

## Fostering partnerships with parents

### Introduction

This material aims to support teachers in fostering partnerships with parents<sup>1</sup>. The sections are as follows:

- Consistent and timely communication between school and home
- Including all parents
- Whole-school approaches to supporting parents
- Further reading.

SPHE/RSE is a shared responsibility that does not begin or end in the classroom. It is most effective when it is based upon a consistent approach where the responsibility is shared between the school and the home. A partnership approach ensures that children are provided with a consistent experience in SPHE/RSE and are able to make connections between life at home, in the school and in the community (NCCA, 1999, p. 4). Partnerships are collaborative relationships that support and empower positive parent engagement through communication based on trust and mutual understanding. Through these partnerships, parents can build purposeful and productive relationships with teachers that expand their interest, knowledge and understanding of the importance of Relationships and Sexuality Education.

### Consistent and timely communication between school and home

Consistent and timely communication about learning in SPHE/RSE is important from junior infants to sixth class, and gives opportunities for parents to make connections between learning at home and learning in school. Opportunities to communicate with parents about SPHE/RSE throughout the school year include:

- **Enrolment:** Including information about SPHE/RSE as part of the enrolment process is an opportunity to support communication and to establish a partnership with parents (see Resources for Sharing with Parents in the Resources to Teach section of the [SPHE/RSE online toolkit](#)). This could include ways to support children's home learning, and key messages the school wants to communicate about SPHE/RSE.
- **Meetings with parents:** The needs of the child are the focus when building partnerships with parents. Sharing what will be taught in SPHE/RSE at regular intervals can help parents engage with and understand the holistic and connected nature of learning in SPHE/RSE. These meetings can give an opportunity for parents to clarify their concerns and perspectives, and for you to share the scope of the SPHE/RSE curriculum and the resources and methodologies used to teach it. In some instances, continued communication with parents may be needed to address any questions or concerns. Class meetings are another opportunity to meet with parents and share information on the topics and approaches to teaching SPHE/RSE. The formal parent/teacher meetings can include information about the child's progress and learning in SPHE/RSE.
- **Supporting home-learning:** You can share resources such as stories, information leaflets, or video clips to help parents engage with their child/children around topics in SPHE/RSE. Some parents may not have English as their first language so it is important to consider the type of materials that could be shared to support and meet their needs.
- **Written communications:** Written communication about learning in SPHE/RSE is most effective when it supplements other forms of communication, such as conversations and meetings. You can share the approach taken by the school; the list of topics covered in the curriculum; the methodologies used to support children's learning; and advice for supporting this learning in the home.

<sup>1</sup> Parents refers to mothers, fathers and those with parental responsibility in different parenting relationships. This may include foster parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, and carers.

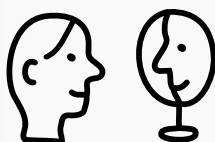
## Fostering partnerships with parents

### Teacher Snapshot



*In our school, we try to emphasise that the door of our school is always open for discussions and conversation about all issues, including concerns in relation to RSE. We are clear though, that such conversations are important and need time and consideration. We ensure we meet parents outside of class at an arranged time. Parents appreciate this investment of time and space to share their views and concerns, and for teachers, it gives us time to listen and provide the school's perspective in terms of our roles and responsibilities and approach with respect to teaching RSE. Parents appreciate when we take an honest and upfront approach.*

### Teacher Reflection



- In your experience of teaching SPHE/RSE, what modes of communication have you found to be most successful in supporting partnerships with parents?

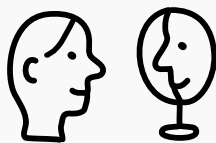
### Including all parents

Parents can have differing views about what, when and how certain topics in SPHE/RSE should be taught. Engaging with their questions and perspectives on these topics helps to build effective partnerships that are inclusive of all parents. By opening the door to these conversations, you create the opportunity for a shared understanding of the scope of learning in SPHE/RSE. In supporting all parents, you can consider:

- **An awareness of different family backgrounds, values and beliefs:** It is important to consider family backgrounds, values and beliefs which contribute to the perspectives of parents on learning about relationships and sexuality. Some families may have concerns about their child's learning in SPHE/RSE. Your awareness of their religious and cultural beliefs supports your understanding and sensitivity towards their perspective during conversations. In responding sensitively to parents, you can refer to the value of the learning in SPHE/RSE for children and the steps taken to support their engagement in the subject content, to an age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate level. You can access further support on this area in the [SPHE Curriculum Teacher Guidelines](#) and on [PDST.ie](#).
- **An awareness of different family types:** Inclusive representation of all families—same-sex parent, single parent, foster and multi-generational families—helps families feel welcomed and included, building effective partnerships between school and home. Representing all types of families in your teaching, and using inclusive language in formal and informal communication makes families feel valued and appreciated, and fosters engagement and involvement.
- **An awareness of gender identity:** Some parents may be having a range of experiences related to their child's gender identity. The school can act as a support to parents if desired, by using inclusive language, remaining open-minded and providing a safe space for self-expression.

## Fostering partnerships with parents

### Teacher Reflection



- In your experience, what impact does an inclusive approach have on supporting partnerships with parents in your class?
- In your experience, are there other areas to consider when using an inclusive approach to support partnerships with parents?

**Newsletter:** Publishing articles on SPHE/RSE in the school newsletter can raise awareness of learning in RSE, and support the understanding that it is ongoing and includes a range of learning experiences.

**Parent information sessions:** Information sessions provide opportunities for parents to become aware of the content and the methodologies used in SPHE/RSE, allowing them to further support their child's learning in SPHE/RSE. The parents' association can play a role in organising information sessions.

### Teacher Snapshot



*I always try to understand a parent's perspective and consider what I need to do to ensure they feel they are supported and involved in this important part of learning. Sometimes I signpost further resources and support for parents to have discussions at home, by providing links or booklets I order from the HSE. Other times I schedule a meeting with a parent to go through some of the materials and key messages of our school approach. I try to bring understanding to the issues at hand, and if I am unsure or need further support, there are always other teachers in our school I can rely on. Parents often feel more comfortable, involved and knowledgeable about what is taught when I take the time to consider including the key messages about RSE in an ongoing way into my communications with them such as during class meetings and parent/teacher meetings.*

### Teacher Snapshot



*We find parents engage well during the early years of primary and as a result we try to incorporate messages about SPHE/RSE as often as possible during this time. This helps build a solid foundation and address any concerns or issues early on. It also supports parents in seeing that RSE is taught across primary school and not just in the senior classes. We also use lots of opportunities to communicate and engage with parents. By getting positive messages out about our school, parents feel engaged and know what's going on. Parents are reassured and confident in our approach when they see all that the school does for their children. They understand that the school is doing their best. No single strategy works, you have to try bits and pieces of them all to reach as many parents as possible. Children seem less anxious and more engaged when they feel their parents are interested and supportive of what they learn in school. I can see this when topics arise because the children are less conflicted about participating.*

## Whole-school approaches to supporting parents

**Engagement in the review of RSE policy:** Parental engagement in the review of the school RSE policy is an important chance to reflect on and develop the school's approach to RSE. The parents' association can play a role in facilitating engagement by organising meetings and receiving feedback and views from the wider parent body. Online questionnaires can be used to source parental feedback on the school's approach to RSE.

# Fostering partnerships with parents

## What's Next?



### Further reading

**Resources to share with parents/guardians:** The online SPHE/RSE toolkit has resources to share with parents/guardians at each class level.

**Resources to teach SPHE/RSE.**

**HSE, Supporting Parents Communicating with Children Aged 4–9 Years about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up:** This research was carried out in 2018 and was the basis for the HSE resource Talking To Your Young Child About Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up. **Read the executive summary.**

**Parental Involvement, Engagement and Partnership in their Children's Education during the Primary School Years:** This research was commissioned by NCCA and completed by Marino Institute of Education. **Read the report.**

### References

NCCA. (1999). **Social Personal and Health Education Teacher Guidelines**, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.