



Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs

Relationships & Sexuality Education (R.S.E) Policy

Introduction

Abacas Special School caters for students with a diagnosis of ASD aged between 4-18 years. It is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment. In ABACAS we seek to promote the overall development of the child which involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality Education into the development of personal, social, health and citizenship skills and knowledge. ABACAS Special School will ensure that this policy is in accordance with the ethos of our patron, Autism Ireland, and also in accordance with the Child Safeguarding and DES guidelines. Also, in defining this policy, the school acknowledges that our role in Relationships and Sexuality Education is subsidiary to that of the parents, and we endeavour to support and complement their work.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs, and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE is the formal approach to educating children in:

- Relationships with others – parents, siblings, friends and the community in general
- Respect for themselves and others
- Physical development – bodily functions and changes, and personal hygiene
- Emotional development – maturing in society
- Sexuality in context – part of a loving relationship.

All young people, whatever their ability, develop physically and emotionally and need to be guided to understand their bodies and feelings. Central to RSE is the fostering of self esteem, through which the students become more responsible in making choices and decisions in all aspects of life and particularly in those relating to relationships and sexuality.

RSE and SPHE

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education and must be taught in this context. SPHE contributes to developing the work of the school in promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. The objective of this is to help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development.

The key characteristics of this programme are that SPHE is a lifelong process and is a shared responsibility between family, school, health professionals and the community. The main strands of the SPHE programme are:

- Myself
- Myself and Others
- Myself and the Wider World

Sexually sensitive issues will be covered within the strand units:

- Taking care of my body



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- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection.

A successful programme, firmly embedded in SPHE, will help young people to learn to respect themselves and others and to move more confidently from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood.

Current Provision

We are a child-centred school. The educational and emotional needs of the children in our care are central to our planning and policy-making processes. We have always, and will always continue to put the welfare of the children first.

Included in the school curriculum in ABACAS Special School is:

- RSE- Relationships and Sexuality Education (as part of SPHE).
- Stay Safe Programme- a personal safety skills programme that seeks to enhance children’s self-protective skills by participation in lessons on safe and unsafe situations, bullying, inappropriate touch, secrets, telling and stranger danger.
- So Safe-visual and conceptual tools designed to promote social safety for people with moderate to severe intellectual disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder.

SPHE Curriculum Areas

As with the majority of educational provision in ABACAS, SPHE programmes will be included in each student’s individualised program and in consultation with each student’s parent or guardian. The individual goals will depend on the needs of each student.

Curricular Areas	
<i>Junior level</i>	<i>Senior level</i>
Self-awareness – Who am I	Body changes
Identifying & naming body parts	Menstruation & masturbation
Gender	Self-care
Hygiene and general health	Emotional changes
Family & Friends	Feelings
Making decisions/choosing – yes & no	Respect for others
Growing and changing – size skills	Resolving conflict
Preparation for puberty	Integration and community experience
Stay Safe	L2LP elements(Junior Cycle)
	Stay Safe

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In addition, all teaching is supported by implementing school rules around appropriate physical interactions between staff and students. These rules are established for the pupil on his/her enrolment in the school to ensure that awareness of appropriate/inappropriate behaviours is fostered



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from the beginning. These include:

- No hugging or kissing
- No sitting on the laps of staff.
- Horse play involving physical contact is not allowed. This excludes tickles or squeezes as specified in a student's behaviour or OT plan.
- No holding hands or linking as students walk. This excludes the use of PCM or holding hands to maintain general safety.
- Students are not allowed to climb on staff in the swimming pool.
- Teaching appropriate public/private behaviours.

Decreasing Behaviours & RSE

There may at some point be a need to input goals aimed at decreasing behaviours that are occurring in excess. Any intervention aimed at decreasing sexualised behaviours will be approached in the same way as other behaviours we try to decrease (see also Code of Behaviour).

Sexualised Behaviour

While recognising that sexual behaviours are a natural part of maturation, it is important that the school adopts a general procedure to address these behaviours during school hours. Some of these behaviours include but are not limited to:

- Masturbation
- Exposing genitals
- Inappropriate touching of peers or staff
- Attempted kissing peers or staff

Procedure:

- Interrupt the behaviour
- Redirect the student to an activity that involves high concentration
- Provide reinforcement for staying on the assigned task
- Inform the class teacher
- Keep a record of instances
- Inform parents
- Design a support plan

Parental Involvement

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an ongoing process throughout life. Parents and the family are acknowledged as the primary educators of their children. We work in a supportive role with the parents of our school, by complementing their role with a school-based program in RSE.

Parents *may* wish to talk about and address this area of learning with their child's teacher and the behaviour analyst, but deliver the content at home. After discussion and agreeing expectations, the school will do its best to provide resources or ideas for parents to use at home. Due to the personal



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and private nature of this work, it will be important to have one or two consistent people liaising with families on these issues. This will typically be the class teacher and the behaviour analyst.

Parents are advised to inform their child's teacher in confidence of any special family situations that may cause upset to the student when covering RSE, e.g. death, family separation etc.

Since RSE is an obligatory requirement of the Department of Education and Science, it should be inclusive. ABACAS Special School actively promotes the implementation of RSE and discourages withdrawal from the program. The school will, however, take account of parental concerns and a parent's right to withdraw a pupil from themes pertaining to sensitive issues. These will be honoured on the understanding that the parents/guardians are taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves. Parents are obliged to inform the school in writing of their decision to withdraw the child from an RSE programme.

Terminology

In teaching issues related to RSE, teachers will use the correct biological terms for parts of the body. Visual supports may also be used. Any visual aids of sexual body parts will be drawings or symbols (sourced from appropriate curriculum resources) and never photographs.

Sources and Resources

The school will use the RSE, Stay Safe Program and So Safe resources. We may also use other materials which have been identified by staff as useful and approved as suitable by the school.

Child Safeguarding

Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse or reason to suspect abuse, the school will follow the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017), guidelines set out in 'Children First' and the school's own Child Safeguarding Statement.

Links with other policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies which support RSE:

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Code of behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Toileting and Intimate Care Policy
- Administration of Medicines Policy
- Stay Safe Policy

Policy Review

This policy was drafted in consultation with two members of teaching staff, the behaviour analyst and members of the Board of Management. It is fully acknowledged by all parties that this RSE policy will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is kept up to date and that it retains its relevance. Ongoing evaluation and new approaches to education, DES guidelines & agreements may require this document to be modified.



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Ratified by the ABACAS Board of Management on 16th January 2019

Signed: _____ (Chairperson)