

## Communicating with parents/carers about SPHE/RSE

SPHE/RSE is a shared responsibility that does not begin or end in the classroom. It is most effective when there is a partnership approach between the school and home. This involves regular communication that builds mutual understanding about the role and value of SPHE in young people's education.

### Some considerations

Opportunities to communicate with parents/carers about SPHE/RSE can be built in throughout the school year. These are just some suggestions.

### Meetings

Consider including information about SPHE/RSE as part of information evenings for new parents as this is an important way of signalling the value that your school places on SPHE. Similarly, SPHE teachers should be available to meet with parents as part of parent-teacher meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity for you, the teacher to share the scope of the SPHE/RSE curriculum and discuss progress in learning. It also offers parents the opportunity to mention specific issues or challenges that their teenager might be dealing with which can help you in planning future learning and teaching in SPHE.

### Consultation

Planning for learning and teaching in SPHE must be rooted in the students' real and identified needs. Therefore, consulting with young people about what they need to learn about in SPHE is vital. A summary of the needs identified by the students can be presented to parents and used as the basis for an awareness raising workshop and consultation with parents. Alternatively, the results of student consultations can be shared electronically with parents alongside a parent survey, inviting parents to give their views on what they think is important for their child's learning in SPHE/RSE. Coordination with other consultations and planning in the context of Wellbeing is important here.

### Workshops

Occasional information sessions/workshops on specific aspects of SPHE/RSE can help parents to understand the needs of young people today and support them in developing their own skills and knowledge to help them talk to their teenage children. Some topics around which workshops might be organised include youth mental health, substance abuse, managing social media and aspects of relationships and sexuality education. The parents' association can play a role in identifying subjects of relevance and organising these events.

## Communicating with parents/carers about SPHE/RSE

### An example of effective practice

The following practice is very effective in generating positive parental involvement in SPHE.

First, gather evidence of young people’s behaviour and attitudes on a topic of interest to parents. This may be found in research reports such as the [Health Behaviour in School-aged Children \(HBSC\) report \(2020\)](#) based on data collected from 10-17 year olds in Ireland, the [My World Survey \(2019\)](#) Ireland’s largest survey of youth mental health and wellbeing or the ESRI research [Talking about sex and sexual behaviour of young people in Ireland.](#)

Then design a survey to gather information about aspects of your students’ behaviour and attitudes. It is important to anonymise this.

Invite students to discuss the findings and to compare the findings at national level with the local findings. Discuss particular findings that they find surprising or are of interest to them.

Organise a meeting for parents at which the data gathered can be shared and used as the basis for a conversation. When the findings relate to their own children, parents are likely to be very interested.

### Provide sources of information

Provide parents with links to useful websites and sources of information related to SPHE/RSE through your school website, newsletter, text messages and other communication tools. Community/local resources and support services should also be shared with parents. You might consider setting up a dedicated space for SPHE on the school website for this purpose.

### Including all

Some parents may not be literate or have English as their first language and so it is important to consider the type of consultation and communication that might meet their needs. Equally, it is important to consider parents who have children with SEN and parents who may have a child who self-identifies as transgender and to discuss ways that the SPHE/RSE programme can attend to their child’s specific needs in a sensitive manner.

### Engagement in the review of RSE policy

Parental engagement in the review of the school RSE policy is important in building a partnership approach to RSE. The parents’ association can play a role in facilitating feedback from the wider parent body.

If parents ask for advice about how to talk to their children about aspects of SPHE/RSE the following tips might be helpful.

### Tips for parents and carers

**Keep it casual:** Use opportunities that arise naturally to prompt a conversation, such as seeing something in the media. As far as possible avoid a ‘we need to talk’ moment. Go for a walk, a drive or visit a favourite cafe together and make spaces for your child to chat about whatever is going on in their lives.

**Be brave:** You don’t need to be an expert and you don’t need to know everything.

## Communicating with parents/carers about SPHE/RSE

**Be proactive:** Talk to your teenager all the time and not just as issues/problems arise.

**Just listen:** Listening is the most important gift you can give your child. Resist the urge to ask too many questions or to jump in immediately with your opinions, views and feelings. Think about a time you felt someone truly listened to you. What did they do? Copy this!

**Understand and show empathy for their feelings:** Try to listen for their feelings as well as to what they are saying. Voice the feelings you pick up by saying something like, 'it sounds like you're worried about this', or 'that sounds really upsetting for you'.

**Share your wisdom:** You have valuable life experiences and values worth sharing with your child. That said, your child is living in a world very different to the one you grew up in and may be dealing with challenges and situations you have not had to deal with. This is why listening is so important!

**Allow them figure things out:** Don't try to solve their problems for them. Let your teen know that you trust them to come to good decisions.

**Remind them that you're there for them:** Keep reminding your child that you are in their corner and that your love is unconditional, even when they make mistakes.

**Don't try to force it:** If they are reluctant to talk don't pester or draw attention to this. Simply continue to show kindness and love. Often simple things, like giving a hug, a pat on the back, knocking before entering their bedroom, cooking their favourite meal, can create a more positive atmosphere.

### Dealing with parental concerns about aspects of SPHE/RSE

While most parents see the value of classroom-based learning in SPHE, some parents may raise concerns or in rare instances ask that their child be withdrawn from class. This can happen for a variety of reasons and with respectful and non-judgmental communication these concerns can often be resolved.

Suggestions for dealing with these concerns include offering to meet parents one-to-one to discuss the programme as sometimes concerns can be based on lack of information or even false information. Consider involving the home school liaison officer or a local community organisation that the family might have a relationship with. They may be able to help you to communicate the importance of the SPHE/RSE programme in supporting and protecting their child.

In the event of not reaching a shared understanding of the value of SPHE/RSE, parents/carers have a right to request that their child opt out of SPHE/RSE (or parts of it), as is their right with any aspect of the curriculum.

#### Further useful resources:

The [b4udecide.ie](http://b4udecide.ie) and [sexualwellbeing.ie](http://sexualwellbeing.ie) websites provide helpful information to parents and carers about talking to their children as well as links to training programmes offered by the National Parents' Council and the Irish Family Planning Association.

Section 5 of [TUSLA's Healthy Sexuality and Relationships toolkit](#) includes information and advice for parents/carers.