

# Respectful relationships education

A blueprint for preventing gender-based  
violence through education systems



**Our  
Watch**

Preventing violence  
against women

## Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land, knowledge and language for more than 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is a whole-of-community issue. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, an intersection exists between racism, sexism, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to experience violence at significantly higher rates than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Aboriginal people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.



## About Our Watch

Our Watch is Australia's leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. We work to embed gender equality and prevent violence where people in Australia live, learn, work and socialise. Our Watch is an independent not-for-profit organisation. The Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments are members of Our Watch.

Our vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence. We aim to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes, structures, systems, institutions, as well as legislative and policy frameworks that drive violence against women. Guided by our ground-breaking frameworks, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (2nd ed. 2021), *Changing the picture* (2018) and *Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities* (2022), we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women. We work with governments, practitioners and the community, at all levels of Australian society, to address these drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise.

Developing the evidence base for respectful relationships education (RRE) is a key focus area for Our Watch. Our Watch has led pilots in secondary schools (Victoria) and primary schools (Victoria and Queensland), and worked alongside policy makers, educators, students, school leadership and experts in designing, implementing and evaluating RRE.

## **A coordinated approach to prevention of gender-based violence**

*Change the story*, Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, identifies that coordinated efforts are necessary for an effective national approach to reduce the prevalence of violence in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Coordination of prevention efforts across different systems, institutions and contexts is also identified as essential in Our Watch's *Evidence paper: Respectful relationships education in schools*.<sup>2</sup> To work towards a vision where children and young people experience evidenced-based respectful relationships education (RRE) as core business in schools, we must work in collaboration, led and informed by the evidence, as well as leverage off the expertise, networks and work happening across jurisdictions, government and school sectors.

## **Suggested citation:**

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# Who is the respectful relationships education (RRE) blueprint for?

The RRE blueprint provides guidance to strategic policy and decision makers, the RRE workforce and cross-sector stakeholders responsible for schools at all levels of government and across school sectors. The blueprint outlines how to design, implement, coordinate and monitor a system level approach to evidence-based RRE.

The RRE blueprint highlights the work required at the **education system level**, to build the necessary foundations to enable school level implementation. The blueprint:

- builds on the *Our Watch respectful relationships education brief for policy makers* by providing step-by-step guidance on how to build the foundations to embed RRE into the education system
- draws on the national and international literature to summarise all the elements of a holistic, best-practice approach to RRE
- outlines each of the steps required by government and non-government school sectors to design, implement and coordinate RRE
- acknowledges the important role that all 3 education sectors (government, independent and Catholic) play in the primary prevention of gender-based violence.

The focus of this resource is on the prevention of gender-based violence at the **system and institutional level**, which includes the federal, state and territory governments, and government and non-government school sectors.

To prevent gender-based violence, every child in Australia must have access to evidence-based approaches to RRE, which include support for young people to build the knowledge and skills required to reject aggressive behaviour and discrimination, and challenge gender stereotypes. Governments can achieve this by developing a long-term vision and approach for RRE and securing multi-year funding commitments to support an evidence-based whole-of-school approach to RRE.

# How to use the respectful relationships education blueprint

The RRE blueprint has been developed to provide advice and step-by-step guidance on the phases and actions required to successfully embed an evidence-based approach to RRE across education systems and school sectors.

The content has been separated into 3 sections:

## SECTION A

**Addressing gender-based violence by stopping it before it starts**

## SECTION B

**What is respectful relationships education?**

## SECTION C

**Embedding respectful relationships education in education systems and sectors**

Section A and B of the blueprint provide background information and research on the evidence base supporting RRE and why it is an essential part of the primary prevention ecosystem.

Section C of the blueprint provides an outline of the phases required to embed RRE in education systems and sectors, as well as practical actions to support each phase of implementation.

Due to the intricate nature of the government and non-government school sectors in Australia and the different levels of understanding and support for RRE across the country, developing a resource that meets the needs of all school sectors and jurisdictions is complex. The RRE blueprint recognises this complexity and uses the language of 'government and non-government school sectors' to refer to the

work required to embed RRE into the function and structure of how schools operate as educational institutes.

Each education sector has a comprehensive understanding of the way in which their sector operates and functions. Therefore, use of this document will vary depending on the sector, stages of readiness and the levers available to ensure RRE is embedded in schools within each sector.

**The RRE blueprint provides a bird's-eye overview of the work required to embed RRE in an evidence-based way, and allows jurisdictions and school sectors to draw on the information most relevant to them and their stage of system implementation.**

# Addressing gender-based violence by stopping it before it starts

## Primary prevention: Stopping violence before it starts

Gendered violence is recognised as a serious and widespread problem in Australia, with enormous individual and community impacts and social costs. Overwhelmingly, domestic, family and sexual violence is gendered, with women and children most commonly the victims, and men most commonly perpetrators of violence. While most men in Australia do not use violence,<sup>3</sup> we know that it is men who perpetrate the majority of violence against people of all genders. And while people of all genders can be victims of violence, there are differences in how violence is experienced, based on gender.

### Of the people who have experienced violence since the age of 15 years<sup>4</sup>:



Preventing gender-based violence is about changing the society and culture in which individuals develop their attitudes towards violence. It is not solely the work of schools to address this societal issue. However, due to their reach and engagement with young people, schools, education systems and education institutes in particular have a significant role to play.

While many different strategies are needed to contribute to this population-wide approach, respectful relationships education (RRE) is a key example of successful primary prevention work to prevent gender-based violence in education settings. RRE focuses on gender equality because evidence tells us that achieving this will ultimately lead to lower rates of violence across Australia.<sup>5</sup>

International and Australian research clearly demonstrates that violence and discrimination against and unfair treatment of women is driven by gender inequality.<sup>6</sup> In particular there are 4 expressions of gender inequality that increase the likelihood of violence against women occurring. These 'gendered drivers of violence' are outlined on the next page, along with examples of what they may look like in a school setting, together with the essential actions needed to address them.

» For further examples of what the drivers of violence and essential actions look like for schools, please see the [Our Watch Respectful relationship education toolkit](#).



The following table outlines the gendered drivers of violence and what they might look like in schools, as well as examples of essential actions that could be taken to address the gendered drivers of violence.

<b>Gendered drivers of violence</b> 	<b>Essential actions needed to prevent gendered violence</b>
<p><b>Driver 1: Condoning of violence against women</b></p> <p>School-based messaging that focuses on changing girls' behaviour, such as the need for girls to dress 'modestly', and victim blaming attitudes such as 'she shouldn't have sent the nude if she didn't want it shared'.</p>	<p><b>Challenge the condoning of violence against women</b></p> <p>As part of a whole-of-school approach, the school challenges the condoning of violence through school gender equality and behavioural policies and practices that outline school expectations and recognise all forms of gender-based violence as harmful.</p>
<p><b>Driver 2: Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private spheres</b></p> <p>A preference for male leadership is created due to assumptions that male principals/teachers are 'stronger' or 'firmer' than other teachers. This can reinforce the idea that men make better disciplinarians and diminish the authority of women and gender diverse teachers.</p>	<p><b>Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships</b></p> <p>School policies are designed to achieve gender equality in leadership positions, including for example job share and/or part time arrangements for leadership positions. Student leaderships roles also promote and role model gender equality ensuring a wide range of views, ideas, identities, and experiences are reflected in school decision making processes.</p>
<p><b>Driver 3: Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity</b></p> <p>Gender stereotypes and norms are reinforced through gendered school uniform policies or subject choices limiting participation, achievement and the expression of gender identity. For example, the stereotype that boys are less likely to select creative subjects such as Art or Drama.</p>	<p><b>Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes</b></p> <p>The school promotes, recognises and celebrates diverse expressions of gender across all aspects of the school. For example, having non-gendered approaches to uniform and proactively planning how to make subject choices less gendered.</p>
<p><b>Driver 4: Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control</b></p> <p>Young men displaying sexist and misogynist behaviour towards women teachers and students as a means of gaining social power with other boys, and these acts not being adequately addressed by schools.</p>	<p><b>Support men and boys to develop healthy masculinities and positive, supportive male peer relationships</b></p> <p>Schools ensure that their vision and goals for RRE focus on gender equality and respect. As part of a whole of school approach ensuring that RRE teaching and learning materials include content and discussions on masculinities, and supports all young people to challenge and step outside of harmful and limiting gender stereotypes. Reinforcing this content outside the classroom is essential, ensuring equality in leadership roles, recognising and celebrating diverse identities in school awards and celebrations and role modelling, positive, equal and healthy relationships.</p>

Figure 1: School-based examples of the gendered drivers of violence and essential actions needed to prevent gendered violence.

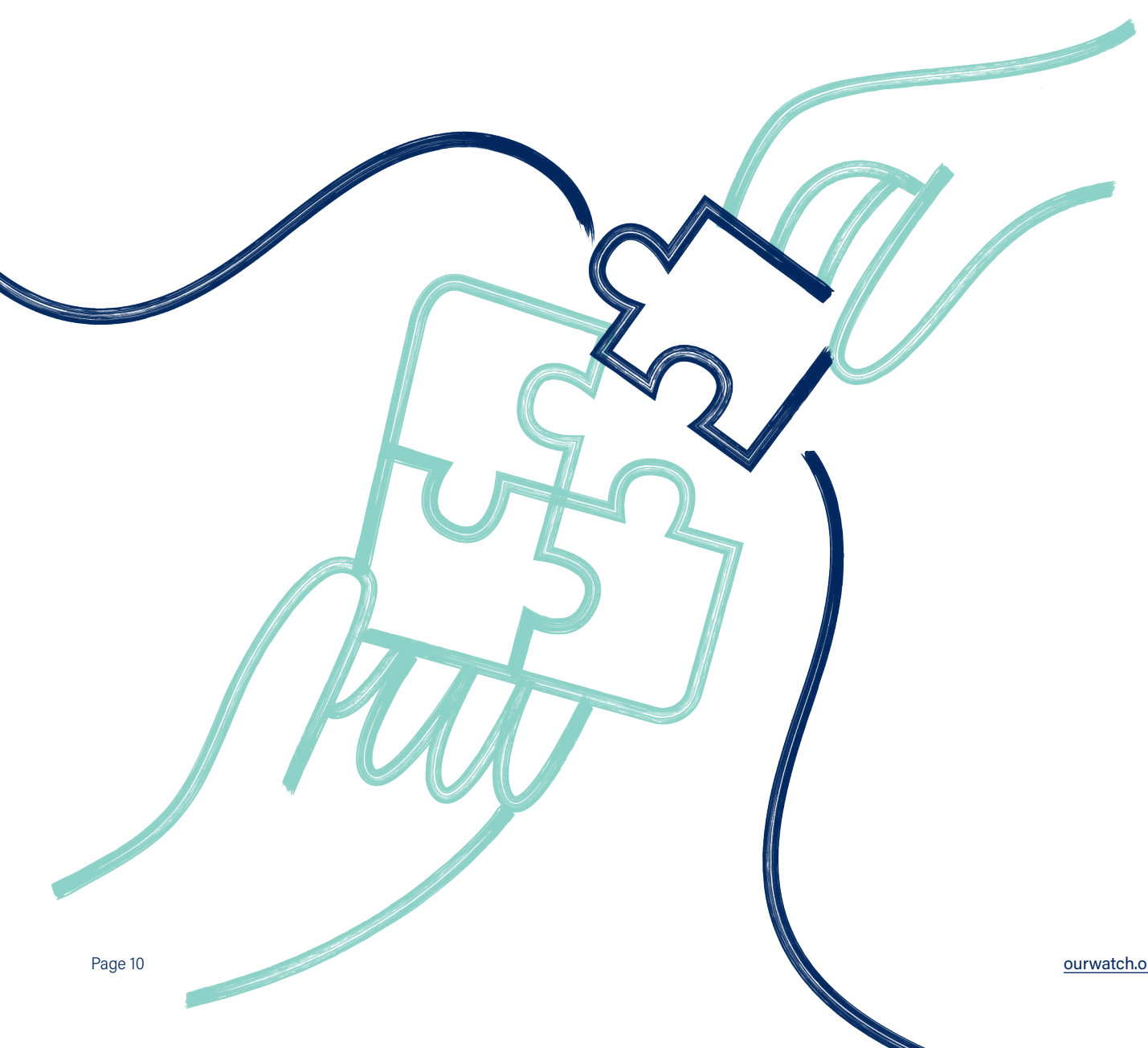
## **Gender-based violence is not experienced in the same way by everyone**

**While gender inequality needs to remain at the centre of efforts to prevent gender-based violence, it must be addressed alongside other forms of discrimination and disadvantage such as racism, ableism and homophobia.**

A comprehensive approach involves challenging not only gender inequality, but other forms of structural inequalities, negative stereotypes and discrimination, including those based on ability, age, class and socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and refugee status.

For example, a First Nations student who identifies as a woman, may experience both sexism and racism, which significantly impacts the nature and severity of the discrimination experienced, as well as the support required to respond to the student safely and appropriately. As a result, a gender and power analysis must underpin our understanding and design of RRE to ensure the underlying drivers are addressed as part of all approaches to prevent gender-based violence in schools.

Please see 'intersectionality' in the [glossary](#) for more information.



# What is gender-based violence?

Schools strive to be a place of equality, opportunity and learning for all students and a safe, equitable and inspiring workplace for staff. Unfortunately, gender-based violence persists for students and staff across Australia, with rigid ideas of gender, sex and sexuality driving a significant proportion of bullying, discrimination and harassment in schools.

## What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence refers to 'any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity'.<sup>7</sup>

Gender-based violence is not just physical – it includes behaviours that are controlling or cause psychological, emotional and financial harm. These types of violence are usually not experienced in isolation, but as part of an overall pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour.

'Violence against women' is a term often used to capture the higher rates of gender-based violence perpetrated against women. It includes anyone who identifies and lives as a woman, which includes cisgender and trans women.<sup>8</sup>

In RRE, the term 'gender-based violence' is most commonly used rather than 'violence against women' as it is more reflective of the experiences and identities of young people. The terms violence against women and gender-based violence are both used to emphasise how:

- these forms of violence disproportionately affect women and gender diverse people
- violence occurs in a social context where power and resources are distributed unequally between genders, and violence reinforces this gendered power imbalance.

Internationally, there is increasing evidence and recognition that gender-based violence includes violence directed towards someone because of their gender expression – for example, how individuals or groups express notions of masculinity or femininity, often in relation to stereotypical and dominant norms.<sup>9</sup>

All violence is unacceptable, no matter who perpetrates it and who experiences it. But the scale and nature of men's violence against women and gender diverse people, and its gendered dynamics require immediate attention and action.

This violence is **preventable** and an evidence-based approach to RRE is part of this solution.

The gendered nature of anti-social, harmful, and violent behaviour in schools is not always recognised. At times, this behaviour is normalised. This is evident in schools when young people may not feel well supported. This may occur when incidents are excused as inconsequential, or not dealt with, or where perpetrators are not held to account for acts of gender-based violence, including discrimination and bullying. Instead, incidents may be excused as one-offs or as not sufficiently consequential to deem action.

**To prevent such violence, we must recognise and acknowledge the gendered nature of these forms of violence. We must ensure nuanced interventions challenge negative social and peer norms, and support young people to develop skills for building and maintaining respectful relationships.<sup>10</sup>**

# What can gender-based violence look like in schools?

Particular forms of gender-based violence are most prevalent in school settings. Gendered bullying and discrimination, sexual harassment and technology-facilitated abuse, including image-based abuse, are some of the most common forms of gender-based violence in schools.

All forms of gender-based violence are serious and should be recognised and responded to in ways that acknowledge the impact these behaviours have on not only those experiencing the violence, but also on the broader school culture.

Gender-based violence in schools can look like the following behaviours:

Exclusion of students based on their sexuality or gender.

Persistent and unwanted requests to 'hook up' or 'date'.

Sharing or threatening to share intimate images or videos without consent.

Telling, showing or sending sexual images, stories or jokes.

Inappropriate sexual gestures, including leering and loitering.

Questions or comments about a person's sexual activity.

'Outing' someone to friends or family.

Requests or pressure for sex.

Any form of sexual violence, including rape.

Homophobic and/or transphobic comments such as 'gay' or the 'insistence that there are only two genders' being used in a derogatory way.

Gender policing as a form of bullying, for example boys bullying others boys to gain or reinforce their social status and/or power.

Touching someone else's body without consent, including kissing, groping, patting, stroking, hugging.

Ranking students, mainly those who identify as women/girls based on their appearance

Harassment of peers based on their gender, sexuality, identity or gender expression.

Controlling and coercive romantic relationships.



# The gendered nature of bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools

Bullying and discrimination are forms of gender-based violence<sup>11</sup> and are human rights violations that have serious impacts on young people's mental and physical health, safety, and wellbeing.<sup>12</sup> Gender inequality underpins a significant proportion of bullying, discrimination and violence against all young people.<sup>13</sup> This inequality is based in rigid attitudes, behaviours and views about gender, sex and bodies. As a result, understanding bullying and discrimination within schools through a gendered and intersectional lens is essential if the underlying drivers of this behaviour are to be addressed.

Research into bullying has found it to be a highly gendered practice, especially among adolescents<sup>14</sup>. The gendered nature of bullying is reflected in experiences of both victimisation and perpetration.

**Young men with supportive attitudes towards rigid forms of masculinities** (such as being tough, stoic, hypersexual) **are much more likely to have perpetrated** physical (54%) verbal (66%) and online (56%) bullying in the past month.<sup>15</sup>

**Young men with supportive attitudes towards rigid forms of masculinities are much more likely to make sexual comments to women** in public places.<sup>16</sup>

**Research shows bullying tends to become more sexualised in nature as students move into secondary school**, manifesting in forms of sexual, gender based and homophobic harassment.<sup>17</sup>

Bullying can also be targeted towards boys who do not adhere to dominant forms of masculinity (such as being tough, stoic, hypersexual) and the sexual harassment of girls can be used by boys as a way to establish male status and bond with other boys.<sup>18</sup>

Trans young people aged 14–25 experience elevated rates of bullying, discrimination and gendered violence, with 74% reporting experiences of bullying.<sup>19</sup>

This data clearly suggests a complex relationship between rigid gendered norms and experiences of bullying. Supporting young people to understand the gendered patterns, nature and impact of bullying and harassment is essential if we are to prevent this violence from occurring.

## Moving beyond bullying education

Despite bullying education having prominence in schools for some time, research has found that previous approaches have oversimplified the role of social norms and inequalities as well as peer hierarchies present within adolescent relationships. The limited success of bullying interventions and programs has been attributed to the widespread absence of a critical power lens, including gender.<sup>20</sup> Nuanced interventions that challenge negative social and peer norms and develop the necessary skills for building and maintaining respectful relationships are needed.<sup>21</sup> Research has found that approaches that centre the aims of identifying, questioning and challenging the drivers of gender-based violence are more effective than those that do not.<sup>22</sup>

A challenge for addressing bullying is the internalisation and normalisation of gender inequality. Young people often justify forms of gendered inequality, discrimination and violence encountered in schools,<sup>23</sup> believing they are part of a typical school experience.<sup>24</sup>

In the Australian context it has been found that young people do not necessarily recognise the gendered nature of domestic and family violence, or that perpetration is most commonly by men, and many hold victim-blaming attitudes.<sup>25</sup>

Research into effective approaches also found that it is important to attune to the ways in which bullying tends to become more sexualised in nature as students move into secondary school, manifesting in forms of sexual and gender-based harassment and homophobic harassment.<sup>26</sup>

A research project examined the delivery in 2022 of the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships program to Years 7 and 9 students in 6 Victorian secondary schools. The research found reductions in bullying and sexual bullying for Year 7 and Year 9, with a decrease in students who said they sexually bullied other students (from 8.7% of students prior to the implementation of the teaching and learning materials to 5.9% post implementation), along with a slight decrease in bullying following the implementation of the project.

**Respectful relationships education, which engages schools as workplaces, education institutions and community hubs, offers the most promising approach to embedding gender equality and addressing the drivers of all forms of gender-based violence, including bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools.**

RRE does this by teaching about gender, power and control through the curriculum, challenging harmful and limiting gender stereotypes, and role-modelling equality and respect via a whole-of-school approach.

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that makes someone feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.<sup>28</sup>

**Recent research into sexual harassment has found that more than 50% of young people have experienced sexual harassment and that there is a gendered pattern to this harassment:<sup>29\*</sup>**

**Young females**, aged 16–19, were more likely (65%) to have experienced sexual harassment than males (43%) from the same age group.<sup>30</sup>

**Young females**, aged 18–19, were mainly subjected to sexual harassment by strangers.<sup>31</sup>

**Young males**, aged 18–19, were mostly subjected to sexual harassment by friends.<sup>32</sup>

**Almost one-quarter (22.8%) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) young people reported experiencing sexual harassment or assault** based on their sexuality or gender identity in the past 12 months.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, **39% of same sex attracted teens report sexual identity discrimination** between the ages of 14 and 17 (compared to 5% of all teens).<sup>34</sup>



Of the 16- to 17-year-olds who experienced sexual harassment, **40% experienced it at a place of study.**

The research is clear that schools and other places of study are key settings where sexual harassment occurs.

- Concerningly, this research found that of the 16- to 17-year-olds who experienced sexual harassment, 40% experienced it at a place of study.<sup>35</sup>
- 29% of surveyed 13- to 18-year-olds report witnessing physical bullying or intimidation of gender and sexuality diverse students at school.<sup>36</sup>
- Nearly one-third (28.3%) of respondents to a survey of Australians born with intersex variations described their different experiences of being bullied at school.<sup>37</sup>

While the evidence in relation to the levels of sexual harassment experienced at school are continuing to recognise and address this issue, evidence-based approaches to RRE provides schools with an effective mechanism to address school-based sexual harassment.

Important emerging evidence demonstrates the increase in sexual harassment, sexism and misogyny perpetrated by some boys perpetrated towards both women teachers and peers.

Women teachers are experiencing high levels of distress related to being harassed, undermined and challenged by male students subscribing to dominating forms of masculinity.<sup>38</sup>

\* This study defined sexual harassment as including unwanted touching and grabbing, sexual remarks and showing sexually explicit images.

These attitudes and behaviours have been linked to the recent rise and popularity of online male influencers, known as the 'manosphere', with young people.<sup>39</sup> This online content is rapidly changing peer social norms (the perceived, informal and mostly unwritten rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a group or community).

Many female teachers state that their workplaces are no longer safe due to misogynistic behaviour directed towards them and female students.<sup>40</sup> Existing research has identified that silencing and downplaying women's experiences of sexual harassment are historical responses levelled by school leadership teams, with intersections of masculinity and power reinforcing sexual harassment as normative within schools.<sup>41</sup>

**Strong support from school leaders is essential in recognising, responding to and supporting women's experiences of sexism, sexual harassment and misogyny in schools, as opposed to interpreting these experiences as an individual teacher's inability to 'control' or 'manage' inappropriate classroom behaviour.**

## Tech-facilitated abuse

In recent years there has been a rise in online or technology-facilitated abuse, which uses technology (such as emails, text messages or social media) to control, abuse, harass, punish, bully and humiliate people.

Image-based abuse is a form of technology-facilitated abuse and specifically involves the taking and distributing of nude, semi-nude or sexual images without consent, or threatening to do so. It also includes:

- non-consensual sexualised messages
- non-consensual tracking and stalking
- the use of AI to make digital alterations to existing images or to create new images

- 'sextortion', when someone tries to blackmail another person through the use of a nude or sexual image
- taking and distributing images of a person without religious or cultural clothing that they would normally wear in public.

### **While people of all genders experience image-based abuse, research indicates that:**

**Young adults** aged 18–24 **are most likely to experience image-based abuse**, with young women more likely (24%) to have experienced image-based abuse than young men (16%).<sup>42</sup>

**Teens with disabilities were also more likely to have been asked for sexual information** (26%, compared with the national average of 18%) or sexual images of themselves (15%, compared with the national average of 11%).<sup>43</sup>

There is crossover in the methods used to perpetrate gender-based violence, as well as the types of violence experienced. For example, tech-facilitated abuse is both a *form* of gendered violence and a *means of perpetrating* gender-based violence.

As such, it is essential that education systems recognise the overlap and seek to map and connect across programs, policies and priorities to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing gender, power and control across all areas of the education system, rather than siloing RRE to one area or department.



## Understanding gender, power and control as central to preventing gender-based violence

Due to the gendered nature of bullying, sexual harassment and tech-facilitated abuse, it is essential that a systemic approach to RRE focuses on gender, power and control as a means of preventing gender-based violence.<sup>44</sup>

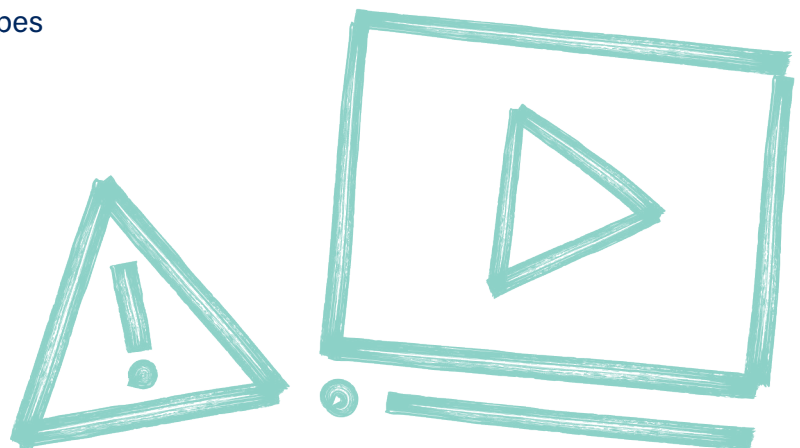
Understanding bullying and discrimination through a gendered and intersectional lens is essential if the underlying drivers of this behaviour are to be addressed.

An evidence-based approach to RRE provides the mechanism required to address gender-based violence, including bullying and harassment by:

- identifying the gendered nature of behaviour (facilitated by incident data collection systems)
- setting up appropriate systems for responding to disclosures of violence
- supporting teachers to discuss, educate and appropriately address complex topics related to gender expression, stereotypes and diversity.

Encouragingly, LGBTIQ+ young people who found their school to be positive and inclusive towards gender and sexuality diversity felt stronger connectedness to school were more likely to have higher perceptions of their academic abilities at school; including holding greater intentions to attend university; and had fewer incidences of truancy. This again highlights the important role that the education system and schools can play in ensuring an accepting and supportive schooling environment for people of all gender identities.<sup>45</sup>

**RRE provides the mechanism for system-level thinking that supports leadership, processes and practices to address gender-based violence, to ensure a school and workplace that is free from discrimination, harassment and violence.**



**Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (aged 14–17) have been exposed to potentially harmful online material such as violent images or sexual content (76%).<sup>46</sup>**

## Respectful relationships education: A primary prevention approach

The primary prevention of gender-based violence is about stopping violence before it starts. Grounded in national and international evidence, it is a public health approach that focuses on transforming attitudes, behaviours and practices to make undesirable consequence less likely. Implementing a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in government and non-government school sectors is one essential piece in a jigsaw of approaches encompassing primary prevention activity in Australia.

Primary prevention takes a whole-of-population approach to challenge the underlying social conditions that allow disrespect and gender inequality to exist, and ultimately it aims to prevent gendered violence from happening in the first place.

Primary prevention, early intervention and response are inextricably linked and must work concurrently and coherently for safe and effective RRE in schools. A whole-of-school approach reflects this integral relationship through prioritising the capacity of schools and

staff to respond to and support those who have/ are experiencing violence; work with specialised response services; and intervene early with people who are using violence (or are at risk of doing so). Primary prevention in schools relies on the safety and integrity of these response services to build trust and a supportive environment for students, staff and families.

Schools are unique as a setting in which primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery operate alongside and in connection with one another. For example, evidence<sup>47</sup> has shown that when RRE is implemented in schools, there is often an increase in disclosures of violence; as such, an essential part of school readiness for RRE is to ensure that all school staff are able to appropriately and safely respond to disclosures of violence, and that referral pathways for external support are clearly defined and understood.

At the same time, it is essential that schools are undertaking primary prevention work to address the gendered drivers of violence across all aspects of the school system, through curriculum, professional learning and strong leadership to prevent this violence from happening in the first place.

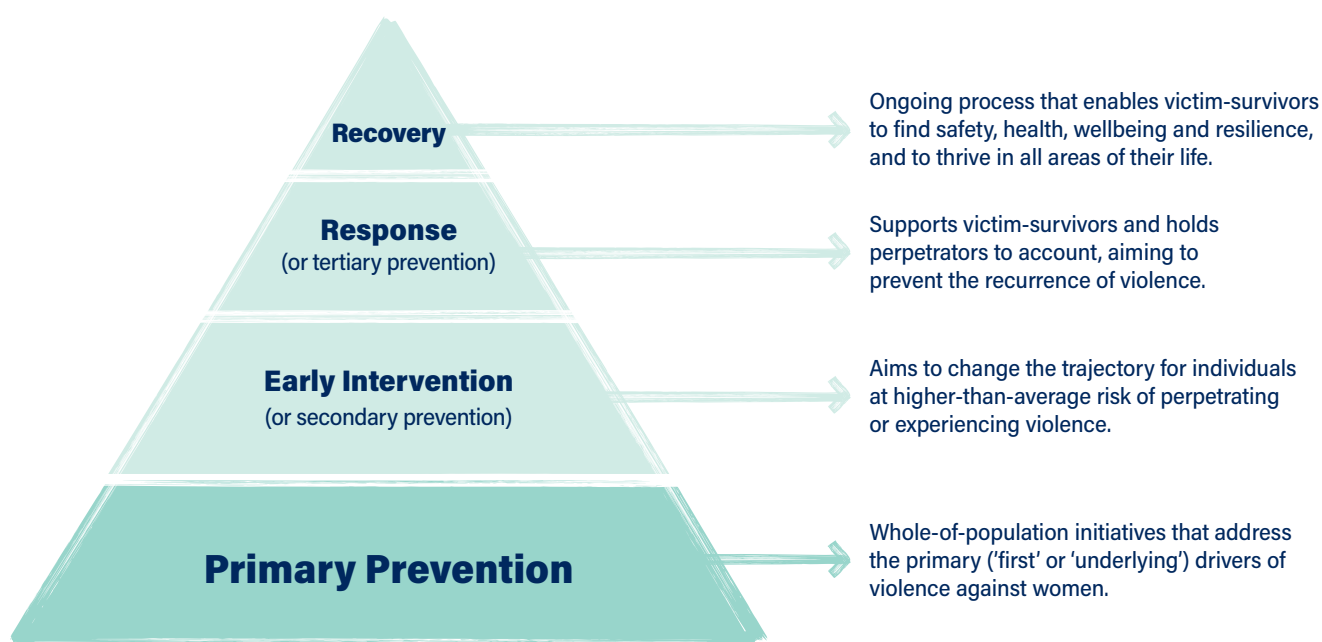


Figure 2: The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address the drivers of gendered violence.

## Benefits of respectful relationships education

Best-practice respectful relationships education can shift the gendered drivers of violence against women at individual, school, system, policy and broader societal levels when integrated effectively into the education system.

In the short term, respectful relationships education can challenge violence-supportive attitudes that some staff and students may hold. It can support more respectful behaviour, counter gender stereotyping among students, and strengthen schools' commitment to gender equality at the institutional level.

In the longer term, respectful relationships education has the potential to contribute to reduced rates of gender-based bullying and harassment, shift school cultures towards being more gender equitable and challenge violence-supportive norms.

The potential for respectful relationships education to create shifts in the gendered drivers of violence within schools is evidenced in Australian evaluations of respectful relationships education. These have found:<sup>48</sup>

- increased student knowledge of, positive attitudes towards and confidence in discussing issues of domestic violence, gender equality and respectful relationships
- decreased student adherence to gender stereotypical attitudes
- increased teacher understanding of the importance of respectful relationships education
- improved student classroom behaviour
- improved teacher-student relationships
- increased understanding of respectful relationships, gender equality and gender-based violence among school leadership – including principals.

While a longitudinal evaluation of respectful relationships education in Australia has not yet been undertaken given its recency, international research has demonstrated that school-based prevention initiatives can reduce future violence perpetration and victimisation of students.<sup>49</sup>

## Addressing pornography through whole-of-school RRE

The negative impacts of pornography on young people, and its strong correlation to the drivers of violence against women and to beliefs on sex, gender roles, gender stereotypes and harmful ideas of masculinity, remain a significant issue facing Australian schools.

Most young people in Australia now own personal data-enabled phones, which means access to pornography has never been easier.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, the production and dissemination of deepfake or artificial intelligence (AI) generated pornography now offers new mechanisms for image-based abuse, which schools are increasingly being called to address and respond to.

While some research emphasises the positive impact porn can have on some young people's sexual socialisation and experiences, the large majority identifies that early exposure to pornography can have a significant negative impact on the development of young people's attitudes and practices relating to gender roles, identities and relationships.<sup>51</sup>

This impact can be particularly significant among young people, because adolescence is a time when ideas and attitudes about gender roles, identities and relationships are being developed, with research showing that both young men and young women are accessing pornography years before their first sexual relationships.

### **Recent research conducted with young Australians on their views on pornography found that:**

**84% of participants agree that porn pushes stereotypes** of what is expected of men and women in sex (young men: 79%, young women: 88%).

**79% agree that porn impacts how women are viewed in real life** (young men: 72%, young women: 85%).

**73% agree that porn is degrading to women** (young men: 65%, young women: 80%) and **69% agree it is harmful** (young men: 64%, young women: 73%).

**72% agree that porn often shows aggression and violence against women** (young men: 67%, young women: 76%).

**60% agree that porn is degrading to people of certain races** (young men: 52%, young women: 67%).

### **Pornography and the curriculum**

While pornography is not included in the content descriptions or achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0, there is a reference to pornography in a Years 9 and 10 content elaboration. The reference to pornography is in the context of students learning about 'Personal, social and community health: Making healthy and safe choices'. It relates to consent and respectful relationships education. Some states and territories have developed their own curriculum, of which some incorporate explicit references to pornography.

It is important to note that content elaborations provide suggestions for ways to teach the curriculum. Content elaborations are optional. Without explicit references to pornography in the curriculum, it is unlikely to be taught within schools due to school priorities; the siloing of RRE content, including pornography, to the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area; and teachers' lack of skills and confidence in teaching the content.

### **How can RRE build young people's media literacy skills to prevent gender-based violence?**

A whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education helps build young people's critical awareness of gender roles in sexual interactions and provides tools for critically challenging violence-endorsing messages in all forms of media. Access to information and education about pornography has the potential to help mediate the negative impacts of pornography on young people, their wellbeing and their relationships.

Specifically, the teaching of consent, sexuality, relationships and gender should be part of a balanced and developmentally appropriate approach to RRE, which encompasses comprehensive sexuality education programs. It is essential that school staff are supported through professional learning and an enabling school culture to safely and confidently address the harmful impacts of pornography with young people.

A holistic approach to RRE that comprehensively encompasses evidence-based approaches to teaching consent, sexuality, relationships and gender can positively contribute to the primary prevention of gender-based violence.

There is significant opportunity within the curriculum and professional learning components of whole-of-school RRE to build young people's critical awareness of gender roles in sexual interactions and provide tools for critically challenging violence-endorsing messages in all forms of media.



# What is respectful relationships education?

Emerging Australian and international evidence suggests that RRE can shift the ways in which schools operate as workplaces, community settings and education institutions, and contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence.<sup>52</sup>

## Best-practice definition of respectful relationships education

Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school-based primary prevention of gender-based violence.

It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, both as education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence.

## A whole of school approach to respectful relationships education

RRE requires a long-term vision, approach and commitment. RRE can have broad impacts, as it seeks to adjust the processes and structures that determine how schools operate, to create school environments that are gender equitable, respectful and inclusive.

National and international evidence, including from UNESCO, UN Women, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence indicates that a whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence is the most effective mechanism for school-based prevention of gender-based violence. This approach centres on identifying, questioning and challenging the drivers of gender-based violence across all aspects of the education system.

To be effective, RRE must take a whole-of-school approach that works with leadership, systems and practices to support positive school cultures, age-appropriate curriculum delivery, policy development and community engagement. A whole-of-school approach to RRE ensures a culture among both staff and students where gender stereotypes are challenged, gender-based discrimination is unacceptable, and gender equality is actively promoted, modelled and embedded across the entire school, not only through the curriculum.

The term 'respectful relationships education' is often used and interpreted in a range of ways, many of which are not aligned to the established evidence base. To ensure that the goal and outcomes of evidenced-based RRE – preventing gender-based violence –

are achieved, there is significant value in seeking a consistent and evidence-based definition, or a minimum understanding, to drive and inform approaches to RRE across the country. A whole-school approach to RRE creates a supportive and enabling environment for educators by ensuring they have access to professional learning, feel confident to deliver classroom materials, can safely and appropriately respond to disclosure and importantly are supported by school leadership to embed RRE across all aspects of school life.

If RRE is properly embedded in education systems and sectors, with the appropriate support, commitment and resourcing to schools and their community partners, the benefits have the potential to reach more than 4 million students across Australian primary and secondary schools, as well as a workforce of more than 300,000 teachers, and the non-teaching staff and communities of more than 9,600 schools.<sup>53</sup>

## Respectful relationships education: More than curriculum delivery

What sets RRE apart is that it explicitly centres on addressing the drivers of gender-based violence across the entire education system and sectors. Teaching and learning approaches and materials that enable students to identify, question and challenge the drivers of gender-based violence are a major and important facet of RRE; however, RRE is much broader than the delivery of classroom-based learning.

A curriculum is a statement of intent and offers learning guidance (mandated requirements); however, neither a curriculum nor the use of a resource is not enough, in isolation, to drive cultural change within a school. Schools need more than curriculum resources, one off workshops or time-limited programs, often delivered by external private providers. Jurisdiction and/or school sector roll-out of RRE will only be successful if the delivery of the Australian Curriculum (or the relevant

version adapted and implemented through the respective curriculum authority) is contextualised as part of a broader school and education system and school culture that is committed to, and role-models, gender equality and respect.

### RRE is characterised by a critical analysis of gender, power and control.

RRE goes further than raising awareness of violence and promoting protective behaviours, such as consent. While alignment with other areas of work (such as social and emotional learning or sexuality education) are desirable, RRE requires dedicated focus and investment in the creation of gender equal and respectful attitudes, behaviours, structures and practices across the whole school culture.

The Australian Curriculum supports the delivery of RRE primarily through the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area. Digital Technologies, English, and Humanities and Social Sciences also provide opportunities to reinforce and build upon this learning.



Figure 3: A whole-of-school approach for building respectful relationships.

## Respectful relationships education and consent

Consent applies to all areas of our lives and relationships, including but not limited to sexual relationships. As such, best-practice consent education must occur within a whole-of-school approach that is focused on teaching and learning about gender equality and respectful relationships, as well as efforts to transform school cultures. It should not occur as a stand-alone subject or topic.

Teaching consent as part of a comprehensive approach to respectful relationships education is an ongoing process. Age-appropriate teaching and learning should be commenced as early as possible and should enable students to build incrementally on knowledge as they progress through year levels. Materials for younger children may involve topics such as gender stereotypes and the need to ask and give permission for physical touch such as hugging, while older students may have more detailed conversations about sexual violence and 'affirmative consent' within relationships.

A comprehensive and robust approach is needed to teach consent within our schools. We cannot teach consent without also addressing the societal context in which discussions about consent take place. This includes widespread myths about sexual violence, victim-blaming, male peer cultures and ideas about masculinity that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women, sexual harassment and the sexualisation of women.

A whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education enables schools to not only teach the important principles of consent using age-appropriate, evidence-based resources, but also to challenge and critically engage with the societal context in which sexual violence occurs. Critical to this is the need for investment in a professional learning strategy that underpins the effective and evidence-based teaching of RRE and consent, which supports teachers to safely and confidently guide young people to understand and navigate consent and relationships in their lives.

For learning areas outside RRE, such as English and Humanities, the skills and behaviours for respectful relationships education are often addressed in a holistic way through everyday routines, practices, and integrated planning and programming.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has developed the Curriculum Connection: Respectful relationships resource, which shows educators where RRE is embedded across the Australian Curriculum. Through a whole-of-school approach to RRE, and as their knowledge and skills increase, teachers will be able to reinforce concepts related to RRE and make additional connections across other learning areas. Many jurisdictions have also created their own specific resources to support classroom instructions, which vary in their alignment to evidence-based practice.<sup>54</sup>

# Key considerations for engaging external private providers

## 01

### Identify need

**Where they are a value-add, external private providers could be engaged as part of a whole-of-school approach to RRE; however, they should not be engaged in isolation or as a replacement for teacher-led delivery.**

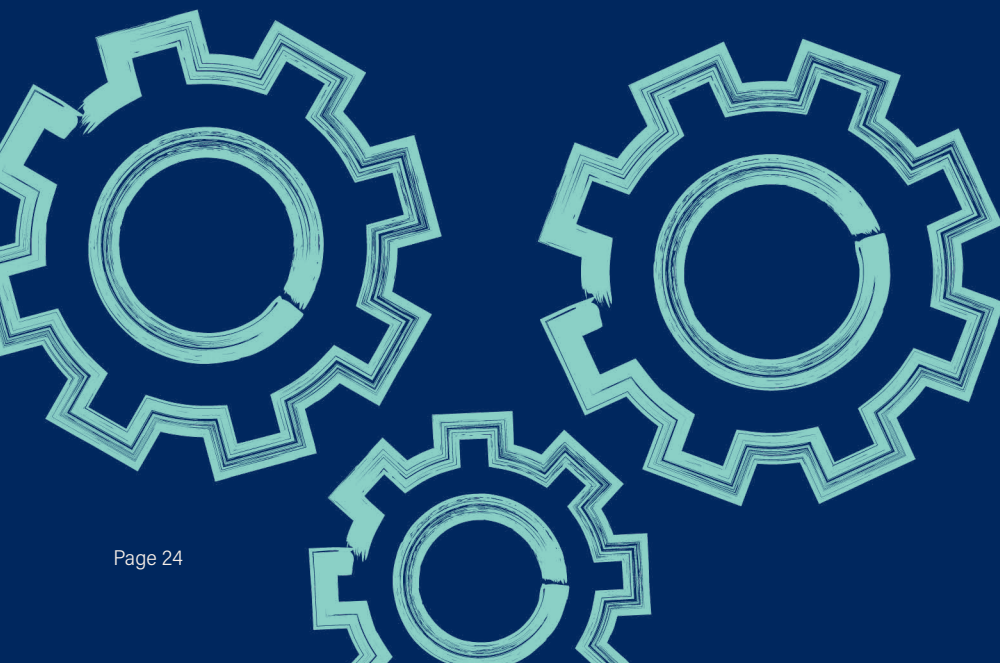
- Identify gaps and determine if staff professional learning could be prioritised to support teachers to build their capacity and skills in RRE.
- Identify how an external program will be part of a broader, ongoing RRE curriculum being delivered within the school.
- Identify what RRE curriculum delivery and learning has already occurred within the school.
- Consider how the external provider will be briefed on the school's broader RRE program and how they will enhance – not replace – the role of the classroom teacher.

## 02

### Provider capabilities

**The use of external private providers for delivery of RRE curriculum should be underpinned by robust evaluation and aligned with best-practice principles.**

- Consider how external private providers reflect and align with current evidence and best practice for RRE curriculum delivery, and whether the impact and effectiveness of a provider have been evaluated. This evaluation should go beyond measuring reach and student engagement and include measures on impact and effectiveness.
- Ensure information provided by external providers are age-appropriate and match the developmental level of the students.
- Determine how the private provider plans to embed student voice and agency into content delivery and learning.
- Ensure that resources are previewed by school staff before being delivered.



## 03

### Plan engagement

**Hold pre-planning discussions with the external provider and school staff to ensure a safe and effective learning environment is maintained.**

- Ensure adequate pre-planning meetings for a shared approach to maintaining a safe classroom environment for RRE delivery. Planning should include behaviour management strategies, ensuring a safe space for students and identifying what protocols are in place for responding to disclosures.
- Ensure that classroom teachers will be present for the external provider's session.
- Ensure there are opportunities and systems in place for students to seek additional information or request support following any sessions provided by external providers.

## 04

### Build in evaluation

**Build in data collection mechanisms to follow up with students and supervising school staff after the delivery of an external provider.**

- As part of ongoing and continuous engagement with students through a whole-of-school approach, provide students with opportunities to safely and confidently give feedback on external providers, such as through surveys and confidential discussions with a trusted school staff member.

## 05

### Communicate activities

**Consider a communications plan to engage and inform students and families/care givers about the use and purpose of external providers.**

- Provide an information session or briefing for students, parents and caregivers that outlines the purpose and learning outcomes of the external provider's session and how this fits within the school's broader approach to RRE.



## The 7 core elements of a respectful relationships education

International and national evidence on RRE outlines that **policy and program** design must include 7 core elements to be effective in preventing gender-based violence.<sup>55</sup>

These 7 core elements act as a foundation at the system level and are required to enable a whole-of-school approach at an organisational level. Without the commitment, investment and long-term vision and approach to RRE at the system

level, schools will not receive the support needed to implement a whole-of-school approach to RRE, and therefore the goal of preventing gender-based violence will not be realised.

If the 7 core elements are not addressed as part of initial planning, there is a significant risk of lost opportunity in public support and government investment and program effectiveness, and the levels of gender-based violence will stay the same for future generations.

### The 7 core elements of RRE

**01**

Address the **drivers** of gender-based violence.

**02**

Take a **whole-of-school approach** to change.

**03**

Support the change by developing a **professional learning strategy**.

**04**

Use **age-appropriate curriculum** that addresses the drivers of gender-based violence.

**05**

Sustain and **commit to the change** by having long-term vision, approach and funding.

**06**

Support through **cross-sectional collaboration** and coordination.

**07**

Evaluate for **continuous improvement**.

Figure 4: The 7 core elements of a whole-of-school approach to RRE.

The RRE blueprint seeks to provide tangible and practical actions that highlight how each of the 7 core components of RRE can be addressed across each of the phases, to build upon and strengthen approaches to RRE across jurisdictions and school sectors.

A best-practice and sustainable model to RRE requires all stakeholders – including governments and all school sectors – to lead the way in supporting an evidence-based, consistent and unified approach.

**Leadership and commitment from governments, school sectors and other relevant stakeholders in conjunction with sustainable resourcing is essential to drive such broad and long-term change.**

## Government leadership and resourcing

Numerous national plans and policies highlight the importance of all governments working in partnership to ensure school students receive age-appropriate RRE:

- Commonwealth Government Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE), the measures from which involve a commitment of \$77.6 million in grant funding to states and territories and non-government school systems to help schools invest in RRE.<sup>56</sup>
- The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, alongside accompanying action plans.<sup>57</sup>
- Recommendation 10 of the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020).<sup>58</sup>
- Recommendation 59 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.<sup>59</sup>
- Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability - Recommendation 59, 7.3 which states 'Improve policies and

procedures on the provision of reasonable adjustments to students with disability', and provides guidelines for ensuring equal access to consent, relationships and sexuality education for students with disabilities through learning resources, including for neurodiverse students and LGBTIQ+ students.

State and territory government commitment to, and investment in, RRE varies, and each jurisdiction is at a different stage of implementing RRE. A range of excellent work is already underway across jurisdictions. This blueprint seeks to identify opportunities to strengthen approaches and build upon existing work.

The policy environment, investment in and prioritisation of RRE across the nation is building a strong foundation for prevention in school settings.

**We now have a significant opportunity to ensure that investment is directed to evidence-based approaches, which includes mainstreaming respectful relationships education as core business in schools and scaling up RRE to have an effective, consistent and coordinated approach in every jurisdiction in Australia.**

# Key principles of student engagement in RRE

Ensuring students of all ages have a voice in relation to their education and learning affirms their agency, independence and leadership, and plays a central role in supporting positive student outcomes, safety and wellbeing. Student voice is not simply about giving students the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about students having the power to influence change, and ensuring they have the autonomy and power to use this influence to direct and drive change.<sup>60</sup> In practice, student engagement helps create more diverse, relevant, meaningful and positive

learning experiences, and supports students to feel empowered to make decisions about their own lives outside of school as well.

Jurisdictions and school sectors should ensure there are genuine and meaningful opportunities for student co-design, and ensure that students have a seat at the table and are part of decision-making about RRE. It is critical that this engagement is age-appropriate; has clearly defined parameters, process and structures; and is part of an ongoing process of review and reflection.

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## Key principles of student engagement in RRE:

### 01

#### **Recognise the expertise and significant contribution that students can offer in driving cultural change**

- All young people are experts in their own lives. Schools play an important role in ensuring the views, opinions and experiences of students are recognised and valued to create a shared, inclusive and authorising school environment.
- Government and non-government school sectors have varying frameworks for improving student outcomes and learnings and RRE provides a unique and meaningful opportunity for centering student voice and agency within those frameworks.

### 02

#### **Leadership and school staff enable students to take meaningful actions that students themselves have identified**

- School leaders are encouraged to establish processes for the effective engagement of student voice and agency through discussions with teachers and students about the issues; the material and evidence base; the school's commitment to engaging and addressing issues raised by students; and the systems and structures that will be established to create a safe, respectful and supportive environment. For example, schools have in place policies, protocols and practices that facilitate and enable meaningful student engagement, and resourcing is allocated to support student input and initiatives. This may include the establishment of a specific RRE student advisory group that includes allocated school staff.

## 03

### **Ensure that students are involved at each step of organisational and cultural change**

- At each step of the change process, there should be opportunities for both input and action from students as part of a co-design process, to drive and influence change. This includes ensuring that student opinions and ideas are captured across all 5 steps of the implementation cycle, for example as part of assessing the current school climate through student self-assessment tools, action planning, and evaluating and monitoring activities.
- Student representative councils and/or youth advisory groups can be a useful leadership body to draw upon to engage students; however, schools should not rely solely on established student leadership mechanisms. Young people outside these traditional leadership roles may have an identified interest and may be better suited to engage with staff on the ideas, proposals and identified student actions from the student body.

## 04

### **Students are engaged in multiple components of the whole-of-school approach**

- Student engagement is not limited to participation in teaching and learning activities but should be a consistent principle that is embedded across other areas of the whole-of-school approach to RRE. This may include policy review and design, leadership opportunities to speak about RRE in the broader community, or students petitioning and supporting the development of a gender-neutral uniform policy that reflects the diversity in gender identity and expression among students.

- It is important that students are not passively listened to but are empowered to provide input and nuance through their own experiences and perspectives into teaching and learning, and are supported to influence school policies.

## 05

### **Students are supported and motivated to continue to drive action in the school**

- In recognition of the long-term work required to prevent gender-based violence, schools allocate resourcing to support students to develop ongoing initiatives to create and drive cultural change.
- Schools are encouraged to engage students in monitoring and evaluation and continual improvement processes. For example, this may be through formal mechanisms such as the inclusion of questions around gender equality in attitudes-to-school surveys (where relevant), as well as other informal mechanisms such as collecting student data via reflection and feedback sessions. It is essential to ensure informed consent across data collection and feedback loops and to create an environment where students feel confident and safe to provide feedback. Therefore, options that allow students to provide anonymous feedback or speak directly with a trusted staff member should be considered as part of this process.
- It is essential that any data collected is used to inform the continual improvement of RRE across the school. Transparent feedback loops to demonstrate how student data or opinions have been used should be part of ongoing implementation and reflection cycles.

## Case study

# RRE can help prevent gendered violence: Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools

Young primary school students reported increased personal wellbeing at school and were less likely to consider certain jobs and activities as 'just for boys' or 'just for girls' after participating in a respectful relationships education pilot in primary school.

The Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools Pilot in Queensland and Victoria involved 18 schools with a focus on Year 1 and 2 students. The 6-month pilot included classroom teaching and learning, professional development for staff, auditing of current school policies and processes, support for schools to engage parents in reinforcing messages of respect and equality, and use of Our Watch's [Respectful relationships education toolkit](#).

The pilot showed promising results, demonstrating that a whole-of-school approach to addressing gender-based violence can improve student attitudes and increase teacher confidence and knowledge.

The data collected from the schools, in partnership with Deakin University, was used to measure changes in school practices, culture and structures.

**The report highlighted the need for respectful relationships education to be integrated within a school community on a long-term basis.**

## Key findings:



### Decreased stereotypical attitudes

A decrease in stereotypical attitudes among school students, making them less likely to see jobs or activities as strictly for men or women. Both boys and girls showed an interest in traditionally 'feminine' jobs and activities after the whole-of-school approach to RRE was introduced.



### Increased understanding of gender inequality

Staff demonstrated an increased understanding of gender inequality and the ways in which it impacts on school culture. Teacher feedback highlighted the importance of professional development to help teachers deliver respectful relationships education that addresses the drivers of violence. Some schools showed an increase in staff understandings of gender discrimination and sexual harassment.



### Strong commitment to the role of RRE

Strong commitment to respectful relationships education and its role in school readiness across the school community after the pilot.



# Embedding respectful relationships education in education systems and sectors

## About the RRE blueprint

Preventing gender-based violence is about changing the systems, structures and culture in which individuals develop their attitudes towards violence. This blueprint is informed by the national and international evidence on what works to prevent gender-based violence through the education system.

It offers guidance for planning a staged implementation, with particular emphasis on establishing the foundations required for success. The blueprint aims to assist governments and school sectors in making decisions about how to plan, implement and monitor a best-practice approach to RRE within the unique policy or school sector context of each jurisdiction.

## The blueprint outlines 3 key phases:

**1 Build evidence-based foundations**

**2 Support implementation of a whole-of-school approach**

**3 Sustain RRE to achieve long-term change**

# Respectful relationships education: A model for system wide integration

Maintain  
momentum



Develop the  
pre-service workforce:  
Initial teacher education



1

PHASE 1

**Build evidence-based  
foundations for RRE**

Establish an authorising  
environment for RRE



Identify mechanisms for  
coordination and collaboration



Establish an RRE  
implementation workforce



3

PHASE 3

**Sustain RRE to  
achieve long-term  
change**



Support  
the roll-out  
of RRE

Continue to  
strengthen the RRE  
evidence base



# 2

## PHASE 2

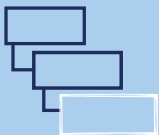
### Support implementation of a whole-of-school approach to RRE



Develop a comprehensive  
approach to monitoring,  
evaluation and learning activities



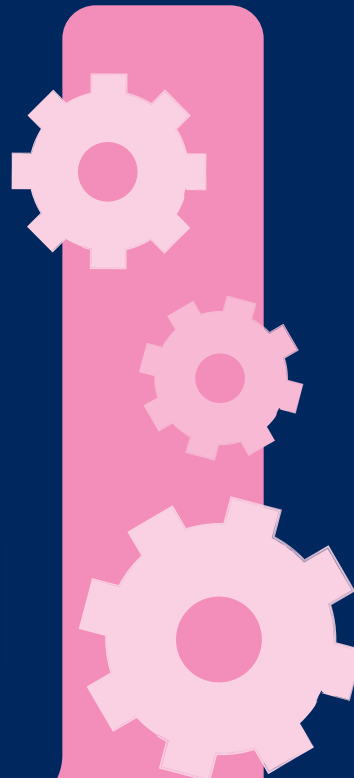
Develop a professional  
learning strategy



Plan for a phased approach  
to RRE implementation



Include central elements of  
respectful relationships education  
in curriculum development



Develop a  
communication  
strategy



Ensure strong  
leadership and  
commitment

# 1

## PHASE 1

# Build evidence-based foundations

## 1.1 Establish an authorising environment for RRE

**The first step to embedding RRE in the education system involves ensuring that the right policy settings and investment are in place to implement best-practice RRE.**

At present, there are a range of strategies and programs across Australian jurisdictions highlighting the need for RRE to be introduced as a key pillar for preventing gender-based violence. Taking measures to establish an authorising environment will set stakeholder and community expectations and create strong foundations for effective and evidence-based RRE.

It is important to establish a positive and affirming policy environment, that includes; statements of commitment from governments and leaders on the importance of RRE and ensuring RRE is embedded in key educational strategies (e.g. that outline future direction and priorities) as these are integral to sustaining the future of RRE as well as prioritising/directing its implementation in the current context. Supportive policies have been identified consistently as key enablers to the successful implementation of RRE at the school level.

### Key actions

- ✓ Confirm government commitment to an evidence-based approach to RRE. This includes ensuring the 7 core elements of best-practice RRE are embedded in planning, design and monitoring of RRE.
- ✓ Integrate this commitment into key government policies, for example in primary prevention or domestic, family and sexual violence strategies.
- ✓ With support from governments, school sectors develop a multi-year long-term vision and plan to roll out RRE (minimum 5 years) in government and non-government school sectors, including ensuring adequate levels of financial resourcing to support creation of a workforce to support school level implementation.
- ✓ Communicate the vision, goals and approaches to RRE across internal and external stakeholders, including key sectors and community organisations.
- ✓ Review and update existing education policies to establish a positive and affirming policy environment for RRE within the education system and ensure gender equality is foundational to policy design.

# RRE-enabling policies

**Policies that support or enable respectful relationships education include those that:**

Outline the right of all staff and students to be included and be free from discrimination and harassment.

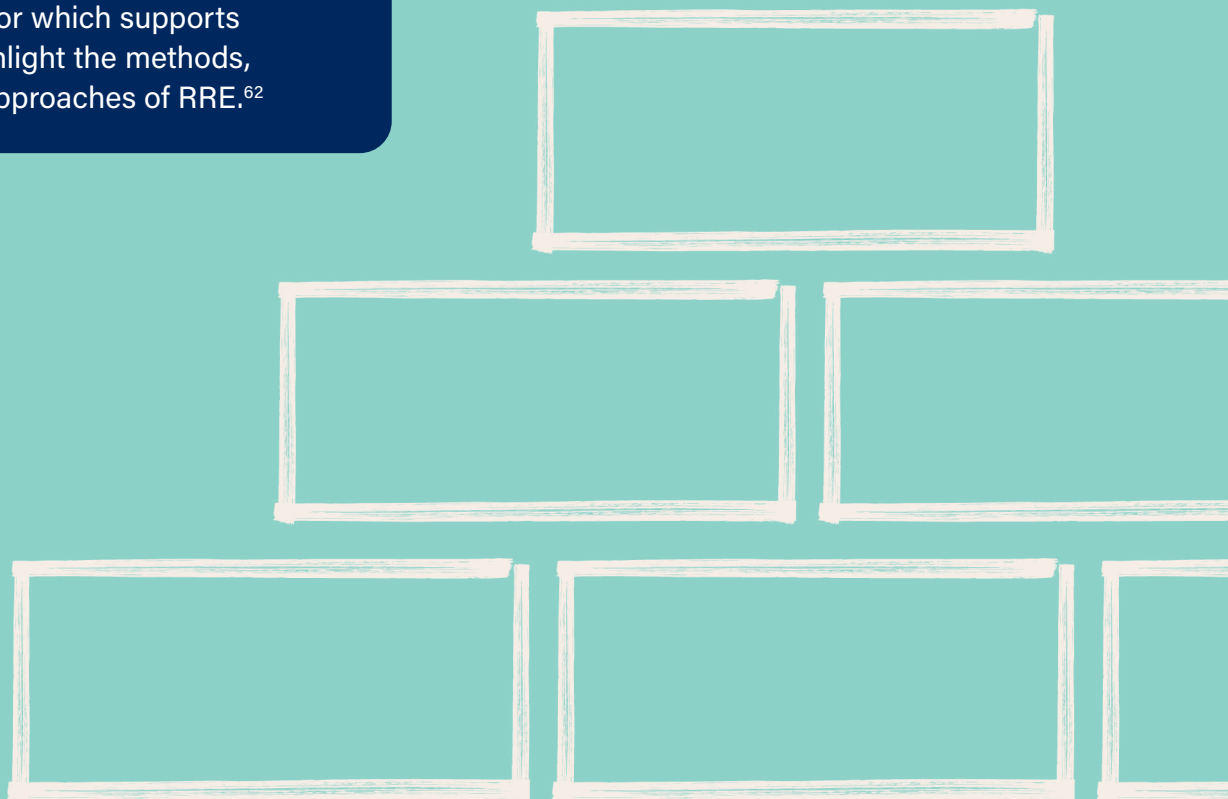
Articulate the rights of LGBTIQ+ students.

Mandate the teaching of evidence-based RRE, including minimum hours per week.<sup>61</sup>

Provide clear direction and expectations for schools, thereby acting as a protective factor which supports schools to highlight the methods, benefits and approaches of RRE.<sup>62</sup>

Support and resource the creation of an RRE workforce within government and non-government school sectors, to support school level implementation. Due to the difference in how these sectors operate, an RRE workforce will look different across sectors.

Securing adequate and ongoing funding for RRE workforce roles is essential in enabling schools to embed a whole of school approach to RRE.





## 1.2 Identify mechanisms for coordination and collaboration

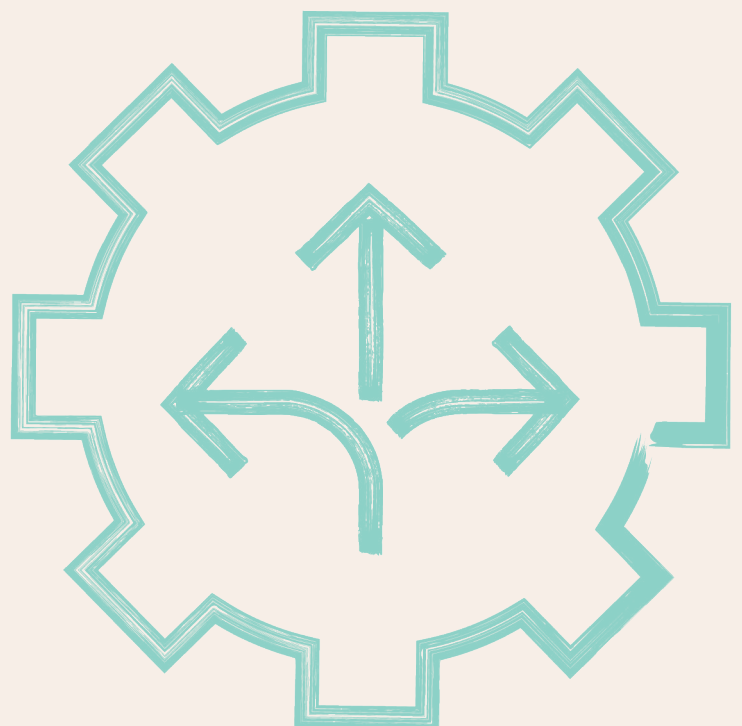
**Strong governance, with clear delineation of roles of responsibilities, enables effective collaboration and ensures a cohesive whole-of-government approach to delivering RRE.**

The delivery of RRE connects to a range of policy frameworks, including the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022–2032*, and state and territory domestic, family, and sexual violence, gender equality and education policies that involve a range of government agencies.

Individual schools need to be supported to implement a whole-of-school approach to RRE. Research shows that ongoing collaboration between the education and violence prevention sectors is crucial for the effectiveness of RRE.<sup>63</sup> Evidence strongly suggests that collaborative pre-planning, resources and time 'to set up the systems and structures that will enable the sustainability of initiatives and their adoption across the whole school culture' is critical to the success of school level implementation.<sup>64</sup>

### Key criteria and pre-planning that should be met before implementation of RRE in a school include:

- Establish mechanisms for consultation, planning and monitoring.
- Education sectors, including, government, Catholic and Independent build networks with prevention, response and gender equality sector.
- Establish partnerships with gender-based violence response and support services.<sup>65</sup>
- Identify a senior lead to coordinate the implementation of RRE, noting that this may look different in the government and independent school sectors. (Further information in 1.3 *Establish an RRE implementation workforce*).



## Build networks with education sector, and prevention and gender equality sector

The successful planning, delivery and monitoring of RRE depends on engagement with a range of external stakeholders from across sectors. The establishment of a skilled RRE workforce within government and non-government school sectors across jurisdictions is essential for successful school level implementation. Developing a workforce with knowledge and skills in both prevention and education requires coordination and collaboration between and across sectors, which goes beyond policy and infrastructure considerations. The lack of prevention infrastructure in some jurisdictions, matched with the increased interest, investment and need from schools, has led to a tendency to outsource this work to external private providers. While the content knowledge of many of these organisations is extensive, for RRE to be effective as a mechanism to prevent gender-based violence, it must be embedded in the education system or sector, and implemented as part of a whole-of-school approach.

In the planning and 'readiness' stages, it is important for government and non-government school sectors to build connections and relationships with prevention and gender equality groups and organisations in their jurisdictions. This supports the capacity building of school sectors and school staff to ensure approaches to RRE in schools are aligned to the evidence base. It is also essential to engage organisations with expertise in working with specific groups, including young people, LGBTIQ+ organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and disability organisations, to ensure approaches to RRE are inclusive and meet the needs of school communities.

## Establish partnerships with gender-based violence response and support services

A whole-of-school approach to RRE comes with a responsibility to uphold a duty of care for both staff and students who may need support relating to gender-based violence.

It is recommended that the government and non-government school sectors engage with key gender-based violence (including family violence), sexual assault, child protection and youth services stakeholders to ensure availability and accessibility of state-wide integrated approaches that provide:

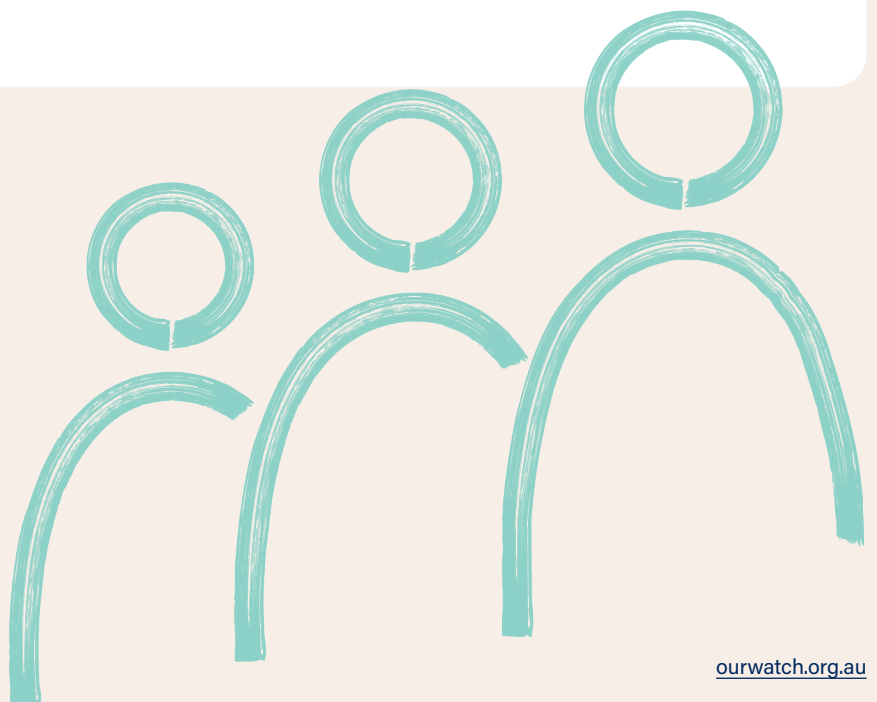
- age-appropriate interventions and/or responses for young people already experiencing or perpetrating violence within their relationships
- appropriate supports and/or interventions for young people witnessing or living with violence at home, given the strong evidence that life experience can impact long-term relationship patterns.

**It is also important to ensure there is guidance and appropriate support in place to safely respond to a range of other disclosures, for example disclosures relating to a young person's sexuality or gender.**

Establishing this type of readiness is most effective where opportunities for partnerships and collaboration between schools, services and systems are supported and enabled by government policy, support and investment.

## Key actions

- ✓ Identify a senior lead to oversee the coordination and roll out of RRE. This may look different across school sectors.
- ✓ Conduct an audit of existing respectful relationships and consent programs, including any existing workforce that delivers or oversees these programs, to identify strengths, opportunities for improvement and ways in which this work may support the implementation of RRE, based on the evidence.
- ✓ Set up or identify an existing whole-of-government interdepartmental working group or committee. This might include representation from government/ non government school sector, Child Safety (Protection), Youth Office, Office for Women or violence prevention in your jurisdiction and the Department of Health.
- ✓ Invest in and facilitate closer working relationships between schools and community-based organisations and local gender-based violence response experts, to provide ongoing support and advice to schools on appropriately responding to disclosures.
- ✓ Establish or identify an existing jurisdiction-wide, cross-sector committee or advisory group for consultation, planning and coordination. This should be led by the school sector. Ensure there is representation from:
  - education peak bodies, such as principals associations, Catholic education offices, associations of independent schools and parents associations
  - jurisdictional gender-based violence response and primary prevention experts or peak bodies
  - organisations led by young people, such as Australian Youth Affairs Council, jurisdictional student representative groups, Minus 18 and Koorie Youth Council
  - other peak bodies or organisations within jurisdictions, such as disability advocacy organisations, LGBTIQ+ groups, First Nations education associations, independent and Catholic school sectors, and curriculum peak bodies.



## 1.3 Establish an RRE implementation workforce

### Establishing RRE-specific roles within the relevant school sector supports the coordination of jurisdiction-wide roll out.

The evaluation of RRE pilots in Victoria and Queensland found that components of the whole-of-school approach may not have been addressed without the available support of primary prevention and gender equality experts working from education department offices. These experts kept schools 'on track' and supported them to develop strategies that helped leaders address relevant issues as they arose.

There are two key types of roles to consider:

### Internal education sector workforce

The coordination of jurisdiction-wide roll-out of RRE requires intradepartmental coordination across multiple groups and divisions; for example, teams with expertise relating to curriculum, strategic policy and planning, and human resources. To ensure RRE is prioritised as a key initiative and not simply siloed as a curriculum priority, it is useful to establish specific responsibilities and coordination roles – for example, RRE lead out of student wellbeing or inclusion divisions/units. In government school sectors, an executive director should be appointed to coordinate and lead the approach and implementation of RRE. Where possible, identifying and utilising existing structures and systems, such as existing cross-departmental committees, is recommended.

### School implementation workforce

An RRE workforce is required to support implementation of a whole-of-school approach at school level. The level of funding will impact the size of the prevention workforce, as will the geographic size of the jurisdiction. However,

best-practice approaches include a regional workforce that is sufficiently large to support a scaled approach across jurisdictions, with sufficient schools forming part of the initial phase to demonstrate impact and change.

Recruitment for a regional RRE implementation workforce should seek to reach and engage a broad range of applicants with experience in fields including education, primary prevention and gender equality, and response practitioners from domestic, family and sexual violence sectors.

In the readiness phase, it is important to ensure the workforce has the time to upskill and is confident in its skills and knowledge, across both the education sector and primary prevention of gender-based violence, to support school level implementation.

Ensuring that an RRE implementation workforce is in place is fundamental to the effectiveness and success of a phased approach across jurisdictions.

### Key actions

- ✓ Establish or identify existing internal leadership, coordination and governance mechanisms.
- ✓ Establish RRE-specific roles within the government or non-government school sector.
- ✓ Establish an RRE workforce to support implementation of a whole-of-school approach at the school level.
- ✓ Ensure that recruitment for regional implementation staff seeks to reach and engage a broad range of applicants with experience in fields including education, primary prevention and gender equality, and domestic, family and sexual violence sector response practitioners.

## 1.4 Develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) activities

**Monitoring and evaluation is a crucial element of effective RRE planning and implementation. It can provide valuable insights about the design, implementation and outcomes of RRE.** It can also help identify any adjustments or changes needed to ensure RRE remains effective. Monitoring and evaluation provides evidence about the impact of the work and the ways in which RRE is addressing the gendered drivers of violence.

Importantly, strong monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms provide governments with the information necessary to make clear decisions about impact, outcomes and effectiveness of investment.

To be most effective, monitoring and evaluation requires planning and coordination to ensure the collection of data that can inform policy and investment decisions, fulfill reporting obligations and contribute to the growing evidence base about RRE.

There are 5 key stages with 10 actions that should be considered as part of an approach to monitoring and evaluation. These are outlined in Figure 5 below, which is titled with the description 'key actions'.

<b>Frame the evaluation</b>	<b>01 Project plan</b> Develop a project plan and clarify the evaluation objectives.
	<b>02 Stakeholder map</b> Identify who the evaluation is for, and what they need to learn from it.
	<b>03 Develop a program logic model</b> Develop a clear visual representation of the activities, outputs, and change the evaluation is aiming to achieve.
<b>Build a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework</b>	<b>04 Evaluation plan</b> Develop an evaluation plan that outlines the evaluation purpose, key evaluation questions, and key indicators of success.
	<b>05 Data collection plan</b> Develop a data collection plan that identifies what data will be collected, how, when and by whom.
<b>Deliver the evaluation</b>	<b>06 Collect and analyse data</b> Prepare and analyse data collected during the evaluation.
	<b>07 Interpret your results</b> Interpret the data against the measures and evaluation questions.
<b>Learn and disseminate</b>	<b>08 Evaluation report</b> Bring results together into a report and other communication products to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.
	<b>09 Share findings</b> Plan how to share findings with stakeholders and disseminate.
<b>Practical application</b>	<b>10 Use the data</b> Evaluation report and insights to inform ongoing decisions, planning and implementation of RRE.

Figure 5: Key actions required to develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring and evaluation.



**Develop a program logic model early in the evaluation planning stage.** This is important for thinking through and making connections between the inputs, activities and outputs, and the short, medium and long-term outcomes of this work. Support and guidance from those with expertise in evaluation is recommended.

As part of the 2015 Respectful Relationships in Secondary Schools Pilot, a program logic was developed to guide coordination and implementation of the pilot. This example may provide some insights and guidance into what a program logic may look like; however, it is essential that evaluation tools like these are developed in collaboration with experts in evaluation and RRE, to ensure the tools meet the needs of specific jurisdictions.

**The evaluation plan should take a holistic approach to monitoring changes in the drivers of gender-based violence.** The drivers relate to norms, practices and structures (see Figure 6), so all of these aspects should be captured to determine the effectiveness of RRE in addressing the gendered drivers of violence.

**The evaluation plan should identify the indicators and measures of success, and the type(s) of evaluation that will be conducted over the staged roll-out of RRE.** For definitions and considerations please refer to Figure 7.

**Process measures** can help monitor whether activities are being implemented as intended and identify whether adjustments are needed.

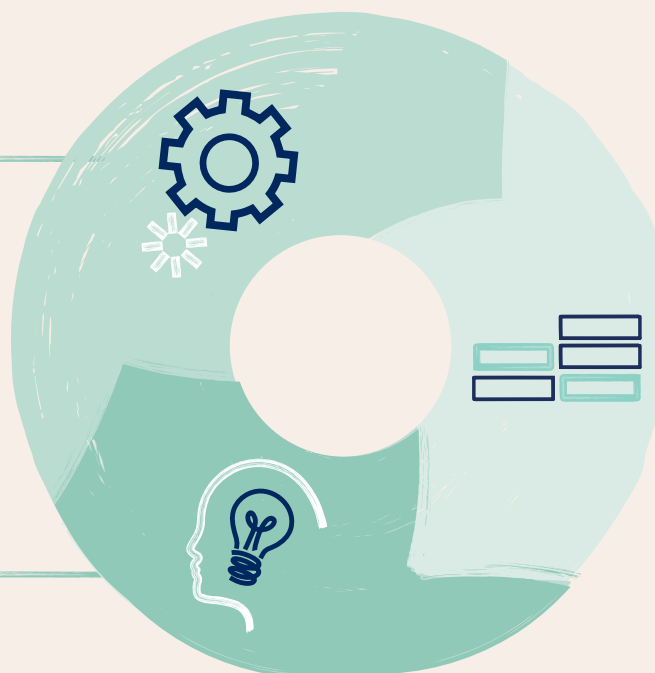
**Outcome measures** articulate how success will be measured in the short, medium and long term, and whether the activities have achieved these. The measures used to monitor progress and outcomes should reflect the context and aims of departments and schools. For example, there may be jurisdictional policy and funding agreements that require specific measures be reported against.

### Practices

Practices in a school community that enact and reinforce norms and attitudes.

### Norms

Attitudes, values and beliefs of school leadership, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, families/carers and students.



### Structures

Formal and informal structures that reinforce and underpin norms and practices.

Figure 6: Examples of norms, practices and structures in relation to schools.

Process measures are often used in formative (process) evaluations, and outcome measures are used in summative (outcome) evaluations. Formative evaluations are usually performed during implementation, so that adaptations can be made along the way. The phased roll-out of RRE across jurisdictions provides opportunity to assess whether activities were implemented as planned, and how learnings can be applied to ensure continuous improvement. Summative evaluations usually take place at the end of a program, and make an overall judgement about the value, worth or significance of the program, against the outcomes and key evaluation questions in the MEL Framework.

Longitudinal approaches to evaluation are also recommended, as they are best placed to provide evidence about the long-term societal and economic benefit of government investment in RRE across jurisdictions. The resourcing needed to support longitudinal evaluation should be factored into the project planning stage and is recommended to ensure:

- continual improvement – providing a mechanism for reflecting on practice to inform future planning and implementation, at the teacher, school, regional and state level. Aligning this with a 5-year staged roll-out across government and non-government school sectors allows for the approach and its various elements to be continually refined and adapted to the diverse needs of schools and regions.
- strengthening the evidence base – including longitudinal evaluation to measure the long-term impacts of RRE to demonstrate the long-term societal and economic benefit of government investment in RRE across jurisdictions.





**The data collection plan** should detail the data sources for each of the process and outcome measures; the methods or tools that will be used to collect data; when data will be collected; how it will be analysed and synthesised; and the relevant roles and responsibilities. The methods and tools used should reflect the context, aims and resources available to departments and schools. Appropriate systems and processes, including ethical and technical, must be in place to support data collection, storage and analysis.

### Key actions

- ✓ Establish school level and jurisdiction-wide evaluation mechanisms.
- ✓ Develop jurisdictional program logics or theories of change to guide roll-out activity.
- ✓ Ensure appropriate investment in ongoing evaluation of RRE.
- ✓ Ensure that students are engaged in evaluation and continual improvement processes.
- ✓ Update practice with evidence from evaluations. This includes adapting content and delivery of RRE to reflect the changing needs of and issues for young people in relation to gender-based violence.
- ✓ Ensure appropriate systems and process, including ethical and technical, are in place to support monitoring, evaluation and learning activities, data collection, storage and analysis.

# Build and monitor an evaluation plan

The following table outlines the considerations in building an evaluation plan.

Element	Description	Prompts
<b>Domain</b> 	Aspirational statement or vision related to RRE.	What are the key domains or focus areas of RRE? What is the vision for each of these focus areas?
<b>Outcomes</b> 	Statement of expected high-level outcomes achievable within the timeframe of RRE implementation.	For each outcome, what does success look like in the short, medium and long term?
<b>Indicators</b> 	Statement about what needs to change in the short, medium and long term to achieve desired outcomes.	For each outcome, what are the indicators that show progress is being made? What is the direction of that change (i.e. should something increase or decrease)?
<b>Measures</b> 	The specific way we measure the size, amount, or degree of change achieved in relation to a specific indicator.	How will each indicator be measured? This is usually a numeric measure, such as a number or percentage. It is helpful to consider what data is already available and accessible, as well as the data gaps that need to be addressed.

## 1.5 Develop a professional learning strategy

Professional development is essential to the success of RRE. Ensure all staff involved in the planning, design and implementation of RRE have the skills and knowledge to understand and support a whole-of-school approach to RRE at a systems and school level. Professional learning must be appropriately planned and resourced to support the depth and longevity of the change processes associated with a whole-of-school approach to RRE.

All school staff have a vital role to play in promoting and role modelling gender equality across the entire school, including those teachers not directly responsible for the delivery of RRE classroom materials. A professional learning strategy that considers the roles of principals, leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, and supports all school staff to understand their roles and responsibilities, is an integral part of the readiness stage. Evidence consistently demonstrates that teachers who have received appropriate professional learning as part of a whole-of-school approach can ensure the safety of students; enhance their own wellbeing and confidence in undertaking prevention work across the school; and ensure the sustainability of progress in preventing gender-based violence.<sup>66</sup>

Prior to rolling out any curriculum, government and non-government school sectors must ensure there is adequate lead time and professional learning available for teachers to ensure they feel confident, safe and supported to deliver RRE curriculum. This best-practice approach ensures trained teachers are well supported to deliver RRE materials to their students. For further information, please refer to *1.7 Central elements of respectful relationships curriculum*).

Evaluations of school-based violence prevention approaches show those that prompt students to identify, question and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and structures that underlie violence were found to be effective. Based on the evidence, professional development for teachers should focus not only on the underlying drivers of violence against women, but also on teacher confidence in facilitating a safe space for conversations about inequitable attitudes, behaviours and structures.

Professional learning should also include strategies to support teachers to tailor delivery in response to the diverse learning needs of students – including students with disabilities, students who speak a language other than English as a first language, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and LGBTIQ+ students.

Topics covered in professional development sessions should include:

- introduction to violence against women and its drivers
- the whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education
- contributing to a whole-of-school approach via classroom activity
- the importance of setting up a safe space
- intersectionality in teaching practice
- using a strengths-based approach
- the importance of promoting gender equity through RRE
- applying a gender lens to teaching and curriculum
- protective interrupting and other important skills for teachers
- RRE content and activities.

Evidence indicates that effective delivery of professional learning (PL) on RRE requires multiple sessions. Ideally sessions should be delivered as face-to-face learning opportunities; however, as this is not always possible, a mixed method approach that includes delivery of content online and face to face can also support professional learning. When delivering content online, delivery should capitalise on the benefits of digital mediums such as scale and reach and avoid trying to replicate the intensity or length of face-to-face activities. Digital and face-to-face opportunities should complement – not replicate – each other.

Professional learning should:<sup>67</sup>

- provide an opportunity for school staff to reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes (norms) about gender and the influence of these on their teaching practice
- prompt exploration of how teaching practice and materials reinforce gender norms and respectful relationships
- help teachers to integrate ideas about gender equality into the curriculum across all key learning areas<sup>68</sup>
- guide staff in identifying and addressing violence based on social, cultural and gender norms among students
- guide staff in how to sensitively and appropriately receive and address students' disclosures of violence.

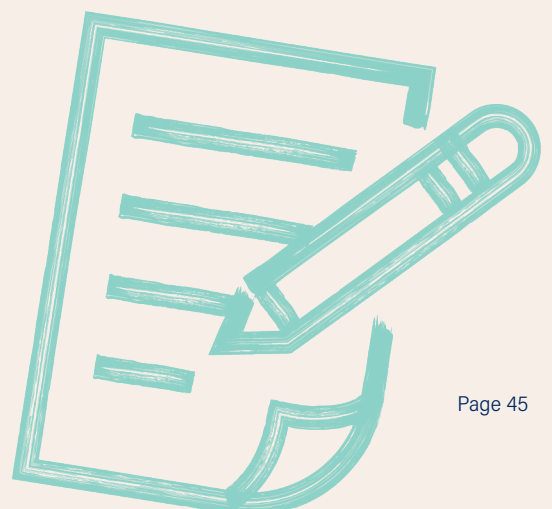
Professional learning builds confidence, awareness, knowledge and commitment to the prevention of gender-based violence. It also provides the opportunity to develop skills and pedagogical approaches that engage students in a safe learning environment. At a more practical level, professional learning enables teachers to become familiar with the curriculum resource and begin the planning process.

Consistent with studies on RRE in schools, several factors support teacher confidence and professional satisfaction in teaching respectful relationships education.<sup>69</sup> These factors include:

- adequate professional learning
- easy to administer, evidence-based, curriculum resources
- adequate time for planning
- best-practice implementation and time for reflection
- school and community support for the initiative.

Although training is a useful approach to professional learning in schools, consideration should be given to other adult learning methods, particularly as RRE implementation unfolds. Other methods could include mentoring, communities of practice or cross-school networks as an important part of ongoing professional learning. The RRE pilots in both primary and secondary schools noted the importance of having adequate time to plan, reflect and embed the curriculum alongside comprehensive professional learning as crucial for all teachers and stakeholders.

**Materials and approaches that support the implementation of the professional learning strategy need to show consistency and alignment with the evidence base. It is important that curriculum authorities and sectors consider resourcing and adequately plan for school staff to attend ongoing professional learning.**



Overview of professional learning for all school staff

All staff should receive professional learning on foundational concepts such as:

- gender equality
- primary prevention
- intersectionality
- how to embed a gender lens across all areas of the curriculum
- impacts of gender-based violence
- roles played by the education system and RRE in preventing gender-based violence
- responding to disclosures of violence.

- All staff have responsibilities and must understand their role in promoting and role modelling respect and gender equality:
- relevant school policies and processes
  - communication with families and community
  - safe responses to disclosures of violence.

School leaders need to be supported with professional learning that covers concepts such as understanding the roles played by the education system in preventing gender-based violence; harnessing their role as a leader in driving cultural change; assessing school readiness; understanding how RRE links to broader education polices, and responding to backlash and resistance.

School staff participation

Professional learning content areas

	School leaders	Teaching staff responsible for the delivery of RRE curriculum	All other teaching staff	Non-teaching staff
Leading cultural change to support implementation of a whole-of-school approach.	✓			
Understanding the key concepts related to RRE, including the evidence base, aims, methods, benefits and long-term goals of RRE, and the skills required for responding to disclosures.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Professional learning specifically designed for teachers on delivering RRE curriculum in a safe and supportive environment.	✓	✓	✓	
Skills and knowledge in applying a critical gender and power lens across curriculum areas and content.	✓		✓	

Figure 7: Outline of RRE professional learning content areas and school staff participation.



**Teaching staff** who are responsible for the delivery of RRE-specific curriculum materials will require professional learning related to the content and delivery of teaching and learning materials. The relationship between the classroom teacher and their students is essential in the context of facilitating safe and supportive discussions on topics such as gender and violence. As a result, attention to both the learning material as well as pedagogical approaches is an essential component of professional learning. Trained and supported teachers, rather than external providers, are best placed to deliver RRE content to their students.

It is important to note that the level of funding to support school level implementation of RRE, ie the workforce, will impact on the levels of professional learning available to schools.

All schools sectors must also consider geographic location, available resourcing, cultural considerations and safety of staff when developing and delivering professional learning. These considerations should form part of initial planning and financial resourcing to ensure the specific approach is able to be adequately resourced and meets the needs and expectations of school communities.

## Responding to disclosures of violence

Given the high rates of gender-based violence in the community and the highly feminised workforce of the education system, it is likely that many staff within schools will also be victim-survivors of gender-based violence. Ensuring that there are appropriate resources and support services available is critical to the wellbeing and safety of all school staff.

Many RRE pilot schools in Victoria noted increased disclosures from students and staff experiencing, and in some cases perpetrating, violence. Increased disclosures indicate an increased awareness about gender-based violence, as well as that staff and students felt their schools were supportive environments where sensitive topics could be safely shared and discussed.

As part of the professional learning strategy, schools should be supported to develop staff capacity to safely respond to disclosures of violence. Importantly, educators understand the boundaries of their roles and have a clear understanding of school policy/process for when it is necessary to refer to relevant experts outside of education. This may include engaging gender-based violence response experts to inform guidance and capacity building for staff to appropriately respond to disclosures, and resourcing existing services to provide appropriate responses to younger age groups. Professional learning focused on responding to student disclosures should be delivered prior to classroom delivery of teaching and learning materials.

## Key actions

- ✓ School sectors develop a professional learning strategy, that can be adapted to meet the needs of schools context.
- ✓ Ensure the strategy is evidence based and developed by those who are leading the roll-out of RRE across their jurisdictions and/or school sector. Collaboration with prevention experts is advisable to ensure content is evidence based.
- ✓ Provide appropriate resources, funding and support to schools to ensure all staff can engage with professional learning on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ Ensure comprehensive professional learning opportunities are provided to all staff prior to the roll-out of RRE.
- ✓ Ensure school staff are provided with ongoing support and opportunities by RRE workforce for learning and consolidation of skills.
- ✓ Ensure professional learning supports appropriate and safe responses to disclosures, including by establishing mechanisms for referral to domestic and/or family violence response agencies with appropriate expertise.

## 1.6 Plan for a phased approach to RRE implementation

A whole-of-school approach to RRE may be new territory for some schools. Part of the challenge of implementing a whole-of-school approach to RRE is that it is a significant change process for schools to undertake, requiring investment of time and human resources, particularly during its early stages. Pre-planning, school readiness, engagement of the whole-of-school community, and capacity building and planning prior to implementation are essential considerations for state-wide delivery.

Government and non-government delivery of RRE should be staggered over several years (suggested minimum of 5 years) to allow time for school readiness, internal collaboration, and workforce recruitment and capacity building – at department and school level – to support further system and policy development, and to ensure that a whole-of-school approach is integrated systematically into all schools.

### Engage and work across a range of education divisions

The siloing of RRE to one particular division or unit is a barrier to internal collaboration and coordination of RRE.

Ideally a range of divisions within government and non-government school sectors are engaged to ensure that RRE becomes part of, and integrated across, the education system. While the work may be led out of a particular division, it is important that areas such as those responsible for curriculum development, education policy and reform, school-wide behaviours and bullying prevention are actively engaged, and understand how their division can contribute to preventing gender-based violence.

Mapping and alignment of existing state-based or school-based learning frameworks and strategies is also an important part of planning for a phased approach.

## Approaches to working across educational divisions

Whilst each school sector and jurisdiction used different terminology to describe departments/ teams/units, the following list outlines some areas that should be engaged with in the planning process for roll out RRE:

- School improvement
- Inclusion (students with disabilities)
- Cultural integrity
- Positive Behaviour for Learning/ School Wide Positive Behaviour Support
- Safe and supportive schools policy (Health Promotion team)
- Social and Emotional Learning / Health curriculum areas (within Teaching and Learning team)
- Health Promotion (eSafety)
- Family and community engagement
- Transition and careers
- People and performance departments
- Child protection and mandatory reporting
- Data and analytics
- Student Services (students with disability, psychologists, social workers, support for gender diverse students)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education teams
- Work Health and Safety (WHS) and occupational violence
- Workplace Management

## Recognise and resource RRE school leaders as higher duty roles

Evaluation identified that having a designated RRE leader (much like a school numeracy or literacy leader) is an enabling factor for successful school level implementation. A designated lead helps to emphasise the priority of the work, support everyone across the school community to implement it, and support the integration of RRE across all aspects of the school. The resourcing of higher duties roles, such as an RRE lead, should be part of initial planning and budgeting and take a long-term approach. The level of FTE for this role will vary depending on the size of the school, but to ensure RRE is prioritised, there should be a dedicated amount of time allocated out of the classroom each week/fortnight. As with other school leader roles, allocation of planning and coordination time (in addition to existing classroom planning time) is essential.

## Commence roll-out with an opt-in model

School readiness and support from appointed school leaders is essential for uptake of RRE. An opt-in approach allows schools to assess their readiness and nominate themselves for school participation in the initial year/s of implementation. A staged roll-out may occur across school regions to allow for consistency and support. The planned roll-out should involve capping the number of participating schools per phase according to the available resourcing and depending of the resourcing and capacity of the school sector.

## Give schools time to prepare

Regardless of the school sector – government or non-government – schools require adequate time to prepare for implementation of a whole-of-school approach. Our Watch RRE pilots showed that support and guidance is required by RRE project leads leading the roll-out of RRE for approximately 6 months prior to the start of respectful relationships curriculum being delivered in classrooms. This includes adequate time for staff to access and engage in professional learning, as well as mapping to understand where and how RRE will be integrated. Schools must be provided with guidance on how best to plan for a whole-of-school approach, including the provision of existing evidence-based tools and resources to assist in self-assessment and action planning. The [Our Watch RRE Toolkit](#) is a useful resource in outlining the work required to plan for successful school level implementation.

A 6-month lead time gives schools the opportunity to establish crucial community partnerships, prepare for the integration of RRE into their school planning cycle, allocate adequate resources, and conduct a review of current practices across all 6 components of a whole-of-school approach.

### Key actions

- ✓ Develop a plan for an opt-in, phased roll-out, including by capping the number of participating schools per phase according to the resourcing and capacity of the Department of Education.
- ✓ Develop internal coordination mechanisms between relevant divisions within Departments of Education to ensure work to address the gendered drivers of violence is integrated across the education system.
- ✓ Provide schools with guidance on how best to plan for a whole-of-school approach, including the provision of existing evidence-based tools and resources to assist in self-assessment and action planning.<sup>70</sup>
- ✓ Support schools to develop a whole-of-school implementation action plan.
- ✓ Establish and resource a designated RRE lead within each participating school.
- ✓ Support the establishment of implementation teams consisting of teaching, wellbeing and leadership staff.
- ✓ Create mechanisms to meaningfully engage young people in co-design of RRE learning experiences.

## 1.7. Include central elements of respectful relationships education in curriculum development

Teaching and learning materials that enable students to identify, question and **challenge the drivers of gender-based violence in age-appropriate ways, across all year levels, are essential to RRE.**

In line with best-practice curriculum development, curriculum materials should be sequential, evidence-based, developed by experts, supported by a whole-of-school approach and taught every year throughout schooling, using consistent, age-appropriate messages across all age groups.

### Development of respectful relationships curriculum should include the following central elements:

- 01** Address the drivers of gender-based violence.
- 02** Deliver RRE as part of a whole-of-school approach
- 03** Start early and deliver age-appropriate, continued learning.
- 04** Take an intersectional approach.
- 05** Emphasise participatory design of materials and peer learning in delivery.

## 01

### Address the drivers of gender-based violence

For RRE to successfully contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence, it is critical that the curriculum includes learning objectives and content specifically focused on gender and power – the underlying drivers of gender-based violence. Age-appropriate teaching of relationships and sexuality education that has a gender lens can support students to understand and critically analyse gender roles, stereotypes, norms and relations.<sup>71</sup>

School-based prevention should focus on increasing young people's critical thinking skills so that they can recognise, question and challenge structures, beliefs, attitudes, norms and practices that uphold gender inequality.<sup>72</sup> Prevention initiatives should aim to challenge gendered inequalities that can be faced by children, young people and also staff in schools. Aspects of the school environment through which gender inequality and violence can manifest, such as policies and school governance arrangements, should be transformed to enhance respectful relationships between students, staff and the broader school community.<sup>73</sup>

Young people who endorse more gender equitable attitudes have lower odds of reporting several different types of violence perpetration.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, widely and firmly held gendered norms have real-world consequences for young people. Numerous studies suggest that individuals who endorse traditional gender role beliefs, for example about the roles of men and women with respect to decision-making and authority, have an increased risk of both perpetrating and experiencing dating violence. Programs that aim to identify, question and challenge the drivers of gender-based violence are more effective than those that do not.<sup>75</sup>



School-based initiatives that address these drivers have been found to contribute to an increase in students' ability to identify rigid gender roles and violent behaviour, as well as a decrease in students' intention to use violence in relationships.

Gender inequality is present across all areas of society. Content that enables students to identify, question and challenge the drivers of gender-based violence is a critical element in promoting equality and preventing gender-based violence across the curriculum. It is essential that teaching materials are reviewed and revised by education and prevention experts as part of Phase 1 of the blueprint to ensure that approaches to teaching RRE in each jurisdiction are evidence based and explicitly teach content that addresses the drivers of gender-based violence across all year levels. As various jurisdictions across Australia have developed RRE learning materials, there is an opportunity to learn and draw from existing materials. Those reviewing teaching materials should have strong expertise in prevention of gender-based violence to ensure that any materials used across jurisdictions and school sectors are aligned to the evidence base.

## 02

### **Deliver RRE as part of a whole-of-school approach**

A whole-of-school approach to RRE understands that schools are not only educational institutions but also workplaces and community hubs. It involves engaging students, school staff, families and the wider school community in the process of cultural change. It undertakes actions across the school in an ongoing, coordinated and mutually reinforcing way. A whole-of-school approach helps to embed and sustain positive cultural change.

RRE is a shared responsibility between schools and families/carers, and therefore a strong partnership is vital to the success of a whole-of-school approach to RRE. Regular, evidence-based and accessible communications about the role, aim, and benefits of and delivery approach to RRE are an important part of ensuring families/care givers are engaged and informed about RRE, and enables them to reinforce and support gender equitable messages outside the school environment.

**A whole-of-school approach requires commitment from leaders in schools and departments of education to assess and improve current culture in relation to gender equality and respectful relationships by:**

- driving and championing change
- prioritising resources
- embedding RRE into annual implementation and strategic plans, including measures of success.





This approach also focuses on school readiness and ongoing capability building through the provision of professional learning, and through ensuring gender equality is embedded in pedagogical practices and curriculum materials.

As part of the whole-of-school approach, schools are encouraged to consider how RRE can be linked to other work within their school, such as Reconciliation Action Plans, cultural safety and inclusive education initiatives. By doing so, schools can address other forms of disadvantage and privilege that intersect with gender inequality, which will contribute to preventing violence against all women.

Transformative cultural change is often associated with a level of discomfort. Leaders who drive this work can sometimes experience perceived or actual resistance to change. This discomfort presents an opportunity for learning and also demonstrates that the school community is engaged. A well-managed response to this resistance can be an effective part of the process.

It is also critical that schools work with relevant local community organisations to enable and support staff to respond safely and appropriately to disclosures of experiences of violence (of any kind) from staff and students.

In relation to the teaching and learning component of a whole-of-school approach, evidence tells us that for RRE to be an effective mechanism to prevent gender-based violence, content must be explicitly taught across all year levels on an ongoing, consistent basis and delivered by classroom teachers. As previously noted in *1.2 Identify mechanisms for coordination and collaboration*, well-supported and adequately trained classroom teachers are best placed to deliver classroom content on respectful relationships to their students.

## 03

### **Start early and deliver age-appropriate, continued learning**

Young people become aware of differences in gendered roles at a young age, and are impacted by the gendered stereotypes and limits they place on themselves and others.<sup>76</sup> In line with best-practice evidence, age-appropriate content delivery should commence as early as possible and should enable students to build knowledge incrementally as they progress through year levels.<sup>77</sup>

Education interventions that particularly address gender inequality and the drivers of gender-based violence have demonstrated positive impacts on students' knowledge of and attitudes towards these topics, including at a young age.<sup>78</sup> For example, in RRE pilots in Queensland and Victoria, RRE taught to Year 1 and 2 students showed positive results, including changes in students' attitudes around gender roles and activities, and an enhanced sense of personal wellbeing.<sup>79</sup>

RRE must have a 'home' within the curriculum. Considerations for how this time can be found in the existing timetable must be addressed so that teachers are able to adequately plan for and teach evidence-based RRE. This can often be more challenging in middle and senior schools, as students move between classes and do not spend a significant portion of time with a dedicated classroom teacher, as is generally the case in primary schools.

The Australian Curriculum 9.0, a framework for levels Foundation to Year 10, authorises schools to implement RRE through the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area. Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum includes updates and significant reform to the HPE learning area to strengthen content related to the teaching of respectful relationships, sexuality and consent education across F–Year 10.

However, the curriculum does not provide guidance on taking a gendered approach to the content or outline how to integrate the delivery of RRE content across multiple curriculum domains to avoid creating an RRE silo.

The siloing of RRE content to the HPE learning area risks placing the onus for teaching respectful relationships curriculum on HPE teachers only, and acts as a barrier to a whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence. Given Relationships and Sexuality is just one of 12 focus areas in the HPE learning area, it is important to recognise the limitations associated with teaching RRE solely through the HPE learning area.

Curriculum materials should support the delivery of gender equality and respectful relationships materials across all curriculum areas, not only those pertaining to health, wellbeing, and social and emotional capability. The content of other areas of learning, such as science, geography and literature can, where relevant, provide mutually reinforcing messages across different teaching and learning activities. For example, when considering leaders throughout history, content may include celebrating women leaders and also unpack the barriers and lack of diversity in many aspects of leadership, and the impact this has on the policies we see across society today.

Teachers can and do find ways to highlight and proactively address the drivers of gender-based violence through their delivery of learning materials and in all their interactions with students. This approach to embedding learning across multiple areas, topics and activities supports the development of deeper understandings among students and enhances the potential for cultural transformation.

## 04

### Take an intersectional approach

An intersectional approach recognises and values the contexts and cohorts of every school community. It is a way of seeing the world, based not only on their gender, but also based on other aspects of their identity, including but not limited to race, religion, ability and sexuality. An intersectional approach helps us to focus on the intersecting and interlinking forms of discrimination and oppression that contribute to the gendered drivers of violence.<sup>80</sup>


An intersectional approach does not mean we no longer use a gendered lens, but rather that we see gender as always interacting and intersecting with other forms of discrimination, institutional policies and practices.

In addition to education settings, schools are community hubs and are a reflection of our community. As a result, there are a range of perspectives, beliefs and attitudes that intersect and need to be considered when developing curriculum, including the need to ensure that prevention and gender-equality messages meet the needs and are reflective of community. Young people in education settings may be negotiating language barriers, family priorities, intergenerational differences, and experiences of racism and discrimination. RRE is about creating safe spaces where young people feel comfortable and empowered to critically reflect on concepts such as gender, sexuality, discrimination and equality. Government and non-government school sectors do not need to be experts in all communities, but they do need to ensure that teachers are supported to understand how to create safe environments and have respectful conversations about community and culture in positive, meaningful and respectful ways. Engaging with specialist external organisations within school communities or at the state level can ensure

that RRE curriculum delivery is reflective and inclusive of all members of the school community.

For example, when developing RRE curriculum, it is essential that teaching and learning materials capture the diversity of young peoples' identities and relationships, including how power and privilege play out and can impact all relationships. Similarly, the experiences and needs of young people with disabilities can often be excluded from content related to RRE, including consent and sexuality education. RRE should promote respectful relationships between people with and without disabilities, and address the impacts that ableism may have on relationships, and on attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities.<sup>81</sup>

It is essential that initiatives promoting respectful relationships are relevant to, inclusive and representative of, and accessible for all young people.



An intersectional approach to RRE is a way of **seeing the different ways in which people experience the world**, based not only on their gender, but also based on other aspects of their identity.

# 05

## Emphasise participatory design of materials and peer learning in delivery

Participatory curriculum design, in which young people contribute to the development of materials and provide feedback on them, tends to promote content that is relevant and relatable to students.<sup>82</sup> Developed in this way, content is likely to be responsive to students' experiences of gender inequality and how these experiences intersect with and compound other forms of discrimination, such as ethnicity, sexual identity and disability.<sup>83</sup> Creative approaches to learning, based on using drama and art to express responses to key concepts, have been found to be more beneficial than didactic methods.<sup>84</sup>

Peer-led learning is an important facet of impactful curriculum delivery.<sup>85</sup> A study of R4Respect, a violence prevention program delivered in schools and community agencies in the Northern Territory and Queensland, revealed that 92% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that they should be leading learning on respectful relationships.<sup>86</sup> However, a peer learning approach should be undertaken carefully and be complementary to classroom teaching and learning within a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education. Peer educators require support from teachers and other prevention experts such as social workers to ensure that they can respond appropriately to student disclosures of violence.<sup>87</sup>

Principles that support the meaningful participation of young people in their learning should be applied to all areas of their education. Young people are experts in their own lives. The development of teaching and learning curriculums that value their diverse experiences can effectively inform and shape their learning. It can also enable opportunities to collaborate with adults to create a shared vision for their learning.

## Apply a gender lens across all areas of the curriculum

Gender norms and stereotypes can influence the school curriculum. Finding opportunities to reinforce messages conveyed through the explicit teaching of RRE across other learning areas, such as Literacy, English, Humanities, and Social Sciences and the Arts, ensures students have mutually reinforcing learning experiences across multiple domains.

### Additional curriculum considerations

#### Social and emotional learning and RRE: an integrated approach

As a solution to timetabling issues, some jurisdictions have embedded the teaching of RRE through existing social and emotional learning (SEL) sessions. SEL programs in schools support young people to build their skills in help-seeking, emotional literacy, problem solving and empathy, and provide a good foundation and safe learning environment to discuss concepts such as consent, power and gender-based violence. Should such an approach be considered, it is essential that any SEL curriculum includes a 'gender lens' and includes content specifically related to the gendered drivers of violence. Without an explicit focus on the gendered drivers of violence, a program or approach may be an effective social and emotional learning program, but not an effective approach to preventing gender-based violence. Effective respectful relationships programs should include content that develops skills and understanding relating to respectful relationships in the context of gender and power, in addition to social and emotional learning.

#### Consent and comprehensive sexuality education

In recent years, the need for consent and comprehensive sexuality education in our schools has received a great deal of focus and interest. Updates have been made to the Australian Curriculum to include this content.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) seeks to equip and empower young people with the knowledge, skills and understandings they need to promote their own sexual health, wellbeing and safety, and to respect the rights and safety of others. Health and wellbeing benefits of comprehensive sexuality education include a reduction in coerced sexual activity and sexual assault, and improvement in young people's capacity to actively communicate and negotiate consensual sexual activity.<sup>88</sup>

As part of a comprehension, age-appropriate approach to RRE, age-appropriate sexuality education should begin in early primary school, and build incrementally throughout a young person education, allowing them to develop the skills and knowledge required to make informed,

consensual, informed decisions about their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, human rights and safety, which in-turn supports the creation of healthy, equitable and respectful relationships.

Consent and comprehensive sexuality education include some crossover elements with RRE. However, gender, power and control lenses are not consistently applied to this content. The teaching of consent, sexuality, relationships and gender relations should be part of a balanced and developmentally staged whole-of-school approach to RRE, and be delivered by confident, skilled and supported classroom teachers. Teaching respectful relationships and sexuality education in this way contributes to the primary prevention of gender-based violence.

## Case study

### Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships

This case study highlights a curriculum resource that explicitly addresses the drivers of gender-based violence, in age-appropriate ways across all year levels.

The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials were developed by experts in consultation with teachers, students and parents or carers to support students to develop social and emotional skills and respectful relationships, including a focus on consent and the prevention of gender-based violence. These resources are designed to be taught by the classroom teacher as part of ongoing learning from Foundation to Year 10 and are designed to align with the Victorian Curriculum.

The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning resources cover 8 topics of social and emotional learning across all levels of primary and secondary education. Years 11 and 12 include topics of goal setting, time management and safer socialising in place of Emotional literacy.

#### Teaching and learning materials topics, Foundation-Year 10

Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6	Topic 7	Topic 8
Emotional literacy	Personal and cultural strengths	Positive coping	Problem solving	Stress management	Help-seeking	Gender norms and stereotypes	Positive gender relations

Figure 8: Outline of the Victorian Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships Teaching and Learning Materials.



## Protective behaviours

Protective behaviours education is critical, particularly when aimed at supporting children around age-appropriate conversations on consent, and identifying and responding to inappropriate or harmful behaviours. This learning should commence in early childhood with concepts of consent and bodily autonomy, safety and rights. There are some connections and crossover between protective behaviours, RRE and sexuality education, for example in consent education. However, when planning for RRE it is essential that respectful relationships education is clearly defined and understood as an initiative to prevent gender-based violence and promote respectful relationships between young people. This is to ensure the focus remains on addressing the gendered drivers of violence, and a whole-of-school approach that includes student and teacher learning as well as a focus on the structures and norms that underpin gender inequality.



## Key actions

- ✓ Government and non-government school sectors conduct a mapping and review activity that identifies how RRE is taught across learning areas and the learning materials being used within their jurisdiction. The review should note content that explicitly addresses the drivers of gender-based violence, across all year levels in age-appropriate ways, that is embedded in the curriculum.
- ✓ Update teaching and learning materials in collaboration with violence prevention experts following the review, if necessary.
- ✓ Government and non-government school sectors recognise the importance of dedicated and ongoing delivery of explicit RRE focussed lessons through advice and guidance on how it can be integrated into timetabling.
- ✓ Identify opportunities across the curriculum to integrate a gender lens.
- ✓ Identify opportunities to teach RRE learning content outside of the HPE learning area, ensuring that RRE learning is not 'othered' or offered as a 'one-off' add-on.
- ✓ Departments of Education develop key messages about the curriculum that can be utilised by schools to inform and engage with families/ carers and the broader school community.



## Delivery of RRE curriculum materials

The curriculum structure and timetabling of explicit teaching time for RRE across primary and secondary schools differs. Schools need to consider how best to integrate RRE content into the timetable, particularly at secondary school level. Curriculum crowding remains an ongoing issue. For RRE to be successful, this must be addressed at a departmental level to ensure schools can viably provide a comprehensive, ongoing approach to RRE timetabling.

Well-supported and confident teachers play a crucial role in helping young people to navigate and understand the complexities of gender-based violence. Research consistently shows that students who are involved in programs addressing gender-based violence find strong teacher-student relationships play a major role in fostering their engagement and learning.<sup>89</sup> Based on this, ideally the classroom or homeroom teacher should be supported by school leadership and with ongoing professional learning to deliver explicit RRE content to their students. This method supports the whole-of-school approach, as it better enables classroom teachers to be able to integrate RRE content and reinforce messages within broader classroom activities and learning areas; better ensures student wellbeing and safety; creates opportunities for deeper discussions; and contributes to increased credibility of the learning.<sup>90</sup>

Due to a lack of a coordinated approach to RRE across jurisdictions some schools in some jurisdictions tend to outsource the delivery of concepts relating to RRE, such as consent education, to external private providers who provide student-facing short-term programs or one-off sessions. External private providers can add important nuance to the delivery of RRE through specific and culturally relevant expertise (such as local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Elders, Faith and Community Leaders); they may understand the local community context well and be well-placed to advise school staff on appropriate referral pathways for students. Although skilled external private providers have specialist knowledge, however, they are unlikely to have the same impact on the wider school culture as teachers who know their students and families well and can ensure safe and supportive learning environments. Any use of external private providers needs to complement and support existing teaching and learning, not replace it.<sup>91</sup>

**As part of a best-practice whole-of-school approach to delivering RRE classroom lessons, external private providers should reinforce and endorse teacher-led learning and be a supplementary component of a broader whole-of-school approach.**

PHASE 2

# 2

## Support implementation of a whole-of-school approach

### 2.1 Ensure strong leadership and commitment

The role of school leaders in facilitating a whole-of-school approach is critical. In addition to driving school policy change, leaders should 'till' the cultural soil by endorsing and encouraging conversations about relationships, equality, and gender and sexual diversity.<sup>92</sup> This central role of school leaders requires ongoing specialist support from the RRE implementation workforce. Simply teaching the concepts of RRE is not enough. Schools must actively role model and promote gender equality, inclusivity and respect in everything they do – from their leadership structures, uniform policies, teacher roles and responsibilities, behavioural expectations and procedures, to the make-up of their school board. These elements all have an impact on how the school operates and, ultimately, the culture it promotes.

Schools must **actively role model and promote gender equality, inclusivity and respect** in everything they do.

#### Key actions

- ✓ School leaders, supported by government and non-government school sectors, prioritise RRE and ensure it is embedded in school goals, actions and outcomes e.g. RRE is included in Annual and Strategic Plans and include measures.
- ✓ School leaders review existing timetables and support teaching staff to integrate the teaching of RRE in the current timetable. This may look different for every school; however, it should allow for dedicated time on a regular basis to teach RRE, e.g. through social and emotional learning. This is in addition to HPE curriculum.
- ✓ As part of whole-of-school readiness, principals and school leaders demonstrate their commitment to RRE through attending professional learning, to support them to lead cultural change and plan for implementation of a whole-of-school approach.

## 2.2 Develop a communication strategy

A key part of RRE is building awareness of what primary prevention is and why it is an important part of the education system. To support this, it is recommended that a communications strategy be developed by those involved in funding and implementing RRE, government and non-government sectors.

Departments and their communications experts can work together to develop clear, engaging and informative messaging based on best-practice communications strategies and tools. These strategies will support and enable clear and consistent messaging about the aims, outcomes, methods and benefits of RRE, as well as anticipate and respond to any likely misunderstandings or misinformation.

The communications strategy should support guidance and messaging at various levels for different purposes. Please refer to Figure 9.

<b>Jurisdiction-wide level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a whole-of-government/multi-departmental program to deliver messaging to the community about the prevention of violence against women, to assist broad community engagement with, and support for, respectful relationships education.</li> <li>Engage in dialogue with stakeholders (such as parents' groups, principals' associations, education unions, and gender-based violence response and primary prevention sectors) about why schools undertake respectful relationships education, what is involved, and the expected results.</li> <li>Consider media reporting of positive change stories and outcome data.</li> </ul>
<b>Government or non-government executive service level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide communications guidance that includes, but is not limited to, wellbeing and inclusion, curriculum, school program support and regional services.</li> <li>This guidance should also extend to pre-empting and proactively managing potential or perceived backlash and resistance to RRE.</li> <li>In Government school sectors, ensure executive directors in each unit understand their role in advocating and supporting schools to embed a whole-of-school approach.</li> </ul>
<b>School level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a coordinated and planned-out strategy that highlights how and when to engage across the lifespan of RRE, rather than a one-off communication when RRE is implemented.</li> <li>Include information about the aims and methods of respectful relationships education, which can then be readily incorporated into school newsletters, online communications and family information nights.</li> <li>Tailor RRE communications materials for schools to ensure they are culturally relevant, and to encourage families/carers to engage with the whole-of-school approach and process.</li> <li>Ensure mechanisms are in place to actively engage students in the development of communications/key messages.</li> </ul>
<b>Families and local community level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families are in integral part of the whole-of-school approach to RRE. Strategies to engage and communicate in an ongoing manner with families should form part of the school readiness phase of implementation.</li> <li>Communication with families can provide an opportunity for schools to learn, tailor implementation and anticipate any resistance.</li> <li>Develop guidance and messaging that can be used by schools and principals to support communications with the broader school community.</li> </ul>

Figure 9: Outline of audiences to be considered as part of RRE communications planning and messaging.

### Key actions

- ✓ Develop communications and engagement strategies for government, media and broader community stakeholders on respectful relationships education, including strategies and messaging around responding to backlash and resistance.
- ✓ Support schools to develop school-specific communications strategies to engage and inform all school staff and local communities.

This includes ensuring RRE is part of federal, state and territory prevention strategies and budgets; maintaining and developing an RRE workforce; and continuously integrating findings and learnings into current approaches – all of which requires significant coordination and collaboration.

**Supporting schools to understand the societal issue of gender-based violence and the role of the school system in preventing such violence is an important piece of work that requires ongoing communication and collaboration with schools.**

## 2.3. Support the roll-out of RRE

There is significant work required to embed RRE across the school environment. The RRE implementation workforce has an important role to play. Implementation support will vary across individual schools; however, the support required could include:

- ongoing professional learning
- facilitating or building capacity in undertaking whole-of-school assessments
- establishing communities of practice or learning networks
- sharing communications strategies and messages to support the promotion of RRE to the school community
- guiding appropriate responses to disclosures, resistance and collecting data.

Ongoing commitment, vision and funding to RRE is essential for school level implementation. Governments must continue to advocate, promote and resource RRE as a key mechanism for the prevention of gender-based violence across all school sectors.

### Key actions

- ✓ Establish communities of practice, or utilise existing networks, to provide school staff with the opportunity to engage with and seek support, guidance and knowledge from other school staff. This has proven to be effective in maintaining momentum.
- ✓ Schools develop an action plan with the support of the regional RRE implementation workforce to work towards embedding RRE across the school community. It is important that any plans developed include realistic expectations and goals, and enable schools to strive for best-practice and celebrate success.
- ✓ RRE implementation workforce develops a regional annual calendar for professional learning that enables schools to support all staff to attend professional learning sessions to build their capacity.

## Resistance and backlash to RRE

Resistance and backlash are anticipated responses to any change process and are a common challenge faced by initiatives that aim to prevent gender-based violence<sup>93</sup>. A strategic approach to managing resistance and backlash is to expect it to occur and to proactively plan to address and minimise it.

In many instances, resistance can largely be linked to misinformation or misunderstandings; however, some communities may also feel that the nature of some prevention initiatives contravenes their values or cultural and religious beliefs. It is important to engage with school communities very early in the process of planning for respectful relationships education, to ensure community members are well informed and that they have opportunities to express and work through any concerns they may have.

A critical tool for addressing backlash and resistance is strategic, evidence-based social change messaging. A communications strategy is an effective mechanism to minimise resistance and backlash. This should include simple and clear messages that connect to the evidence and reinforce commitments to address gender inequality.

For example, strategies could involve building parental and community understanding of the aims, benefits and methods of RRE, including the need for age-appropriate teaching and learning materials; why it is important that RRE begins in primary school; and that this learning scaffolds children and young people's abilities and understanding around issues of consent and respect across different relationships, whether friendships or intimate relationships.

**Knowing that you'll meet resistance and what it looks like is a great start to being prepared.**

To manage resistance and backlash, it may be helpful to express the importance of respectful relationships education to school communities by using a relatable analogy, such as the following example:



**“We do not expect Grade 1 or 2 students to be able to complete advanced mathematics without first understanding basic number concepts. Students are taught mathematics concepts in age-appropriate ways, such as basic number concepts in their early years of schooling. This knowledge is then built on throughout their education, so that eventually they have the skills to understand more complex mathematics concepts, such as algebra or complex fractions.**

**RRE follows the same principle. It provides age-appropriate learning about respectful relationships from an early age and then incrementally builds on this learning in age-appropriate ways to support more comprehensive respectful relationship and sexuality education, such as affirmative consent in intimate relationships in later years.”**

Understanding and responding to backlash and resistance should also form part of professional learning for all school staff, including teachers and principals, so that all school staff are aware that backlash and resistance may arise and have strategies to mitigate and respond. It is also recommended that schools develop resources to provide parents and guardians, which outline key messages and learning outcomes in each year.

The specialist violence prevention sector has done a great deal of work in developing resources and tools to help support stakeholders to minimise and respond to resistance and backlash.



# 3

## PHASE 3

# Sustain RRE to achieve long-term change

## 3.1 Maintain momentum

RRE should be embedded into the education system in perpetuity rather than a time-limited policy intervention. Therefore, measures should be taken to ensure this work continues beyond policy, budget and election cycles. The current national policy environment creates a sound foundation to implement RRE across Australia. In many states and territories, further prioritisation and investment are needed to see the intensive mobilisation required for this scale of reform. RRE needs to be sustained over the long term to have lasting impact and create generational social change.

Furthermore, it is important that governments continue to demonstrate a long-term vision approach and provide funding for RRE, through ensuring RRE is part of state-based prevention plans, and budgeting to support and sustain the momentum for RRE across government and non-government school sectors. Consideration should be given to embedding RRE in child and youth or student wellbeing policy, and school sectors and curriculum authorities should conduct regular reviews of the curriculum guidance at least every 3 years, including existing curriculum resources and the integration of emerging evidence.

### Key actions

- ✓ Ensure key policies continue to prioritise commitment to RRE, including by embedding RRE as a key pillar in:
  - jurisdictional primary prevention strategies or action plans
  - child and youth or student wellbeing.
- ✓ Ensure long-term funding certainty for RRE, at least 5-year blocks at a time, and consider integration of required funding into Education Department core budgets.
- ✓ Conduct regular reviews of curriculum guidance, at least every three years, including existing curriculum resources.

## 3.2 Develop the pre-service workforce: Initial teacher education

For RRE to become 'core business' in schools, all student teachers will require introductory training on gender-based violence prevention and response in the school context. Those intending to teach in subject



areas where they will be delivering respectful relationships curriculum will require more comprehensive training. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training supports universities to ensure they have the resources to adequately prepare preservice teachers. Recommendations 13 and 14 of the [Senate Inquiry into Current and Proposed Sexual Consent Laws in Australia](#) support the development of a strategy, national coordination, and funding to upskill the workforce, to achieve consistent and effective delivery of comprehensive RRE in Australian schools.

indicators from school-level impact evaluations are consistent and able to be collated to create a national picture of RRE outcomes. Measures should align with national outcomes frameworks and a culture of information-sharing promoted, so that evaluation data can ultimately inform evidence about what works to prevent gender-based violence. School and education departments should use evaluation results to communicate the success and positive outcomes of RRE, to ensure that key stakeholders, including community members and political parties, understand the value of sustaining RRE well into the future.

### Key actions

- ✓ Establish an investment strategy and national coordination mechanism for RRE workforce development.
- ✓ Establish [preservice training](#) in universities for all students undertaking a Bachelor of Education for primary and secondary teaching, and not only for those who are majoring in HPE.
- ✓ Establish accredited professional development courses by jurisdictional education institutions for preservice teachers to update their professional skills.

### Key actions

- ✓ Develop a universal RRE school-based evaluation framework, which should include moving beyond monitoring and evaluating outcomes to the impact of RRE as a mechanism that can contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence.
- ✓ Ensure data indicators are relevant to key frameworks wherever possible, such as those associated with the [National Plan Outcomes Framework](#) or [Counting on change](#).
- ✓ Establish a jurisdiction-wide mechanism, that captures national priorities as well as being sensitive to the local context, to collect and collate data and insights from school level evaluations.
- ✓ Ensure that evaluation results from RRE are communicated to key stakeholders and used to inform policy and investment decisions for the prevention of gender-based violence.

## 3.3 Continue to strengthen the RRE evidence base

It is important that evaluation data contributes to strengthening the evidence base for RRE and supports evolving best-practice. The development of universal evaluation frameworks and tools will ensure that data

# Glossary

This glossary provides guidance on and definitions for terms used in this blueprint as well as those more broadly relevant to conversations around respectful relationships education.

**Ableism** – The system of beliefs, processes and practices that privilege people without disabilities, and disadvantage and exclude people with disabilities.<sup>94</sup> These beliefs include dominant ideas and expectations about typical abilities of people's bodies and minds. Society applies these standards to determine who is worthy, able or 'normal', and discriminates against and disadvantages people who fail to meet this imaginary standard.<sup>95</sup>

**Ageism** – The system of beliefs, processes and practices that disadvantage and discriminate against people in particular age groups, especially older people and young people.

**Asexual** – A person who experiences minimal or no sexual attraction to other people.

**Backlash/resistance** – The resistance, hostility or aggression with which gender equality or violence prevention strategies are met by some groups. From a feminist perspective, backlash can be understood as an inevitable response to challenges to male dominance, power or status, and is often interpreted as a sign that such challenges are proving effective.<sup>96</sup>

**Biphobia** – Prejudice, fear and/or hatred directed towards bisexual people or bisexuality. This includes the systemic and structural discrimination experienced by bisexual people.

**Bisexual** – A person of any gender who self-identifies as being emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people from more than one gender.

**Cisgender** – A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth. The term 'cis' is often used as an abbreviation.

**Cisnormative/cisnormativity** – Refers to a general perspective that sees cisgender experiences as the only, or central, view of the world. This includes the assumption that all people fall into one of 2 distinct and complementary genders (man and woman), which corresponds to their sex assigned at birth, or what is called the gender binary. It also relates to the systemic and structural privileging of the social models of binary sex and gender.

**Coercive control** – Often defined as a pattern of controlling behaviour, used by a perpetrator to establish and maintain control over another person. Coercive control is almost always an underlying dynamic of family and domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Perpetrators use coercive control to deprive another person of liberty, autonomy and agency.<sup>97</sup>

**Class** – A system of structured inequality based on unequal distributions of power, education, wealth and income that determine social position and status.

**Classism/class discrimination** – The system of beliefs, processes and practices that disadvantages and discriminates against people in particular social classes (typically the lower and middle classes).

**Colonialism** – The ongoing policy and practice of British colonisation over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, lands and nations. See also Colonisation.

**Colonisation** – Refers to the historical act of the British invading and claiming the land now called Australia, thereby dispossessing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who had previously lived on and been custodians of this land for thousands of years. Also refers to the ongoing settlement and establishment of British colonies, and later the Australian nation. It is not only a historical act but also an ongoing process, in particular because there has been no treaty or other form of settlement or agreement; and because many contemporary laws, policies and practices fail to recognise the specific status and human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Nations peoples; and because colonisation continues to have significant impacts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

**Cultural safety** – Cultural safety means ‘an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared knowledge and experience, learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening’.<sup>98</sup>

**Disability** – There is no single definition or model of disability. This resource uses the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) definition, which defines disability as long-term physical, cognitive, sensory and psychosocial impairments, including chronic illness, which in interaction with various barriers hinder an individual’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>99</sup>

**Domestic violence** – Refers to acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.<sup>100</sup>

**Drivers of violence** – The factors that are most strongly and consistently correlated with violence against women; in other words, those that both lead to violence and cause it to continue.

**Emotional/psychological violence** –

This type of violence can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.<sup>101</sup>

**Enbyphobia** – Fear of or prejudice against people outside the gender binary (that is, people who identify as agender, bigender or non-binary). See also Gender diverse.

**Family violence** – A broader term than domestic violence, as it refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members. This includes, for example, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents.

Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful.

In Indigenous communities, family violence is often the preferred term as it encapsulates the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships, as well as intergenerational issues. For LGBTIQ+ people, ‘family’ may be defined as the ‘chosen family’ sometimes created in the context of rejection by biological families, but there is limited research on violence in this context.<sup>102</sup>

**Financial or economic abuse** – involves controlling access to money and possessions without consent. It can include limiting access to funds, forcing someone to spend money or sell belongings, or interfering with someone’s schooling or employment.<sup>103</sup>

**Gender** – The socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defines masculinity and femininity.<sup>104</sup> Gender expectations vary between cultures and can change over time.<sup>105</sup>

**Gender-based violence** – Violence that is specifically ‘directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately’.<sup>106</sup>

**Gender binary** – A system of gender classification in which all people are categorised as belonging to one of 2 distinct sexes (woman or man) and in which everyone is assumed to be ‘cisgender’; that is, that their gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth (female or male).

**Gender diverse** – People whose gender expressions differ from what is socially expected. This includes individuals who identify as agender (having no gender), as bi-gender (both woman and man) or as non-binary (neither woman nor man), genderqueer, or as having shifting or fluid genders. See also Non-binary.

**Gender equality**<sup>107</sup> – Involves equality for people of all genders. This term is used in the substantive sense to mean not only equality of opportunity but also equal or just outcomes (sometimes also called equity). It requires the redistribution of power, resources and responsibilities between men and women in particular, and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures that create and sustain gender inequality.

**Gender identity** – A person’s innate, deeply felt psychological identification of their gender, which may or may not correspond to the person’s designated sex at birth.

**Gender transformative** – Approaches that move beyond simply being aware of gender inequality, or sensitive to gender differences, and that instead deliberately encourage a critical awareness of, and make explicit challenges to, harmful gender roles, stereotypes, practices and norms in order to shift the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men.

**Hegemonic masculinity** – Describes the currently accepted or dominant ways of being a man; that is, the set of ideals and practices that denote the most prized ways of being a man in any given society or context, which help to maintain and legitimise gender inequality and men’s overall dominance, privilege and power over women.<sup>108</sup>

**Heteronormativity** – Refers to a general perspective that sees heterosexual experiences as the only, or central, view of the world, and assumes a linear relationship between sex, gender and sexuality (for example: male, man, heterosexual man). This includes the unquestioned assumption that all people fall into one of 2 distinct and complementary genders (woman and man), which corresponds to their sex assigned at birth. It also assumes that heterosexual is the only ‘normal’ sexual orientation, and that sexual and marital relations are only appropriate between a man and a woman. It is additionally related to the systemic and structural privileging of the social models of binary sex, binary gender and the normalisation of heterosexuality.

**Hypersexual** – Exhibiting a level of interest or involvement in sexual activity that is higher than the norm.

**Inclusion** – In this context, inclusion means phasing out segregated environments and making the structural and systemic changes that are necessary to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream environments. Inclusion is a process of systemic reform that involves changes and modifications to settings, policies and structures to remove barriers and create environments that provide equality of opportunities and experiences.<sup>109</sup>

**Image-based abuse** – A form of technology-facilitated abuse that specifically involves the sharing of an intimate image or video without the consent of the person in the image or video. This includes images or videos that have been digitally altered. Image-based abuse also includes the threat of an intimate image being shared.<sup>110</sup>

**Intergenerational trauma** – A form of historical trauma transmitted across generations. Survivors of the initial experience who have not healed may pass on their trauma to further generations. In Australia, intergenerational trauma particularly affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations.<sup>111</sup>

**Intersectionality** – Describes the interactions between multiple systems and structures of oppression (such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, transphobia, heteronormativity and cisnormativity), as well as policy and legal contexts (such as immigration status). It acknowledges that some people are subject to multiple forms of oppression and ‘the experience is not just the sum of its parts’.<sup>112</sup> An intersectional approach is ‘a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other’.<sup>113</sup> Conversely, intersectionality also highlights the intersection of multiple forms of power and privilege. An intersectional approach is critical for preventing violence against women because patriarchal

power structures always intersect with other systems of power. Violence against women occurs in the context of both gender inequality and multiple other forms of structural and systemic inequality, oppression and discrimination. All of these intersect to influence the perpetration of violence, the prevalence, nature and dynamics of violence, and women’s experiences of violence. Understanding and addressing these intersections is necessary to effectively address the drivers of violence against women and prevent this violence across the population.

**Intersex** – An umbrella term that describes people who have natural variations that differ from conventional ideas about ‘female’ and ‘male’ bodies. These natural variations may include genital, chromosomal and a range of other physical characteristics. Intersex is not about a person’s gender identity.

**Intimate partner violence** – describes any behaviour within an intimate relationship (including current or past marriages, domestic partnerships, or dates) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. This is the most common forms of violence experienced by women globally.<sup>114</sup>

**Lived experience** – The knowledge and understanding a person acquires when they have lived through something.

**Masculinity** – The socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men. These expectations vary between cultures and can change over time.

**Microaggressions** – Smaller, frequent, patronising instances of discrimination.<sup>115</sup>

**Non-binary** – A person who does not identify as belonging to either of the socially expected categories of sex (male/female) and/or gender (masculine/feminine). Some non-binary people identify as genderqueer, or as having shifting or fluid genders. See also Gender diverse.



**Non-partner sexual assault** – refers to sexual violence perpetrated by strangers, acquaintances, friends, colleagues, peers, teachers, neighbours and family members.<sup>116</sup>

**Normalisation of violence** – Where violence, particularly men's violence, is seen and treated as a normal part of everyday life.

**Norms** – See Social norms.

**Reinforcing factors** – Factors that become significant within the context of the drivers of violence. These factors do not predict or drive violence against women on their own. However, they each play a role in influencing the occurrence or dynamics of violence against women.

Reinforcing factors are context-specific; they have an influence in particular circumstances and at particular levels of the socio-ecological model. See also Drivers of violence.

**Settings** – Environments in which people live, work, learn, socialise and play.

**Sex** – The biological and physical characteristics used to define humans as female or male.

**Sexism** – Discrimination based on gender, and the attitudes, stereotypes and cultural elements that promote this discrimination.<sup>117</sup>

**Sexual assault** – Sexual assault is one type of sexual violence and does not include sexual harassment, or broader and complex forms of sexual violence, such as technology-facilitated or image-based abuse. See also Sexual violence.

**Sexual harassment** – Any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated, where a reasonable person would anticipate that reaction in the circumstances.<sup>118</sup>

**Sexuality** – A person's sexual orientation or sexual preferences.

**Sexual violence** – Sexual activity that happens where consent is not obtained or freely given. It occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any sexual activity, such as touching, sexual harassment and intimidation, forced marriage, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape.

**Social norms** – The informal, mostly unwritten and unspoken rules that define typical, acceptable and expected actions and behaviours in a social group, setting or society. They are grounded in customs, traditions and value systems that develop over time.

**Socio-ecological model** – A model used in public health; it is used here to demonstrate how violence is a product of multiple, interacting components and social factors.<sup>119</sup> The model conceptualises how the drivers of violence manifest at different levels – the individual and relationship level, the organisational and community level, the system and institutional level, and the societal level. It illustrates the value of implementing multiple mutually reinforcing strategies across these levels.

**Socioeconomic disadvantage** – Refers to people's access to material and social resources and their ability to participate in society.<sup>120</sup> For some people, certain factors such as inequities in access to resources, differences in power and privilege, and the impacts of intersecting forms of oppression can reduce their access to resources and their ability to participate in society on an equal basis to others.

**Structural discrimination and disadvantage** – A condition produced when the norms, policies and systems that operate within society create patterns that mean people in particular groups are more likely to experience discrimination and more likely to be disadvantaged compared to others.

**Systemic social inequalities** – A pattern of discrimination that is reflected within social norms and reinforced through law, education, the economy, health care and politics, and which results in the privileging of certain groups and individuals over others.

**Systems and structures** – Macro-level mechanisms, both formal (policies, institutions and laws) and informal (social norms), which serve to organise society, and create power relationships between different groups of people and patterns of social and political power.

**Technology-facilitated abuse** – Using technology to harass, threaten, monitor, control, impersonate or intimidate. See also Image-based abuse.

**Transgender** – An umbrella term referring to people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender person may identify specifically as transgender or as male or female, or outside of these categories. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or in other ways. Transgender is often abbreviated to 'trans'.

**Transphobia** – Prejudice, fear, discomfort and/or hatred directed towards people who are transgender and/or gender diverse. This includes the systemic and structural discrimination experienced by transgender and gender diverse people.

**Violence against women** – Any act of gender-based violence that causes, or could cause, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life.<sup>121</sup> This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience (including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural, spiritual, financial, and others) that are gender based. See also Gender-based violence.

**Xenophobia** – Dislike of, aversion or hostility to, or prejudice against strangers, foreigners or people from different cultures.

# Appendix 1: Notes on language

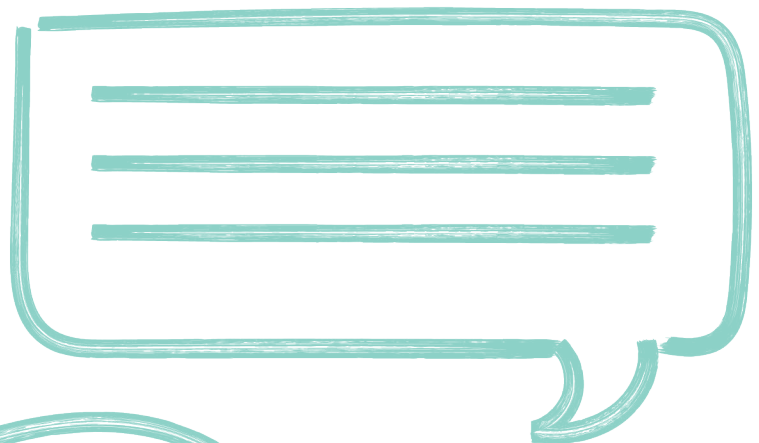
## Use and limitations of binary language

Our Watch acknowledges there are limitations to the use of the terms 'women' and 'men', as these essentialist approaches tend to 'rely on, uphold and naturalise the gender binary'.<sup>122</sup> Both sex and gender are constructed as binary based on the assumption that all people fall into one of 2 distinct genders (woman or man) and that everyone is 'cisgender'; that is, their gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth (female or male). Binary approaches to prevention can ignore or make invisible people who are intersex and whose bodies do not conform to a binary notion of sex, as well as transgender and gender diverse people whose gender identities do not align with a binary notion of gender. Approaches to the prevention of violence should challenge this binary framing, which centres and privileges cisgender experiences and binary models of sex and gender.

## Use and understanding of the term 'gender equality'

This resource uses the term 'gender equality' over 'gender equity',<sup>i</sup> in line with international human rights instruments and because it is a concept that is more widely understood. In this context, the term 'gender equality' is used in the broadest sense – to encompass fairness of access, treatment, opportunities and outcomes. It does not imply sameness. The focus on fairness, and on just outcomes, is important because women and non-binary people may not have the same advantages as men, and therefore equal treatment alone may not actually be fair or just.

- i. 'Gender equity' is the state of having equal rights and access to resources and opportunities, regardless of gender, and according to each person's individual needs. It also means valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.



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