



# SACRED HEART COLLEGE

## RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY (RSE) POLICY

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## 1. Introduction

At Sacred Heart College, we believe that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a vital part of a young person's development. Our sexuality is a central and significant part of who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others. It contributes to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

RSE is primarily about human relationships. It has moral, ethical, and religious dimensions, and for this reason, the College delivers its programme through its pastoral and curriculum teams, in partnership with several trusted external agencies. As a Catholic College, the primacy of Catholic teaching on all matters of spiritual and moral development will be foremost in any taught classes and in any external provision organised by the College.

Our RSE provision is grounded in the core values of **Compassion, Faith, Hope, and Joy**. It is guided by compassion, recognising the dignity and worth of every individual, and delivered in a spirit of respect and care. Rooted in faith, it reflects the Church's teaching on human dignity, vocation, and the sanctity of life. It offers hope to young people by equipping them with the understanding and resilience to navigate relationships with confidence and purpose. And it fosters joy through the celebration of healthy relationships and personal growth.

RSE empowers pupils to grow by helping them understand themselves as sexual beings, called to live in right relationships with themselves, others, and God. Through this, pupils are encouraged to make moral decisions formed by a well-developed conscience. It also inspires them to excel as they develop the knowledge, values, and skills required for healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds—not simply intimate relationships.

RSE should enable young people to understand what a healthy relationship looks like, and to recognise the qualities of a good friend, a trustworthy colleague, and a committed partner in marriage or other loving relationships. It is firmly rooted in the Catholic vision of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God and called to love and be loved.

This approach is aligned with the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service guidance (NI 2021), which states:

“RSE should give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not simply intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship.”

## 2. Rationale

Sacred Heart College's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme seeks to support the holistic development of every pupil. Driven by the love of Christ (*Caritate Christi Compulsi*), our approach is rooted firmly in our Catholic ethos and in the core values that underpin the life of our school community.

The RSE programme aims to provide age-appropriate, accurate and values-informed education that nurtures pupils in their understanding of relationships, identity and the inherent dignity of the human person. In keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church, we seek to form young people who are compassionate in their relationships, grounded in faith, hopeful about their future and confident in living lives of integrity and respect.

To achieve this, we are committed to the following aims:

- To prepare the students for adult relationships within a Catholic moral setting that will ensure the development of responsible and healthy behaviour in all friendships and relationships.
- To present accurate, information in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner appropriate to the age and maturity of the students within the traditions and values of the College's Catholic Ethos.
- To promote the values of a stable family life, self-restraint, respect for the dignity of others, chastity, marriage as a sacrament and the responsibilities of parenthood.
- To promote a positive view of sexuality that will enhance students' personal development and self-esteem and develop the skills necessary to feel good about themselves and others.
- To make students aware of their own sexuality, the physical and emotional changes in life, the importance of relationships and how these are affected by human growth.
- To promote respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender or religious and cultural background.
- To promote period dignity and (Appendix 1) break the stigma surrounding periods and promote respect, understanding and open discussions about what people may experience when menstruating.
- To promote strategies that will allow students to develop the skills necessary for healthy relationships with their peer group, family, friends, and adults.
- To develop skills and strategies to respond appropriately to exploitation, bullying, harassment, and control in relationships (including the unique challenges posed by online abuse and the unacceptability of physical, emotional, sexual abuse)
- To understand that being single and chaste is a virtuous, positive, and fulfilling option.
- To help each student to arrive at an understanding of the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality and to foster an awareness of the scriptural and doctrinal foundations of these teachings.
- To recognise that compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and tolerance are essential dispositions to develop within relationships.

As a result, we seek to enable students to acquire knowledge and understanding of self which will develop a positive sense of self awareness and an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness, and well-being of others. Students should develop personal skills which will enable them to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships as well as coping strategies to protect themselves and others in situations of peer pressure and conflict. Students will be taught to recognise the need for online safety, and the impact of drugs and alcohol on choices and sexual behaviour. They will be made aware that the media portrayal of relationships may not reflect real life and the possible impact that this has on people's expectations of relationships. The programme will endeavour to help young people to become aware of the pervasive prevalence of pornography on the internet which can destroy and degrade human sexuality and relationships and reduce people to objects for gratification. All students will have an opportunity to acquire and use communication and social skills to solve problems, understand moral and legal perspectives and make decisions and develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyle. Through the development of appropriate vocabulary and concepts, they will be able to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth, and development, as well as exploring stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.

### **3. Organisation:**

The programme is co-ordinated by the RSE Co-ordinator, who will review the programme and whole school policy on an annual basis through the monitoring and evaluation of existing provision. They will arrange in-service training for staff.

#### **4. Methodology:**

The programme is largely taught within a timetabled programme of personal, social and health education (in line with the Statements of Minimum Requirements at Key Stage 3 & 4), with clear curricular links to units of work in LLW, Pastoral, Science and Religious Studies. In line with our Catholic Ethos, we have created post 16 provision which is delivered by subject teachers, such as Health and Social Care teachers and Form Teachers as well as by external providers during Enrichment.

Teaching and learning are based on a wide range of strategies including whole year group, whole class and small group teaching, brainstorming, quizzes and questionnaires, role play, investigative work, audio-visual materials, discussion and facilitation by outside speakers and qualified professionals. All such outside help will be provided on the understanding that they promote the teaching of the Catholic Church on matters of sexuality and human development and are invited only after approval by the RSE Co-ordinator.

As maturity is not always determined by age, teachers are alert to the personal and emotional circumstances of each student and take this into account in the delivery of the programme.

Students are allowed a right to privacy in class discussions on sexuality [i.e., they may not wish to ask or answer personal questions] but in accordance with the College's Child Protection Policy, not to confidentiality.

#### **5. Parental Involvement:**

Sacred Heart College regards RSE as a shared responsibility between school and parents. The College thus welcomes the involvement of parents at every stage of the RSE Programme from planning through delivery to review. Parents are made aware of the programme at the beginning of each Key Stage and copies of the programme itself, this policy document and materials used, are available to parents from the College for perusal. Please note that at the request of a parent, a pupil at Key Stages 3 & 4 may be excused only from age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

The teaching offered by the College is intended to reinforce positive family relationships and the role of parents, highlight the importance of marriage as a sacrament and encourage students towards a healthy and Christian approach to all relationships.

## 6. Parental Right to Withdrawal from Specific RSE Content

In accordance with Department of Education (Northern Ireland) Circular 2024/01, parents/guardians of pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 have the right to request that their child be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, specifically covering the prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

This right of withdrawal applies only to the defined elements outlined above.

It does not apply to:

- Safeguarding and child protection education
- Education relating to consent, exploitation, abuse or online safety
- Domestic or sexual violence awareness
- Healthy relationships education
- Statutory Science curriculum content
- Any other elements required under the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) minimum requirements

Requests for withdrawal must be submitted formally in writing to the Principal, either:

- By letter addressed to the College for the attention of the Principal; or
- By email to [info@shc.omagh.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@shc.omagh.ni.sch.uk), clearly marked *For the Attention of the Principal*.

Verbal requests or informal communications will not constitute formal withdrawal.

Upon receipt of a written request, the College will:

1. Acknowledge the request in writing;
2. Confirm the specific sessions from which the pupil will be excused;
3. Maintain a written record of the request and response; and
4. Provide appropriate supervised alternative provision during the relevant sessions.

Parents will be informed in advance when specific sessions fall within the scope of withdrawal.

The College remains legally obliged to deliver statutory curriculum requirements. All statutory content is delivered in accordance with the ethos and teachings of the Catholic Church.

## **7. Programme of Study:**

Pupils undertake a coherent programme of study in RSE from Year 8 to Year 14 in the College. This is done largely through the College's Pastoral Care Programmes. Assemblies and retreats are used to promote positive messages in relation to these programmes. They highlight the uniqueness and precious nature of each individual and reinforce the respect that each person deserves. At each stage, the content is appropriate to the age group and teachers seek to achieve the balance between delivery of content and the development of a moral approach based on Catholic teaching.

### **Year 8**

In Year 8 the focus is on emotional development of the person, in the context of being created in God's image and likeness. The programme is delivered by the Religious Studies Department, Love for Life, LLW, and the PSNI. The Religious Studies Department builds on these resources and addresses the wonder of each life as a miracle of God's creation and the natural development of a young person through teenage years, when they will blossom into the young adult God wants them to be. Some initial guidance on dating, relationships and the promotion of a positive self-image is covered by the Love for Life Team who provide an interactive media-based session to support the content of the Year 8 Programme. This is further reinforced through the Year 8 Pastoral Programme. The PSNI explore issues of child sexual exploitation and the impact of social media on relationships.

### **Year 9**

The Year 9 RSE Programme concentrates on relationships with adults, peer groups and friends. The role of parents, resisting peer pressure and the development of good communication skills to resolve conflicts within family and friendship groups feature in the Pastoral Programme. In the Year 9 pastoral lessons, whilst considering the characteristics of a good friend, students learn to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses as well as the importance of having respect for themselves and others. Year 9 students learn how to identify healthy relationships. The RE Programme also explores moral issues in the context of developing conscience and dealing with bad choices. In Science students focus on identification of male and female body parts, acquisition of appropriate language, puberty and menstruation, pregnancy, and the life of the embryo. Opportunities are provided for boys and girls to discuss changes at puberty in single sex groups (RSE co-ordinator). Students receive a presentation from NEXUS on Staying Safe Online, addressing the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Gender identity is explored through Learning for Life and Work. (Youth Action)

### Year 10

In Year 10, students are encouraged to establish and sustain healthy friendships and relationships based on mutual respect. The focus is on the promotion of positive self-image. They explore: Self Concept and Emotions; Personal Safety including Internet Safety; Morals and Values; Managing Influences and Making Decisions; the reality of STIs, unwanted pregnancy, risks associated with contraception and FGM. Love for Life support the delivery of this content. Students develop skills for making responsible choices, coping with peer pressure, influences including the media, social interaction, and abstinence, all as positive options and achievable realities. Within RSE, students learn about abortion and the Law on Abortion within Northern Ireland. They receive factual information on signposting agencies within Northern Ireland as well as the Catholic Church's teachings around abortion. Students also receive information on Healthy Relationships; setting boundaries and finding their voice. The Pastoral Programme concentrates on the promotion of assertiveness skills, risk assessment concepts and safety techniques, encouraging students to take responsibility for the safety of themselves and others. Students are made aware of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, ways of saying 'no', how to ask for help and how to cope in an emergency. This is supported by the RE Programme through the study of moral teachings and values relating to life and purpose.

### Year 11

In Year 11, the focus is on the promotion of positive self-image and the development of skills to deal with relationships. The Pastoral Programme looks at Self-Awareness in relation to the uniqueness of the individual; at Healthy Living (in collaboration with the PE Department) promoting greater understanding of personal hygiene; identifying and exploring the risks and implications associated with alcohol, drug taking and peer pressure. Opportunities are provided for boys and girls, in gender groups, to discuss perceived sexual pressures and to gain reassurance in relation to perceived expectations (Planned for 2025-2026). They explore the issues of attraction, hormones, guarding the mind and heart and taking responsibility for one's decisions. The Love for Life Team provides an interactive media-based session to support the content of the Year 11 Programme, focusing on virginity, sex, and emotional distress. A series of workshops explore LGBTQI+ issues, social media, and sexual maturation. (2025-2026). Year 11s who study OCN RE will look at the effects of addiction and the impact on self and on society.

### Year 12

In Year 12, a unit on Relationships and Conflict Resolution endeavours to equip students with the skills of conflict resolution when dealing with various types of relationships. Core messages are underpinned by visiting speakers, particularly in relation to identifying and dealing with matters of domestic and sexual violence and abuse and its impact. Through the Religious Studies and Science Programmes, students are given the opportunity to examine issues surrounding relationships in terms of human sexuality and the sanctity of life. The core areas examined are: The Sacredness of Human Life from conception; Marriage; Abortion; Euthanasia; Contraception; Bioethics; Responsible Parenthood. A variety of relationships are explored, including LGBTQI+, in a non-judgemental and supportive manner. This brings the programme material from Key Stage 3 and 4 together and deals with it in the context of making good life choices and decisions.

### Post 16

At Post 16, the focus is on the development of friendships and mature sexual relationships and the skills essential to cope with these. They explore types of love, dating, rites of passage, pornography, addiction and breaking habits and patterns. Talks on chastity, STIs, the impact of alcohol and drugs on relationships and emotional health, social media, and its effect on relationships, as well as matters of domestic and sexual violence and abuse and its impact, are delivered in the Enrichment Programme. The College continues to highlight the importance of Catholic values and morality in these areas, and to help the students come to a deeper understanding of how and why the Church promotes the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until its natural end. The Love for Life Team look at committed versus casual relationships, sex and the law and other risk-taking behaviour. This is complemented by the NEXUS/PSNI who deliver a presentation on the theme of sexual exploitation.

### **8. Confidentiality:**

Any student approaching a member of staff for individual advice on sexual matters is encouraged to seek advice from his/her parents or from qualified professionals. Where any approach leads a member of staff to believe that a child is contemplating a course of behaviour likely to place him/her in moral or physical danger or in breach of the law, the member of staff has a duty to inform the pupil of the risks involved and inform the designated Child Protection teacher who, where appropriate, will involve parents and support services. No undertakings of confidentiality are given to pupils in this area.

### **9. Safeguarding and Child Protection:**

Where a student discloses that they may be involved in or exposed to harmful or illegal sexualised behaviour, the matter will be addressed in accordance with the College's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

**10. Related School Policies:**

The Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy is set within the broader context of Pastoral Care and as such should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Drugs Education Policy
- Relational Learning Policy
- Addressing Bullying Policy
- Medical Needs Policy

**11. Documents Consulted:**

- Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance Document for Post Primary Schools: NI 2021 Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
- RSE Hub: <https://ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>
- Guidance on Amendments to the RSE Curriculum Content: DE Circular 2024/1; January 2024

**12. Review:**

The RSE policy is reviewed annually by the RSE Co-ordinator, and Principal, and amended as considered necessary. Where necessary, the reviewed policy is presented at a Governor meeting and subsequently a staff meeting to allow adjustments to be discussed.

### Period Dignity (Appendix 1)

What is period dignity?

“Period dignity refers to the accessibility and availability of essential care needed to support a period, in conjunction with the removal/breaking of stigma and taboo around periods. Education is a key factor in breaking the stigma surrounding periods and promoting respect, understanding and open discussions about what people may experience when menstruating.” (CCEA 2021)

At Sacred Heart College we understand that access to free products can:

- Promote equality.
- Help keep young people in school.
- Increase concentration in class through not having to worry about lack of period products or leaking.
- Increase confidence to participate in sports or other extracurricular activities.
- Support good health.
- Prevent menstruating young people from having to make decisions to either wear the wrong product, substitute a poor-quality product or toilet roll, or wear a product for longer than is safe.

As a result of this we aim to:

- Ensure that students understand the term ‘period dignity’.
- Complement free period product provision by promoting the availability of free period products.
- Ensure that students understand the impact of periods on the emotional, mental, social, and educational well-being of young people.
- Reduce stigma in relation to periods by providing both male and female students with relevant age-appropriate information on periods.
- Enable students to understand how to deal with period issues, hygiene, and disposal of period products.
- Have a positive impact on students’ confidence, well-being, attendance, and attainment.

The Period Dignity Champions along with the Student Health & Wellbeing Team will continue to monitor, evaluate, and review this provision in collaboration with the Pastoral Vice-Principal and Health Promotion Officer (Period Dignity Key Contacts).