

# TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## ENSURING CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS IN ABORIGINAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

### Background

Sex and topics surrounding sex are very personal and private topics for individuals, no matter what the context. In Aboriginal communities this is overlaid by strict cultural laws centred around gender (men's and women's business) and kinship that dictate how people are allowed to relate and interact with each other. Many of these kinship rules become relevant at the onset of puberty.

All of these factors can make teaching RSE seem difficult in an Aboriginal context. Here we provide some basic guidelines for delivering RSE to Aboriginal young people. Following these will ensure elders' involvement and assist in building strong, lasting relationships with community members. Taking steps to engage with the community will protect against any potential backlash, and you can feel confident in your delivery. You'll also find that RSE can be enjoyable.

**Please note:** These guidelines are in addition to following your local school's policy on seeking parental consent. Throughout each step described in these guidelines we encourage you to seek advice from your local Aboriginal staff. When speaking to the community, consider whether or not you need someone to assist you in interpreting.

### Guidelines

- 1 Assume that any talking around RSE will be gender separate until you are told otherwise by elders from your community.** This means you need to be working with a staff member of the opposite gender through each step of setting up and facilitating RSE. If this is not possible with school staff, there may be a youth worker or health service staff member who can assist you.
- 2 All RSE requires Aboriginal engagement and involvement.** This does not end at consultation; Aboriginal people should be involved in every step and aspect of your RSE. Prior to delivering RSE, elders from the local community must be consulted with. How this is conducted will depend on the local community. Initial conversations usually just seek to gain initial support for the delivery of RSE. Further consultation needs to be conducted to discuss any concerns and go through the content of the sessions. Your initial conversation should include asking elders if they wish to see the content, or if they wish to nominate someone else to assist in reviewing the content. Sometimes elders will entrust this task to a local Aboriginal health staff member or the Aboriginal community education officers (ACEO) at the school; alternatively, all the elder women may want to sit down together to go over the content. Educators need to be mindful of how they will revise content and learning activities in response to community concerns throughout the consultation process, keeping in mind that this process is ongoing throughout the program of lessons.

Some ways in which consultation could be conducted are:

- a) visiting elders' homes to meet one-on-one or in small groups to discuss your intentions
- b) having a community meeting at the school
- c) having a community meeting at a location in the community that elders frequent
- d) having a yarn out on country, at gender-specific sites.

During your consultation talks, some of the questions you may need to ask are:

- a) Is there anyone else who needs to be involved in these conversations?
- b) Who should be involved in checking what's in my education sessions?
- c) Who should assist me with delivering the education?
- d) What sessions need to be delivered gender-separate?
- e) If you have some flexibility, you may also wish to discuss the best place to deliver RSE. Some communities may wish to conduct the sessions at gender-specific sites.
- f) Is it okay for men/women to learn about (insert topic)?

- 3 **Engage at least one local Aboriginal person in the delivery of your sessions.** Usually this will be the local Aboriginal school staff but it could also be elders or parents. Often RSE involves discussions and small group work. Each local person should be assigned two to four students to assist during the lesson. You can encourage their involvement by asking them questions during the session. Please note this should only be done when your volunteers have agreed to being asked questions.

Some questions may include:

- a) What's the local language word for a particular term, such as rash, or discharge?
- b) How did this work when people your age were younger?
- c) How was this spoken about in the old days/traditional days?
- d) What do you think community elders or other community members would think about this?
- e) Why do you think it's important for kids to know about this?

- 4 **Check back in with the community as your education sessions progress.** It's a good idea to let the people you consulted with know the progress of your education sessions. In larger centres this may be done through information sent home or a school newsletter. In more remote areas, this may be done via formal or informal meetings with key community leaders and/or parents.

## QUICK TIPS TO HELP YOU FEEL MORE CONFIDENT

Teaching RSE for the first time can seem overwhelming but there some things you can do to make yourself feel much more comfortable

- 1 Ensure you have read through lesson plans thoroughly.
- 2 Ensure you have read through the teacher information.
- 3 Where relevant, have the additional teaching information on hand.
- 4 Have a display folder with a range of fact sheets and information covering the topics you are covering, as well as other relevant questions you may be asked (below is a list of the types of information you may want to include in the folder). You can refer to the information in the folder throughout the lesson as needed.
- 5 Have the number for the local sexual health helpline or health helpline available. If there isn't one in your area, arrange with the local clinic or public health team that you can call them during your lesson and ask a question if needed. This models help-seeking behaviour.
- 6 Have a script prepared for responding to questions to which you don't know the answer, or you aren't sure how to respond. Try something like: "That's a really interesting question. I'm actually not sure how to answer it right now but I will get the correct information for you and provide it to you next week/tomorrow/next lesson".
- 7 Have a few different reliable websites readily available so you can model how to find the answer online from reliable sources.
- 8 Ensure you have set up your group agreement appropriately and include your limits to confidentiality.
- 9 Set up a question box as a safer way for students to ask questions.  
If you want a heads-up, here are some examples of questions you might get asked from [Sexplain](#).

Remember:

- You do not need to be an expert on sexual health, nor do you need to be a clinician to run sexual health education. In fact, there is a lot of power in NOT being able to answer all your students' questions; ultimately, we want to encourage students to seek help, seek reliable information AND, where needed, seek clinical advice (see "Responding Appropriately to Tricky Questions" for further information).
- Your role is to provide a space for youth to feel safe and explore some of the basic information they need to keep themselves healthy. You are not a nurse or doctor and even if you were, a classroom is not the environment to give clinical consults or information.