

Communicating with parents/guardians about SPHE

SPHE learning 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

Communication with parents/guardians about SPHE should occur throughout the school year, for example, through...

Meetings

Consider sharing information about SPHE during information evenings for new parents as this is an important signal of the value that your school places on SPHE. Similarly, SPHE teachers should be available to meet with parents during parent-teacher meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity for you to share the scope of the SPHE 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 SPHE learning and teaching.

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/or 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.

Workshops

Occasional information sessions/workshops on specific aspects of SPHE 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. Useful workshop topics might include emotional wellbeing/mental health, substance abuse, managing social media and aspects of relationships and sexuality education. The parents' association can play a role in identifying topics of relevance and organising these events.

An example of effective practice

Gather evidence of young people's behaviour and attitudes on a topic of interest to parents. This may be found in national research reports by the Health Service Executive (HSE) or ERSI. Design a survey to gather related information about aspects of your students' behaviour and/or attitudes. Anonymise the survey data and invite students to discuss and compare the findings at national level with the local findings. Organise a meeting for parents to share and use the data 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 topics through your school website, newsletter, text messages and other communication tools. Community/local resources, supports and services should also be shared with parents. Consider setting up a dedicated space for SPHE on the school website for this purpose.

Communicating with parents/carers about SPHE/RSE

Including all

Some parents may have literacy difficulties or may not have English as their first language and so it is important to consider the type of consultation and engagement that might meet their needs. It is also important to consider parents who have children with SEN or other specific needs and discuss ways that SPHE can attend to their child's needs in a sensitive manner.

Dealing with parental concerns about aspects of SPHE/RSE

While most parents see the value of learning in SPHE, some 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 SPHE curriculum, as sometimes concerns can be based on lack of information or even false information. Consider involving the Home School Liaison Officer or other supports that a family might have a relationship with. They may be able to help you to communicate the importance of the SPHE programme in supporting and protecting their child.

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

Tips for parents/guardians when communicating with your child about SPHE

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

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

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

Keep it casual: Use opportunities that arise naturally to prompt a deeper 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 place together and make spaces for your child to chat about whatever is going on in their lives.

Don't try to force it: If your child is 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.

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, you 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.