



RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY POLICY

Meán Scoil Mhuire

Chairperson: Ms. Karen Clabby

Principal: Ms. Mairéad Lyons (Acting)

Date: 19th March 2024

Introduction:

Meán Scoil Mhuire is an all girls, academically non-selective day school, with an enrolment varying between 500-600 students. It is under the Trusteeship of CEIST.

Scope:

This policy governs all aspects of teaching and learning relating to relationships and sexuality. It applies to all staff, parents/ guardians, students, visiting teachers and external facilitators and will be freely available to all personnel.

Our School Philosophy:

Inspired by the vision of Catherine McCauley, our school mission statement commits us to the development of the whole person – spiritually, socially, academically and culturally. The holistic development of a student can only take place when the student is happy in the school environment.

Goals:

- To respect the dignity of each person with their unique background, talents and beliefs.
- To foster positive Christian values and self-esteem so that will equip them for the challenges of life.
- To encourage partnership at all levels between management, staff, pupils, parents and the local community.
- To provide a caring supportive environment.

This policy has been drawn up in conjunction with the staff, Board of management, the Parents Association and the Student Council of Meán Scoil Mhuire.

Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.):

‘Relationships and sexuality is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and identity.’

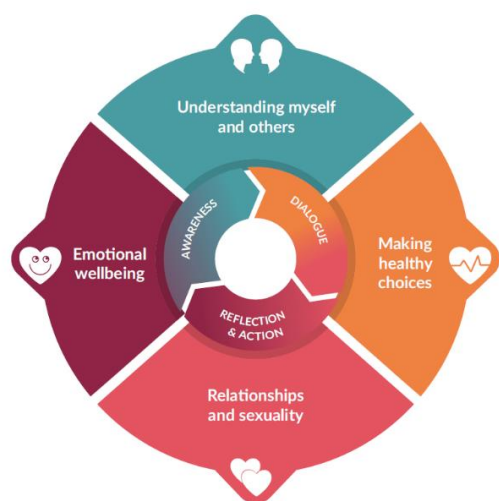
Relationship of R.S.E. to S.P.H.E.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) is located within the Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) Short Course. Social Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology” (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2). The R.S.E. Programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons on R.S.E., S.P.H.E. covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one’s relationships with others. S.P.H.E. deals with other issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision -making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the R.S.E. programme.

The S.P.H.E. course supports young people to develop all six indicators of wellbeing.



The Junior Cycle S.P.H.E. specification consists of four strands:



- Strand 1: Understanding Myself and Others
- Strand 2: Making Health Choices
- Strand 3: Relationship and Sexuality
- Strand 4: Emotional Wellbeing

1st Year 2023 onwards

- Strand 1: Who am I?
- Strand 2: Minding myself and others
- Strand 3: Team up
- Strand 4: My mental health

2021

Strand 3 explores the cognitive, physical, emotional and social aspects of relationships and sexuality through a positive, inclusive, rights and responsibilities based approach. The focus is on family relationships, friendships, romantic and potential sexual relationships in the future.

R.S.E. takes place under Strand 3 – Team Up for first years 2021 onwards. Students learn about having a friend and being a friend, the relationship spectrum, sexuality, gender identity, sexual health and media influences on relationships and sexuality.

R.S.E. is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. S.P.H.E. provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources. The R.S.E. programme provides opportunities for young people to learn about sexuality in ways that help them think in a moral, caring and responsible way.

The Aims of the R.S.E. Programme

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school.

- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that may help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

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

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to:

- Reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/ intimate relationships.
- Examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships -friendships, family relationships, and romantic/ intimate relationships.
- Identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.
- Appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries.
- Consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health.
- Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways.
- Explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for peoples' choices.
- Appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective.
- Explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- 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.
- Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

Guidelines for the Management and the Organisation of R.S.E. in Our School:

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of the staff will be decided by the principal.

The school currently provides R.S.E. through the subject S.P.H.E. at Junior Cycle and through the Religious Education Programme at Senior Cycle.

- R.S.E. is taught for a minimum of six classes each year to each year group at Junior Cycle in S.P.H.E. class.
- R.S.E. is included in the Religious Education Programme in Transition Year.

- Leaving Cert Applied (L.C.A.), Fifth & Sixth Year R.S.E. is an integral part of the Social Education Programme.

It is acknowledged that R.S.E. is cross-curricular. Issues such as overpopulation, birth control and other sexual matters are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and Religious Education (R.E.). However, as discussion is limited and set within the context of the subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the R.S.E. Programme. The biological aspects of reproduction are covered in the Science, Biology and Home Economics specifications. Human relationships including sexual relationships are covered in the Child Development Module covered in Transition Year.

SENIOR CYCLE R.S.E. Programme

Human Growth and Development

Structure and function of sexual organs, awareness of fertility, methods of family planning, pregnancy and developing foetus, health care during pregnancy, human emotions, relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted infections (S.T.I.s)

Human Sexuality

What it means to be male or female, male and female roles in relationships and in society, awareness and understanding of sexual orientation, issues pertaining to equality, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape including legal issues and help issues and help agencies, skill for making sexual choices re sexual activity, attitudes, attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society.

Human Relationship

Understanding the nature of peer pressure, skills for resolving conflict, the complex nature of love and loving relationships, marriage as a loving commitment, awareness of importance of family life.

TOPIC	
Fertility Awareness	Develop a deeper awareness and understanding of male and female fertility and an introduction to family planning.
Family Planning	Develop and awareness of different methods of family planning.
Values and Relationships	Help students identify what they value in a relationship and think critically about idealised images of relationships presented in the media and other sources.
Personal Integrity	Students will consider how affection is expressed in a variety of contexts, how to set boundaries and balance within a relationship in a way that protects personal integrity and respect for one;s own sexuality.
Responsible Parenthood	Using models of decision making, students explore implications and consequences of pregnancy and

	parenthood for both male and female. Consider which impede responsible decision making such as alcohol and drugs, lack of assertiveness etc.
Sexually Transmitted Infections	Students will gain an understanding of the nature of STI's with reference also to AIDS, how STIs are contracted and the importance of early medical intervention and location of appropriate medical support. Issues of discrimination might be addressed here also.
Sexual Harassment	Develop an awareness of and skills for dealing with all forms of sexual harassment in a variety of contexts.
Gender Orientation	Examine some issues concerned with and attitudes to gender orientation in modern society.
Gender Discrimination	Help students understand that the roles assigned to people in life are coloured by stereotype views of what it is to be male and female. This might include issues of gender discrimination, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and pornography.
Personal Rights and Personal Safety	Students will reflect on the right to privacy and their own space, and the consequences when privacy and space are invaded. Students should understand the invasion of personal integrity and the issues of power and control involved in abuse and rape. Help agencies are also identified.
Making, Keeping and Ending Relationships	Students will take steps towards developing and enhancing the skills necessary for making, keeping and ending relationships.
Commitment and Marriage	Students look at various elements of marriage which help support lifelong love and friendship.

Informing and involving parents:

Meán Scoil Mhuire recognises that the parents are the primary educators of their children. We acknowledge the right and the duty of parents to provide for the religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children. Meán Scoil Mhuire will play a supportive and complementary role to the home in this task in its provision of relationships and sexuality education. A copy of the R.S.E. Policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school office and is also available on the school website. More information for parents is available on the NCCA website (<https://ncca.ie/media/6335/jc-sphe-information-for-parents-en.pdf>)

Meán Scoil Mhuire strives to be sensitive to all and recognises the right of parents, in consultation with the Principal, to act in accordance with their stated beliefs. Hence, parents or guardians must notify the school in writing if they wish to absent their daughter as per our RSE policy. Sensitive issues will be dealt with appropriately.

Offering advice:

The function of the school is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues not to offer advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception- however, sources of professional advice will be identified when appropriate. R.S.E. Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

Answering Questions:

While it is important to create an environment in S.P.H.E./R.S.E. in which students can discuss issues openly, R.S.E. teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked and should set appropriate limits. It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included on the curriculum. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at that time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she would seek advice from the S.P.H.E. co-ordinator or the Principal.

When deciding whether or not to answer question, the teacher should use their professional judgement, consider the age and readiness of the student/s, the emotional maturity, the R.S.E. programme content, the ethos of Meán Scoil Mhuire and the R.S.E. policy.

Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in any circumstances where a pupil is considered to be at risk from any type of abuse or breach of the law, the teacher will refer immediately to the Principal, in accordance with the D.E.S. Child Protection Guidelines as the Designated Liaison Person (D.L.P.). The Principal will then decide whether to refer the matter to the student's parents, to the appropriate authorities or to arrange for counselling.

Students at Meán Scoil Mhuire will be made aware that:

- Teachers cannot promise absolute confidentiality
- Any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to the Parents, if the Principal decides that it is the best interest of the pupil to notify the parents/guardians.
- Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the relevant information. If in doubt they must seek the advice of the Principal.
- Teachers must indicate to clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential -the pupil can then decide to whether to proceed or not.

Participation:

S.P.H.E. is a core curricular subject on the Junior Cycle Curriculum. R.S.E. is one section of this programme. Parents/ Guardians should be informed of the R.S.E. policy from the time of enrolment of the student.

Withdrawing Pupils from the R.S.E. Programme:

Parents will be notified by email letter **each year** when the R.S.E. programme will take place and with details about the parent's right to withdraw their daughter from R.S.E. class. An email letter (Appendix A) must be signed and returned to the school. This can be done via post, email or through the front office within the specified time frame, indicating the wish to withdraw from the programme. Parents/ Guardians do not have to give a reason for the withdrawal from class, but the S.P.H.E. department in consultation with the Principal may invite them to do so, in an attempt to resolve any issues or misunderstandings. Once a Parent's/Guardian's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. This request should be made in writing each year, otherwise the student will take part in the R.S.E. classes. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to ensure their contact details are up to date in this regard. Arrangements will be made by the teacher for the withdrawn student to be supervised by another teacher while the R.S.E. programme is being taught.

Where students are withdrawn from the R.S.E. class, the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students.

Using Visiting Speakers:

It is school policy that the R.S.E. Programme is best taught by teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However, the use of visitors can enhance and complement the quality of the provision as long as they are used to assist, and not instead of a planned programme of R.S.E.

The S.P.H.E. Department will-

- Inform the principal in advance who will ensure that garda vetting is up to date.
- Make the speaker aware of the ethos of the school and the S.P.H.E. and R.S.E. policy of the school.
- The visitor will be accompanied by a member of the teaching staff.
- Agree the content of the presentation with the speaker in advance of the visit.
- Do preparatory work and follow up work where possible.

Sexual Activity:

It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which is 17 years of age for both males and females. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006.

Sexual Orientation:

The discussion of sexual orientation will be age appropriate. Teachers do not promote any one life style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education

Family Planning:

The R.S.E. specification guidelines states that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle R.S.E. Programme. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate and open way in keeping with the ethos of the school.

Abortion:

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate and open way in keeping with the catholic ethos of the school.

Students with Additional Educational Needs:

Students with special needs may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up.

Links to Other School Policies:

Acceptable Use Policy

Anti-Bullying Policy

Child Protection Policy

School Visitor's Policy

S.P.H.E. Policy

Substance Misuse Policy

Wellbeing Policy

Whole School Guidance Plan

Ongoing Support and Development:

Teachers in the S.P.H.E. Department do not necessarily have to be experts on the issues concerned. However, they will require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly and honestly and a preparedness to refer to more expertise if necessary.

Meán Scoil Mhuire will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to Wellbeing and Health Education.

Furthermore many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling.

Resources:

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

Monitoring, Evaluating and Review.:

All partners, including the B.O.M., Parents/Guardians, School Management and Teaching staff have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the implementation of the R.S.E. Policy in our school.

The school is committed to the annual monitoring, evaluating and reviewing of the R.S. E. Policy at S.P.H.E./R.S.E. Department meetings and any meeting deemed necessary by the Principal or B.O.M. Ongoing Staff, Parental, and student feedback will be taken into account and relevant changes made as required.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Withdrawal from Junior/Senior Cycle RSE

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

Méan Scoil Mhuire has a holistic approach to education, and as part of this, Social Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) is a required part of the school curriculum, of which Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) is also required to be taught at Junior and Senior Cycle for a minimum of six class periods per year.

We recognise that parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for the personal development of their children, and it is our wish to complement that role. With the school and the family working together, the programme can have greater success.

We are most grateful for your support and welcome any queries that an individual parent/guardian may have.

If you wish to withdraw your daughter from this programme, please inform the Principal in writing.

Name of Student:

Name of RSE teacher:

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Sample email sent to parents each year(from the front office) for Junior and Senior RSE Classes

Dear Parent Guardian,

We will soon deliver our Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme to your daughter. Please read our RSE policy which is available on the school website for an overview of our Junior and Senior Cycle RSE programmes. RSE is a required part of the curriculum and the way it is taught in this school is informed by our Ethos and Mission Statement.

We are very aware of your role as the child's first educator. We would appreciate your support by talking to your daughter about the RSE programme and helping them with any concerns they may have. Should you have any queries or concerns, please contact the school to discuss them with the Principal and we will support you in any way possible.

If you wish to withdraw your daughter from participating in the RSE module, notify the school by completing Appendix A and returning within the next week.

Kind regards,

Mairéad Lyons,

Acting Principal,

Meán Scoil Mhuire Longford

Email: info@scoilmhuirelongford.ie

Tel: 0433346608