

A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Respectful relationships education (RRE) is the comprehensive approach to the primary prevention of violence against women in schools. Schools are both education institutions and workplaces that can generate universal change to address the drivers of violence against women.

The extensive work of RRE practitioners in Victoria, Australia, and internationally has provided a sound evidence base for working effectively to prevent violence against women in schools. **The evidence reveals that a whole school approach is the most important component in RRE** (Department of Education and Training, 2014).

A whole school approach is about embedding systemic change across the entire school through policy, practice, procedures, staffing, environment, leadership and culture, and within the classroom.

WHAT DOES A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH MEAN FOR ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING SCHOOLS?

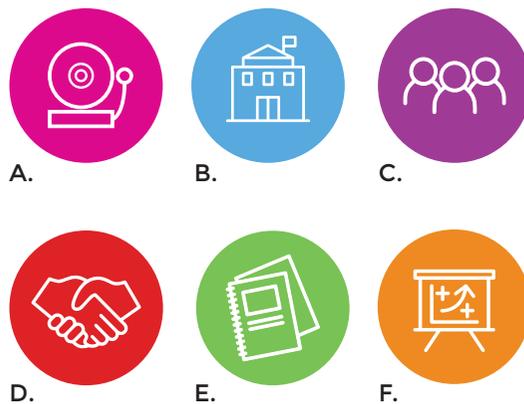
Many schools do not have the time and resources to develop an effective whole school approach without support. Local and community organisations – including family violence and sexual assault services, local government and community and women’s health services – already have expertise in preventing violence against women in schools and responding to disclosures from both victims and perpetrators. These organisations are well placed to partner with schools to support them to plan, develop, implement and evaluate a whole school approach to RRE, tailored to the needs of the school and their local community.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

Partners in Prevention recommends an implementation team be established by each school to lead the work and provide a planned, coordinated approach to RRE. This team should include school leadership (ideally the Principal or Assistant Principal), teaching and wellbeing staff as well as community sector representatives with both prevention and response expertise.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information and resources to support a whole school approach, visit Partners in Prevention: www.partnersinprevention.org.au



REFERENCES:

Department of Education and Training *Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian secondary schools*, Victoria, 2009.
 Department of Education and Training, *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out Against Gender Based Violence*, Victoria, 2014.





SCHOOL CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Outcome: School structures, policies, procedures and ethos enable respectful relationships and gender equality.

As part of a gender audit, apply a gender lens to each area of the school community. For example, when considering physical activity (one of many areas to address), look at how the school culture and environment sets expectations for girls and boys through sport. Do uniforms affect student participation in sport? Is a girls' team winning a final given the same value as a boys' team winning? If take up of each sport is divided by gender, does the school have a strategy to address this? Do boys and girls use the physical sporting resources (eg. footy oval, basketball court) equally? If not, do you know what the barriers to equal use are?



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Outcome: Schools are supported to implement long-term, holistic strategies to build and promote respectful relationships.

Involve the whole school community, including parents and the wider community to inform and drive the school's approach to RRE and reinforce prevention messaging. For example, community agencies can:

1. Act as a "critical expert friend" to supports schools as they undertake a gender audit.
2. Engage parents in ideas of how to talk to their children about gender, sexuality and respect.
3. Provide professional learning on preventing and responding to violence against women to groups working as part of the wider school community, such as after school care providers, breakfast clubs, holiday and school camp programs, local sporting groups and libraries.



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT

Outcome: Principal team drives school-wide commitment to respectful relationships. Students take leadership and social action to promote respectful relationships.

The leadership team can influence cultural change by modelling gender equitable interactions with staff and students and by creating an 'authorising environment' for staff and student-led activity. For example, school leaders can initiate discussions about equality and respect at staff meetings and lead the establishment of an implementation team to drive change. As a school is also a workplace, organisational activity should address the needs of and be targeted at both staff and students. For instance, a school should aim to address any gender imbalance in its recruitment of senior positions and have policies to support staff experiencing violence.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING STRATEGY

Outcome: All staff are engaged in a whole school approach to respectful relationships. Selected staff are equipped to deliver RRE and respond to violence and disclosures effectively.

Providing professional learning to all staff (including school leadership, all teachers and support staff) on how to support and/or lead violence prevention activities across the entire school has two main benefits. It will allow staff to provide students with consistent and reinforced messaging and help staff to consider how they can respond to the drivers of violence against women in their own role. It will also provide staff with the knowledge and expertise to respond to disclosures. Ensuring staff have access to ongoing professional learning and support from expert agencies will also ensure that their RRE activity is most effective.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Outcome: Students have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to engage in respectful relationships.

When working with teachers, it's important to convey that every classroom provides an opportunity to address the drivers of violence against women. For example, a media class can look at how gender is depicted in advertising, an English teacher can use a literature text to examine gender constructions, or a maths class could look at the gender pay gap to teach percentages. Schools may also review their student behaviour practices to determine whether they discipline their male and female students differently. Teachers also have the opportunity to model gender equality and respect through interaction with each other, and with their students.



SUPPORT FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Outcome: Schools are equipped to provide victims and perpetrators of violence with appropriate responses and supports.

Delivering RRE will often prompt disclosures both from students and staff. These disclosures may be about their personal experience of violence, perpetration of violence or their family situation. Students may disclose to any staff member that they trust and schools have a duty of care to respond appropriately. To do this, schools need to ensure all staff are trained and confident in talking to students, families, and other staff about violence and know the referral pathways for both victims and perpetrators. Providing additional, specialised training to student wellbeing or leadership staff and developing partnerships with family violence and sexual assault services can help provide further in-school support to students and staff who disclose.