A Whole-School Approach to Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education

Why include Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education in your school?

Everyone has the right to health, education and information. These rights can only be enjoyed if all young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education. Our programs improve young people's knowledge, skills and confidence so they can make decisions that keep themselves and others safe and healthy.

Ideally, age appropriate Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education programs start in Kindergarten and continue through to Year 12. In the younger years, the focus is on learning information and skills that keep young children safe from harm, embedding strong foundations of treating others with respect, and developing help-seeking behaviours. As children progress through their school years, the focus shifts to understanding changing bodies and how they function, developing skills to support respectful relationships and building the confidence to make health-promoting decisions relating to intimate relationships. There are many benefits to delivering Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education in schools. Younger students develop personal safety skills which can prevent abuse and keep them safe from harm[1]. For older students, research has consistently shown that effective programs delay first sex, increase the use of condoms and contraception, and improve knowledge around sexually transmissible infections[2]. Programs also have the potential to improve social outcomes, including building healthier relationships, improving gender equity and reducing intimate-partner violence[3].

Consent education has recently been added to the Australian Curriculum, and will be a requirement for schools in Western Australia from 2024.

A whole-school approach to Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education can support schools to ensure this vital element of the curriculumis delivered.

1 Goldfarb & Lieberman (2020). Three decades of research: The case for comprehensive sex education
2 UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach
3 UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach

Parents' support for school-based Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education

More than 90% of WA parents strongly believe that age-appropriate Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a right for all children and young people[4]. The overwhelming majority support the delivery of comprehensive RSE in schools across all year levels, and this support also extends across school sectors. Parents also want to know what their children are learning so they can reinforce important messages at home.

4 Hendriks, J., Glasgow-Collins, R., Saltis, H., Marson, K., Walsh, J., Lawton, T., & Burns, S. (2022). Parents and their support for school-based relationships and sexuality education: Western Australia snapshot report. Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health, Curtin University, Australia.

Who is SHQ?

Sexual Health Quarters (SHQ) is an independent, non-profit organisation providing specialised services to support relationships and sexual wellbeing. Formerly known as Family Planning WA, SHQ provides clinical services, tailored counselling, medical education, professional development and education sessions for young people to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to make informed choices.

The SHQ education team provide best-practice, evidence-informed Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education for young people in school and alternative education settings which aligns with the WA curriculum.

These include public, private, independent and faith-based schools from Kindergarten to Year 12. Our team are uniquely placed to deliver high quality education sessions, being part of a wider multidisciplinary team that includes clinicians, medical educators, counsellors and disability specialists. This ensures we deliver holistic, current and specialised education.

The educators on our team are highly trained and experienced with a range of backgrounds, including teaching, nursing, psychology, youth work, health promotion and sexology.

I love how you teach us with games – Yr 5 student

I learned that you can say no to things that make you feel uncomfortable – Year 6 student

Now I know that there are lots of different ways to ask for consent – Yr 9 student

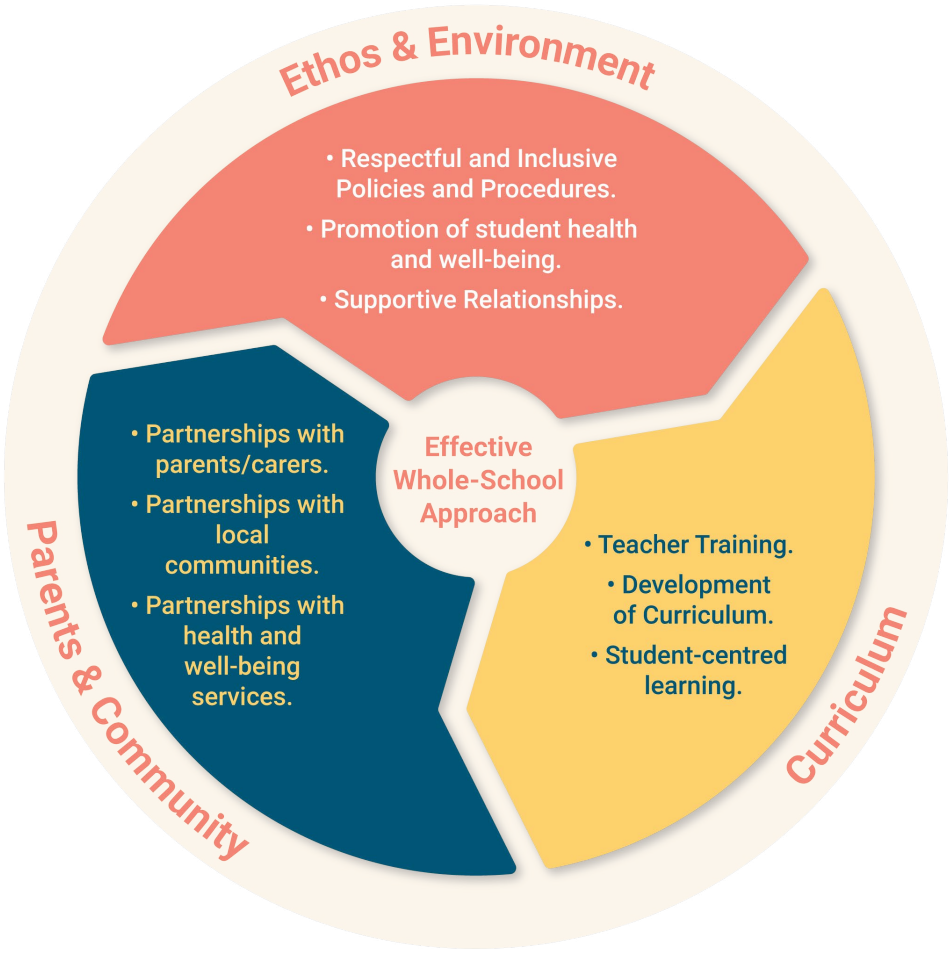
I learned how to be respectful and know the signs of disrespectful relationships – Yr 10 student

What is a whole-school approach?

A whole-school approach is dependent on schools, parents and communities working together to plan, implement, support and sustain Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education strategies and practices within the school community.

The Health Promoting Schools Framework[5] developed by the World Health Organisation in 1986, encourages a whole-school approach to addressing health which can include Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education.

This framework consists of three areas:



Ethos and Environment

The school's physical environment, its ethos and values, as well as the policies and structures create an environment conducive to living, learning, and working.

Curriculum

Age-and stage - appropriate curriculum is developed and delivered in a student-centred environment by highly skilled and confident staff.

Parents and Community

Internal partnerships with parents, staff and students, and external partnerships with other schools, health workers, government and non-government organisations are developed and maintained.

Note: the term 'parent' also refers to caregivers and/or guardians.

5 World Health Organisation (1986). Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: First International Conference on Health Promotion. Geneva

By addressing each component of the model when planning health education or responding to a health concern within the school, school communities can take a coordinated whole-school approach to health. This addresses the multiple facets influencing the health and wellbeing of members of the school community.

A comprehensive, whole-school approach is widely acknowledged as best-practice in working holistically to promote student health and well-being. Through the inter-relationship of these three areas, classroom-based Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education is consolidated by a supportive school environment and effective links to family and the community.

A whole-school approach extends the learning environment from what is taught inside the classroom to how students' wellbeing is supported outside the classroom. This approach acknowledges the overarching political, social, economic and demographic contexts within which schools operate.

Social epidemiologists have stressed the importance of addressing health issues at the population level with multi-level strategies[6].

It is important to address the individual aspects of a healthy lifestyle and the broader aspects of health through the school curriculum and the whole school environment, as well as ensuring that links to the wider community are developed. By adopting this approach, schools can increase engagement with the school community and are more likely to secure sustainable improvements.

The health of students affects their ability and willingness to learn and participate in school life. Therefore, healthy students are more likely to engage and succeed at school. Progressive government policy has increasingly recognised the interconnectedness between health, education and social issues, as well as the association between good health and wellbeing and positive educational outcomes for students[7].

6 Lynch, J (2000). Social epidemiology: Some observations about the past, present and future. Australasian Epidemiologist: 73: 7-15
7 Healy, K. (2004) Linking Children's Health and Education. Progress and Challenges in London. London: Kings Fund

Testimonials

Meg Elsbury, Deputy Principal, Samson Primary School

> “Having SHQ work with our students was fantastic. The way the presenters delivered the program and engaged with our students was outstanding. Their knowledge of the content and the ability to share it so openly with such a calm yet dynamic approach meant that all our students were engaged and on task in all sessions. Students commented about how they were able to share their concerns, thoughts and ideas with complete anonymity and trust so that difficult issues were addressed. I also loved the way that the team adapted the program and used a flexible delivery model ensuring that students’ needs and concerns were addressed. The excellent communication between SHQ and the school ensured that all stakeholders knew exactly what was happening and ensured the very smooth running of the program.
>
> I can’t thank the SHQ team enough. We will certainly be continuing with this program in the coming years.”

Sophie Carroll, Director of Student Wellbeing, Wesley College

> “SHQ are the leaders in Respectful Relationships, embodying a harmonious blend of expert knowledge, professionalism, and collaboration in all their professional services. They have helped support the College in developing an inclusive approach to Relationships and Sexuality Education, which holds a crucial responsibility in fostering positive, safe relationships and dismantling stigma and detrimental stereotypes.
>
> The scope and sequenced program for Year 5-Year 12 students has enabled our students and staff to develop critical thinking skills and make informed and ethical decisions about their bodies, relationships and wellbeing. Delivered through a series of interactive workshops, teacher-led activities and aligned parent resources, holistic engagement by all key parties has been at the core of our work. We have been able to make tailored adjustments to fit student’s needs, and with SHQ’s flexibility, experience and expertise, create a relevant and informative program for our students. With exceptional feedback from students, staff and parents we are excited to continue our partnership with SHQ.”

Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education – How does it work?

Students

Students participate in two or more interactive sessions each year, facilitated by SHQ educators. These sessions are interactive and engaging, and provide students with the opportunity to learn important information, explore their values, and practise vital skills that promote health and well-being.

They may also participate in brief discussions about the topic with school teachers before and after SHQ sessions.

Teachers

Teachers are provided with a suite of discussion prompts and brief activities, designed to consolidate understanding following SHQ sessions.

Teachers will be offered tailored professional development workshops that build knowledge, skills and confidence to speak to young people about Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality.

Families

Parents and carers will be provided with information about the topics covered, and suggested resources to help them reinforce key concepts at home.

They will have the opportunity to attend a workshop with SHQ educators that will build their knowledge, skills and confidence to speak to their children about Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality. They will also receive resources which include additional information and supports.

Suggested Course Structure

We suggest the following age-appropriate program for students. This is a flexible approach which can be co-designed in consultation with school staff, parents and students to meet specific needs.

Education sessions are tailored to the needs of the students and consist of evidence-informed health messages, information, interactive activities and group discussions.

Contact

If you would like to know more about how a whole-school approach to Respectful Relationships, Consent and Sexuality Education could be implemented at your school, please contact:

Felicia O'Keeffe
Educator
08 6164 7971
felicia.okeeffe@shq.org.au

Mick Jackson-Pierce
Manager, Education and Development
08 6375 7700
mick.pierce@shq.org.au

Kindergarten

- Body parts (public and private)
- Seeking help

Year 1 & 2

- Keeping safe – body signals
- Families
- Celebrating our differences

Year 3 & 4

- Knowing my boundaries
- Secrets and surprises
- Effective communication

Year 5 & 6

- Puberty changes
- Reproductive systems
- Respectful friendships
- What is consent?

Year 7 & 8

- Gender roles
- Ethical relationships
- Bodies and reproduction
- LGBTI+ Diversity

Year 9 & 10

- How to communicate consent
- Safer sex
- Contraception
- Pornography and sexting

Year 11 & 12

- Respectful relationships
- Sexual rights and boundaries
- Looking after your sexual health
- Healthy relationships for life

This page has intentionally been left blank