esteem to meet the demands of society.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

“RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills which enable us to develop attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity relationships and intimacy.” (DES 1997) Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly important in the life of the adolescent.

At post primary level RSE aims to provide *“young people with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, values and attitudes offered today, and so make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.”* (RSE Policy Guidelines, 1997)

RSE provides structured opportunities to develop knowledge and build an understanding of relationships, communication, and sexuality. Students will learn through processes which enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual, and social framework.

Young people are given the opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways which help them to think and act in a moral, caring, and responsible manner.

Students will acquire the skills to critically evaluate a wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today. The acquired skills will enable students to make responsible choices about themselves and communicate with others.

Aims of the RSE Programme:

The RSE Programme in Swords Community College should enable students to:

- Acquire the necessary skills to understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals change and grow, particularly during adolescence and to develop respect for individual difference.
- Understand sexual development and identity, and explore aspects of sexuality including stereotyping, gender issues and on sexuality.
- Understand human physiology.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflicts.
- Foster communication skills to communicate personal boundaries.
- Be respectful of the rights and dignity of others.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE

RSE is an integral part of the SPHE programme which is part of the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle programmes for all students (DES Circular 0037/2010, 0028/2023). The SPHE programme promotes the health and wellbeing of young people. Pertinent issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making skills are discussed throughout the programme. In all areas of SPHE, students are encouraged to act in a moral, caring, and responsible way. They are given the necessary skills to communicate their boundaries and make informed decisions.

Sexuality is a key area of development in the life of the adolescent. In addition to specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers areas relevant to the development of a healthy attitude towards sexuality in oneself and one's relationship to others. The content of both courses is age appropriate and in line with what young people are experiencing in their day to day life.

What Our School Currently Provides

The RSE programme as taught in our school is the programme laid out by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment).

The school follows all themes outlined in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE syllabi provided by the Department of Education & Science. RSE at Junior and Senior cycle is delivered as part of the SPHE programme and is allocated a minimum of 6 weeks.

Organisation of RSE in Swords Community College:

At both levels, the class tutor is assigned to teach the SPHE programme, if the class tutor is not available to do so, a different teacher with SPHE experience and training will be assigned to teach the class. The teacher will incorporate RSE into the SPHE subject plan as per Department of Education guidelines. The teacher will follow the Department of Education guidelines and NCCA teacher guidelines on the content covered, and depth of treatment in all areas of the SPHE programme, including the delivery of the RSE lessons.

The Swords Community College philosophy of education is underpinned by values seeking to promote respect, tolerance and understanding while appreciating the diversity of our changing world. The delivery of the SPHE programme (including the RSE lessons) will be done so with the school's values, philosophy, and ethos at its core.

If controversial issues arise in the delivery of the SPHE/RSE programme, teachers will aim to present the facts and express views of the whole school community while incorporating, where possible, the ethos of the school. All issues will be dealt with in a factual and balanced manner with emphasis on health, equality, and correcting stereotypes. The Child Protection Guidelines (Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011) as outlined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and adopted by the Board of Management of Swords Community College, will be adhered to.

Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Swords Community College.

Provision of training and staff development

Amanda Duffy, Aoife Long and Amanda Fahey are the current co coordinators of SPHE/RSE.

Various teachers have attended the required training and are released for any relevant in-services.

The school aims to have at least two teachers trained in SPHE /RSE each year. The role of SPHE teacher is assigned to the class tutor and other relevant teaching staff and all teachers are made aware of this role when commencing their tutor roles. All training materials and teaching resources are shared amongst staff.

Inclusion of parents and guardians

Parents are the primary educators of their children, and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality of great importance to the school. Communication between parents and school is therefore essential. A copy of the RSE Policy will be placed on the school website under policies for parents to access. Parents are informed in advance of the delivery of the RSE programme via a VS ware letter. This ensures that they are aware of what their children are learning and it provides them with an opportunity to discuss the topics that are covered in class.

Withdrawal from Class

As per DES Circular 0037/2010, 0028/2023, parents have the right to withdraw their child from RSE classes if they wish. Parents do not have to give a reason for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. The process is as follows:

- Parents are informed by VS ware notification when RSE is to take place.
- Parents are given a period to respond.
- A meeting can be arranged with the teacher and/or coordinator to answer questions.
- Provisions outlined for student when out of RSE class:
 - There is no obligation for the school to provide alternative lessons or accommodation etc., in lieu of same – the parent/guardian is required to collect the student during any such lessons.

Please see Appendix 1 for additional information on withdrawing students from RSE.

Answering questions

Students are encouraged to make note of any specific questions they may have in relation to the topic being covered. During an allocated time, students can write anonymous questions which are collected by the teacher, how these questions are collected will be at the teacher's discretion. The teacher then has one week to respond to these questions and to decide which are most appropriate for the class group, taking into consideration the age and readiness of the students. The teacher may exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer questions privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter

that has been raised, they should seek advice and take appropriate steps as outlined in The Department of Education and Skills Circular 0081/2017, 0036/2023 on Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023 and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment.

Confidentiality

At the beginning of each academic year and at regular intervals throughout the year students are informed that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison person or Deputy Designated Liaison person if DLP is not available. 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 Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023 Addendum states in 4.4.1 that "Mandated persons who receive a disclosure of harm from a child, which is at or above the threshold of harm (Section 4.3), must make a mandated report of the concerns to TUSLA.

Children First National Guidance 2017 & 2023 Addendum states that "mandated persons are not required to judge the truth of the claim or the credibility of the child." The Child Protection Procedures also state that if the school becomes aware that a young person is sexually active under the age of consent it has a responsibility to inform the parents of the child.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children

2017 state:

If a child discloses to a teacher or to other school staff that he or she is being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person, including another child, the person who receives the information should listen carefully and supportively. The child should not be interviewed formally, and no leading questions should be asked by the person receiving the disclosure. Confidentiality must never be promised. The discussion should be recorded accurately, and the record retained securely, and the staff member should then inform the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who deems whether or not the matter should be reported to TUSLA.

Sexual Activity

It is advisable that 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.

Use of External Speakers and Facilitators.

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. Circular 0043/2018 states *“The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and he/she can have a powerful impact on influencing students’ attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education.”*

When engaging external speakers the staff member who books the visitor will provide them in advance of the visit with a copy of this RSE policy. External facilitators must be compliant with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and other relevant school policies and procedures.

Sexuality

Young people with non-heterosexual identities follow the same developmental challenges and pathways as those of their heterosexual peers. However, research suggests that these young people may have to cope with additional challenges including negative attitudes, discrimination and harassment directed towards the LGBTI+ community.

Swords Community College aims to ensure a positive school climate and culture where difference is welcomed. A positive and inclusive school climate will provide an appropriate environment of support for all students. In compliance with the school's philosophy of inclusion and diversity RSE classes will promote this climate of respect in lessons and class discussions, thereby giving all students the educational support required while facing the challenges of adolescence.

The Equal Status Act 2000 to 2015 is the key piece of legislation protecting young people in school who are LGBTI+. In May 2012 the Department of Education and Skills established a Working Group on Tackling Bullying, including homophobic bullying, cyber-bullying and racist bullying. Swords Community College is mindful of the above in all aspects of school life and in policy formation and implementation.

Contraception and Abortion.

These topics will be discussed in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

Provisions for Ongoing Support, Development and Review

Staff Training

We maintain an updated record of in-service courses attended by staff. Where possible, staff will be given opportunities to attend further professional development courses. Information received at in-service will be made available to all relevant teachers through subject department meetings at the beginning of the academic year.

Planning

The SPHE/RSE core team meets several times throughout the year for subject planning and information sharing. At these meetings the SPHE/RSE coordinator will update staff in relation to In-Service training available, and updates relating to the curriculum, and to complete a review at the end of the academic year. All RSE lessons are prepared in conjunction with the SPHE co-ordinator who has received training in the SPHE course. Teachers involved in delivering the programme will do so in the context of these guidelines as set out in the policy. All staff teaching RSE are encouraged to avail of suitable in-career development opportunities, which may arise.

Supporting Students with AEN (Additional Education Needs)

Children and young people with Additional Education Needs may need additional support in SPHE/RSE lessons. This may include offering alternative formats for learning materials, such as visual aids or simplified language, to accommodate different learning styles. Additionally, teachers can provide additional time for comprehension, repetition, or clarification of concepts, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to fully

engage with the curriculum. Collaborating with special education teachers or support staff can also be beneficial in identifying specific accommodations or modifications that may be required. Students with intellectual disabilities usually progress through the stages of sexual development at the same age as other children but may lack the cognitive or emotional maturity to understand the physiological and psychosocial changes that they are experiencing. Children and young people with an intellectual disability may also lack the understanding or awareness of behaviours that may put them at risk of sexual exploitation. SPHE/RSE teachers tailor the classroom content by utilising the AEN-specific resources and support. This approach enhances young people's understanding and learning, ensuring they grasp the material while also safeguarding their safety and wellbeing.

Parents

The school will continue to offer supports to parents as the need arises and ask parental opinion to help review the policy.

Resources

We have core and supplementary resources available to all SPHE and RSE staff. Staff may also avail of web based resources for class planning. All staff are encouraged to harness the valuable IT resources available. As the need arises, the SPHE department will identify necessary resources for their subject and submit requests to the Principal.

Links to Curriculum Delivery

Teachers with specialist knowledge in particular subject areas can support the work of RSE at different stages in the programme. At Junior Cycle, teachers of Home Economics and Science deal primarily with the biological aspect of reproduction. Issues such as over population, birth control and other sexual matters are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography, Science and RE. However, any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the RSE Programme.

Links to Other Policies

- Child Safeguarding statement and associated risk assessment
- Bí Cineálta Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Positive Behaviour
- Mobile Phone Policy
- AUP Policy
- SEN/ ASD Class Policy
- Wellbeing Policy
- Guidance Policy

Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management is assigned the role of coordinating implementation of this policy. The SPHE/RSE co-ordinators: Amanda Duffy, Aoife Long and Amanda Fahey and SPHE/RSE teachers implement programme to students.

Implementation, Ratification and Communication

This policy will be ratified by the Board of Management and becomes the agreed RSE policy of Swords Community College. All teaching staff will need to be familiar with the policy, a copy of the policy will be made available promptly after it has been ratified.

The Parents Council will also receive a copy of the policy.

Motoring, Reviewing and evaluating the policy.

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation. Policy review will take place when necessary, and will be updated when appropriate under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers, and others.

The SPHE/RSE co-ordinator will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Review Personnel and Timeframe

There will be a review of the policy periodically. The review team will comprise of the Principal, Deputy Principal and RSE teachers. Parents' comments will be considered.

Our Relationships and Sexuality Policy has been written by the college and agreed by staff, Parent's Council, and the Board of Management.

APPENDIX 1

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

- a) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and RSE Coordinator, the Principal and/or Deputy Principal may become involved if necessary)

- b) 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.

- c) If a parent/guardian removes a student from the RSE programme the school is not obliged to provide alternative lessons or accomodation *etc.*, in lieu of same – the parent would be required to collect the student during any such lessons.

Appendix 2: Junior and Senior Cycle Specifications: Learning Outcomes explored in the Junior Cycle RSE 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

1.4 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

Strand 2:

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

2.7 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

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:

<p>Self-awareness and personal skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>Relationship Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate genuineness, empathy and respect in different types of relationship scenarios 19

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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Sexual and reproductive health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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Sexual identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare their understanding of the responsibilities of being a parent/guardian with parents/guardians' understanding of their responsibilities
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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<p>Personal rights and personal safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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<p>Being health literate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
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