

Establishing a partnership

Schools and community organisations have been working together on respectful relationships education for many years, in a range of capacities. Initially led by the community sector within a small number of schools, local partnerships increased as more robust programs were developed. Respectful relationships is now a core component of the Victorian curriculum and the Department of Education and Training (DET) is undertaking a staged implementation of a whole school approach to this work, of which community partnerships are a key element.

There is more government support for respectful relationships education than ever before and this has created new opportunities for schools and the community sector to work together. This tip sheet will guide you through the key considerations and steps to follow when forming partnerships with Victorian schools.

STEP 1

Familiarise yourself with the evidence base and key policy documentation

There are some important reports outlining the evidence for effective respectful relationships education and the primary prevention of violence against women.

Have you read:

- ✓ [Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and respectful relationships education in Victorian Secondary Schools](#) (DET 2009)
- ✓ [Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence paper](#) (Our Watch 2015)
- ✓ [Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children](#) (Our Watch, VicHealth, ANROWS 2015)
- ✓ [Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The Beginnings of Change Final Evaluation Report](#) (Our Watch 2016)

DVRCV offers primary prevention and respectful relationships [training](#) that can help you get across the evidence base.

Familiarise yourself with the Department of Education and Training's [partnerships policy](#), which schools are required to adhere to.

It's important that you're familiar with the [PROTECT Child Safe Standards](#) – the minimum standards Victorian schools and early childhood services must adhere to when they identify or witness or any form of abuse. You can also find useful information on [supporting schools to respond to disclosures](#) on our website.

There are some key documents which can help you get to know a particular school. Familiarise yourself with the school's charter, strategic plan and annual implementation plan. These set out the school's vision, goals and priorities and your partnership is more likely to be successful if you can demonstrate that you understand the school and the education sector more broadly.

STEP 2 Contact the Department of Education and Training's Respectful Relationships team in your area

There is a Respectful Relationships **Project Lead** and **Liaison Officer** in each of the Department of Education and Training's 17 areas.

They work closely with the Respectful Relationships initiative's leading and partner schools and can also give you an idea of what the other schools in their area are doing, which schools need support and what kind of support they need. They should be your first point of contact. You can find contact information for each local DET office at education.vic.gov.au.

STEP 3 Now you're ready to contact the school

Reach out to the **Principal, Assistant Principal** or **Student Wellbeing Coordinator** and meet with them in person. They are the most important people for you to connect with in order to establish a lasting partnership.

If you have been contacted by another staff member, ask if a member of the leadership team can attend your initial meetings, to ensure there is commitment to respectful relationships and support for your partnership with the school.

STEP 4 Get to know the school's culture and staff

If the principal is supportive of a partnership, arranging a day to visit and spend some time in the staffroom can be a great way to meet a range of staff and get a feel for the workplace culture within the school.

STEP 5 Formalise the partnership

Establish an agreement with the school about the nature of your partnership, including the possibilities, boundaries and limitations. It is important to be clear about your role, involvement and expertise early on. VicHealth's [Partnerships Analysis Tool](#) can help provide a focus for your discussions with the school.

Each school participating in the Respectful Relationships initiative as a leading or partner school should have an implementation team. Consider joining or supporting this team as a 'critical friend'.

Ensure you have satisfied the requirements of the Department of Education and Training's Partnerships Policy and consider establishing a **memorandum of understanding** or other formal agreement with the school about your work together.