



# RESILIENCE RIGHTS & RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

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## Teaching for Social and Emotional Learning and Respectful Relationships

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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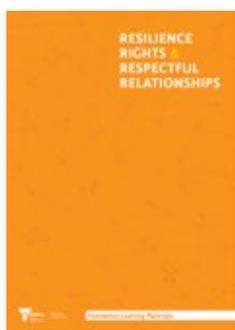
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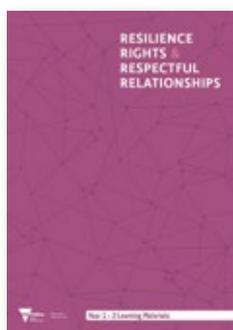
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## Learning materials available in Victorian Curriculum Levels

### PRIMARY



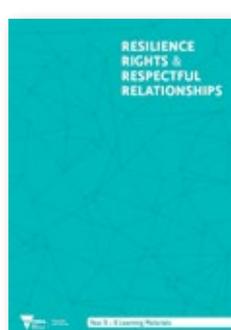
Foundation



Level 1 – 2

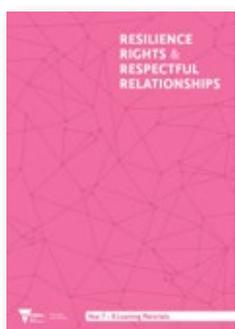


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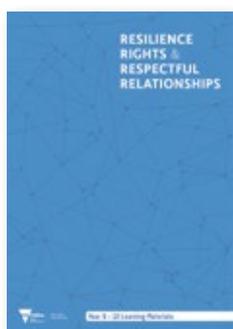


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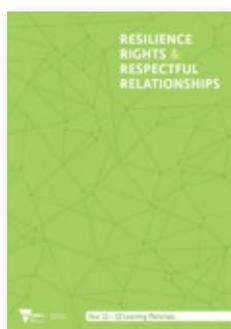
### SECONDARY



Level 7 – 8



Level 9 – 10



Level 11 – 12

All RRRR learning materials can  
be downloaded from:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respectrel>

# Introducing the eight topics of RRRR

**The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) learning materials cover eight topics of Social and Emotional Learning across all levels of primary and secondary education. Years 11 and 12 include the relevant topics of goal setting, time management, and safer socialising in place of emotional literacy.**

## TOPIC 1: EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Emotional literacy can be defined as the ability to understand ourselves and other people. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, build empathy, and to respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Building a large vocabulary for emotions helps to increase emotional literacy and build self-awareness and empathy for others.

## TOPIC 2: PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Children and young people need a vocabulary to help them recognise and understand strengths and positive qualities in themselves and others. This topic provides learning activities to build this vocabulary and to use it when discussing personal, social and ethical challenges.

Research in the field of positive psychology emphasises the importance of identifying and using individual strengths. Social and emotional learning programs which use strength-based approaches promote student wellbeing, positive behaviour and academic achievement.

## TOPIC 3: POSITIVE COPING

Learning activities in this topic provide opportunities for students to identify and discuss different types of coping strategies. When children and young people develop a language around coping, they are more likely to be able to understand and deliberately utilise a range of productive coping strategies and diminish their use of unproductive coping strategies. Students learn to extend their repertoire of coping strategies and benefit from critically reflecting on their own choices and being exposed to alternative options. Activities introduce students to the concept of self-talk and practice using positive self-talk to approach and manage challenging situations. Positive self-talk is a key strategy for coping with negative thoughts, emotions and events. It is associated with greater persistence in the face of challenge, and can be learnt or strengthened through practice.

## TOPIC 4: PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem-solving skills are an important part of the coping repertoire. The classroom program provides a number of learning activities to develop students' problem-solving skills. The activities in the program assist students to develop their critical and creative thinking skills, and to apply them to scenarios exploring personal, social and ethical dilemmas.

## TOPIC 5: STRESS MANAGEMENT

Children and young people experience a range of personal, social and work-related stressors in their everyday lives. Activities within this topic have an explicit focus on teaching positive approaches to stress management. Assisting students to recognise their personal signs and symptoms of stress, and to develop strategies that will help them to deal with stress effectively, will help students cope with future challenges. The activities focus on the ways in which self-calming strategies can be used to manage stressful situations.

## TOPIC 6: HELP-SEEKING

Learning activities in this topic area are designed to help students discuss the importance of seeking help and providing peer support when dealing with problems that are too big to solve alone. This helps to normalise and de-stigmatise help-seeking behaviour. Scenario-based activities help students identify situations in which help should be sought, identify trusted sources of help, and practice seeking help from peers and adults.

## TOPIC 7: GENDER AND IDENTITY

Learning activities within this topic assist students to challenge stereotypes and critique the influence of gender norms on attitudes and behaviour. They learn about key issues relating to human rights and gender identity, and focus on the importance of respect within relationships. The activities promote respect for diversity and difference.

## TOPIC 8: POSITIVE GENDER RELATIONS

Learning activities within this topic focus on building an understanding of the effects of gender-based violence and focus on the standards associated with respectful relationships. Students develop the skills needed to solve problems, set boundaries within relationships, and play an active role within the prevention of gender-based violence. They develop peer support and help-seeking skills that can be applied in response to situations involving gender-based violence in family, peer, community or on-line relationships.

# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

The *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* learning materials have been designed for teachers in primary and secondary schools to develop students' social, emotional and positive relationship skills. Efforts to promote social and emotional skills and positive gender norms in children and young people has been shown to improve health related outcomes and subjective wellbeing. It also reduces antisocial behaviours including engagement in gender-related violence.

## Developing students' personal and social capabilities via social and emotional learning

As well as teaching academic skills, it is part of the core business of schools to promote student resilience, wellbeing and positive social attitudes.<sup>1,2</sup> One way that schools can achieve this is through the teaching of evidence based programs that explicitly foster personal and social capabilities. Explicit efforts to provide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) opportunities is recognised as a key part of this work.<sup>3</sup> SEL is the process through which children and young people build and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to:

- Understand and manage emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Feel and express empathy
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Develop resilience to deal with change
- Create positive gender norms
- Contribute to social cohesion.<sup>4</sup>

Social and emotional skills help students develop the resilience to deal with change, challenge and unpredictability.<sup>4</sup> Social and emotional learning is important in the context of data highlighting that Australian young people face a range of stressors and anxieties, and a high incidence of mental health problems (see Figure 1). Social and emotional skills are also the foundation of positive relationships, including positive gender relationships, and contribute to social cohesion.

### FIGURE 1: MENTAL HEALTH OF AUSTRALIAN YOUNG PEOPLE

- Around a quarter (26%) of young Australians aged 16–24 experience mental health problems and/or mental illness each year.<sup>5,6</sup>
- According to Mission Australia's 2015 Annual Youth Survey<sup>7</sup>:
  - 38% of young Australians (15–19) report that they are concerned or very concerned about coping with stress
  - 34% of young Australian (15–19) report that they are concerned or very concerned about school or study problems.

Efforts to promote personal and social capabilities and build resilience can be fostered through a whole school approach. This includes efforts at organisational, pedagogical and relational levels. A key component of a whole school approach is the promotion of positive teacher-student relationships. Positive relationships are significantly associated with increased 'school connectedness' and with cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement.<sup>8</sup>

A sense of connectedness or belonging to school and to family is the single most important protective factor for young people.<sup>9,10</sup> It is associated with positive health and academic outcomes.<sup>11–16</sup> Students who experience discrimination or stigma are more likely to also experience reduced connectedness to school.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, students who feel cared for by people at their school and feel connected to learning:

- Are more likely to be motivated
- Show improved academic outcomes
- Have higher academic self-efficacy
- Show improved mental health<sup>1–18</sup>
- Are less likely to abuse substances
- Are less likely engage in violence
- Are less likely to experience discrimination or stigma.

## Why teach about gender?

Many differences in the health, educational and economic outcomes of males and females are not biological in origin. Rather they are associated with influence of social expectations and associated behavioural and institutional practices.

The term **gender** is used for the differences that are created as a result of the social and cultural expectations about what is acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a boy or a man or a girl or a woman. This is different from the term **sex** which is used to denote the biological or physical differences between the bodies of males and females.

Some gender expectations can be harmful or restrictive. They can lead to practices that limit people's life choices, lead to inequitable treatment or discrimination, or foster acceptance of gender-based violence. Gender expectations can also lead to risky behaviour, with associated negative health impacts. For example, dominant societal conceptions of masculinity can mean that young men are more vulnerable to risk taking with driving, drinking and drugs, more reluctant to seek help, and more likely to engage in violence, both against other men and against women. Dominant societal conceptions of femininity can mean that young women are more vulnerable to body image distress, anxiety and eating disorders.

Helping students to understand the potentially negative effects of dominant gender expectations can assist them to work on changing those that limit opportunities, reduce equity, contribute to poor health, or lead to violence.

## Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as the platform for teaching about positive gender relationships

SEL programs provide a logical springboard from which to engage in more explicit work with students around gender norms, gender identity and respectful relationships. A focus on respectful relationships is important because gender inequality and gender-based discrimination continue to have a profound effect on outcomes for Australians (see Figure 2). Women and girls continue to experience inequality and discrimination in many important parts of their lives, which can limit the choices and opportunities available to them.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) people often face disproportionate discrimination, bullying and violence, with negative implications for their health and wellbeing.<sup>21–23</sup> In this context, young people benefit from education programs which assist them to recognise and question gender norms, and to critically examine the potentially negative or limiting impacts they may have.

Research shows that education programs that work on building positive gender relationships must commence from an early age, as children are well aware of gender norms and make efforts to fit within gendered expectations by the time they are in kindergarten.<sup>24</sup>

### FIGURE 2: INDICATORS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

- In 2015, on average women earned 17% less than men for doing the same job.<sup>29</sup>
- In 2015, 1 in 4 senior managers across corporate Australia were women.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2015, 7% of Australian TV sports coverage was accounted for by women's sport.<sup>31</sup>
- LGBTI Australians face discrimination in a range of settings including health care services and the workplace.<sup>32</sup>
- In 2015, less than one-third of Australian parliamentarians were female.<sup>33</sup>
- On Australian Day 2016 over two-thirds of Order of Australia awards were for men.<sup>34</sup>
- In 2014, on average female parents spent four hours and 45 minutes more per day caring for children than male parents.<sup>35</sup>

As young children absorb gendered expectations, they can acquire and exhibit stereotypical, prejudiced and often negative attitudes toward those that they perceive as 'others'.<sup>24–28</sup> They may for example insist that some games are for boys and others for girls, and actively reject peers from certain games. Classroom activities can be used to help children to explore gender identity, challenge stereotypes, and value and show respect for diversity and difference.

## Why focus on gender and respectful relationships?

Gender-based violence is violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender. It includes any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to someone based on gender role expectations and stereotypes. Gender-based violence remains a widespread problem in Australia, with significant social, health, economic and other consequences (see Figure 3). The experience of gender-based violence can have serious mental health outcomes for young men, young women and young transgender people.<sup>36</sup> Studies show that women, men or transgender people who experience gender-based violence (including in the home) are more likely to be depressed, tired, or feel worthless and are at a higher risk for having drug or alcohol problems.<sup>36, 37</sup>

Recent research shows that young people are more likely to be the victims of violence than older people.<sup>39</sup> Younger women experience higher rates of victimisation and intimate partner violence than older women.<sup>40</sup> Many young people are not aware of appropriate boundaries in relationships. A 2014 survey found that one in five young people believed that women often say no to sex when they mean yes.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is important to develop young people's understanding of the importance of consent in relationships, and to equip them with skills needed to respond assertively to protect their personal boundaries and standards.

### FIGURE 3: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TRENDS

- In Victoria, male intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 years.<sup>41</sup>
- The 2013 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey found that<sup>39</sup>:
  - One in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence
  - One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence
  - One in four Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner
  - Young women (18–24) are two times more likely to experience sexual assault, compared to all women.
- Almost half of all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people hide their sexual orientation or gender identity in public for fear of violence or discrimination<sup>42</sup>
- A 2010 survey of same sex attracted and gender questioning young Australians (aged between 14 and 12) found that:<sup>43</sup>
  - 61% had experienced verbal abuse
  - 18% had experienced physical abuse.

- Were delivered within a broader wellbeing curriculum that incorporates a range of social, physical and mental health issues
- Were taught by the classroom teacher
- Were undertaken by schools with a positive relational climate.<sup>45</sup>

### Influence of respectful relationships and gender education on behaviour

Studies show that school-based violence prevention and respectful relationships initiatives can produce lasting changes in attitudes and behaviours.<sup>52–54</sup> Providing explicit classroom programs to all students is a key part of a whole school approach to preventing gender-based violence.<sup>55</sup> Well designed and implemented classroom interventions can lead to the reduction in perpetration of dating violence.<sup>56, 57</sup>

Successful gender education and violence prevention programs provide students with the opportunity to learn about the relationship between gender and power.<sup>55</sup> They address the limiting constructions of gender identity and sexuality that lead to acceptance of violence in relationships and families. They foster gender equitable and egalitarian relations between and among men and women, and boys and girls.<sup>55</sup>

A review of 58 intervention studies found that well designed programs that incorporate questioning of gender norms and promote gender equitable relationships can lead to positive changes in attitudes and behaviour.<sup>58</sup> When high quality school-based programs are delivered well, they can produce lasting change in attitudes and behaviours. Longitudinal studies have shown that four years after completing high quality violence prevention programs, young people continued to report less physical and sexual relationship violence.<sup>56, 57</sup>

Research suggests that due to the complexity of the causal factors influencing gender-based violence, a significant number of sessions are needed to change attitudes and behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Research also shows that 'one-off' sessions are both inappropriate and inadequate. While there is no agreed minimum exposure,<sup>60</sup> there is consensus that programs providing greater intensity and duration have greater potential to produce behaviour change.<sup>55</sup>

Research also highlights the advantages of using existing school staff to deliver an ongoing and sequenced program, and of positioning the classroom program within a broader whole school approach. These prevention programs are best led by staff who have an ongoing presence in the school, are able to model appropriate non-violent, non-discriminatory behaviours, and are available for follow up with students.<sup>55</sup>

### The influence of social and emotional learning on behaviour

Research into the effectiveness of social and emotional learning (SEL) classroom programs highlights the contribution they can make to improved wellbeing, social and academic outcomes. Students who participate in rigorously designed and well-taught SEL programs:

- Demonstrate more positive social behaviour
- Have improved academic outcomes
- Are less likely to engage in risky and disruptive behaviour, including risk-taking with alcohol and other drugs.<sup>44–46</sup>

Several longitudinal studies have documented the way in which initiatives provided in the primary years can have a lasting effect, promoting resilience and school connectedness well into the high school years.<sup>12, 17, 18, 47–50</sup>

The most effective programs were those that:

- Contained explicit teaching of social and emotional skills
- Were of greater intensity
- Were of longer duration<sup>51</sup>
- Combined knowledge, social and life skills, normative approaches, critical thinking and negotiation skills

## Focus on protective behaviours

The term 'protective behaviours' refers to behaviours which enable children to recognise and respond to situations in which their personal space and safety might be compromised. Programs teaching about gender-based violence should include a focus on protective behaviours, and provide developmentally appropriate information and skills building activities. Programs which include a focus on protective behaviours can assist in the prevention of child abuse and violence by building children's comfort level to disclose about violence and inappropriate sexual advances.<sup>61</sup>

School based abuse prevention programs for early childhood and primary school children have been found to be effective in increasing student knowledge and protective behaviours.<sup>61-63</sup> Components of successful programs include:

- Teaching children how to identify, resist and report inappropriate touching
- Reassuring children that it is not their fault if they experience abuse
- Learning the proper names of their genitals.<sup>61</sup>

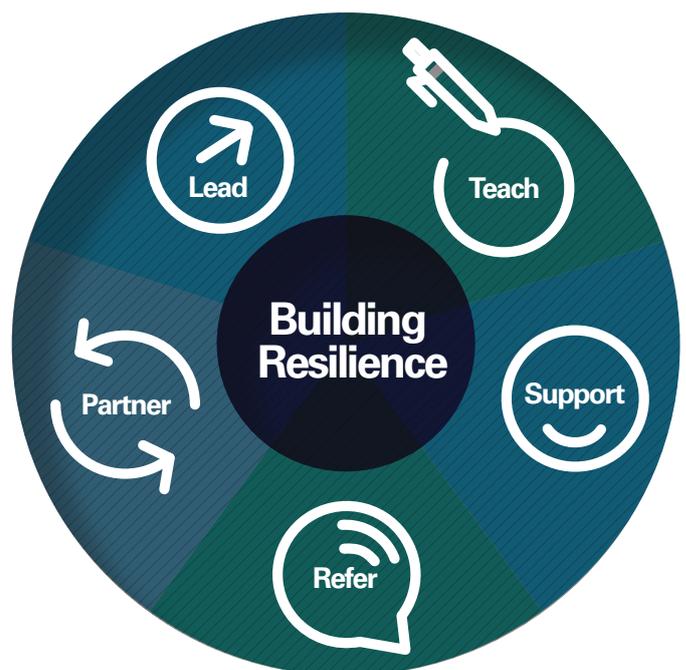
Research highlights that programs are more likely to be successful if they use behavioural skills training (e.g. active rehearsal through role play, followed by shaping and reinforcement), rather than passive learning (E.g. watching the teacher model skills or viewing a film).<sup>61-63</sup>

## Embedding efforts within a whole school approach

Research in the area of health and wellbeing programs across a range of areas highlights the need for a whole school approach to respectful relationships.<sup>18, 45, 47, 55, 60</sup> Efforts are needed at multiple levels in order to achieve positive and sustained cultural change. A whole school approach means providing students with broad exposure to key messages across the curriculum, policies and practices of the school.

A framework for action can help guide schools in their planning and provision of a comprehensive approach to promoting resilience, rights and respectful relationships. The Building Resilience model provides one such framework. It directs school to:

- **Lead** activity across the school, orchestrating a comprehensive approach and establishing school policies and practices that promote wellbeing, respectful relationships and gender equality
- **Teach** social and emotional skills to all students across all year levels, promote respectful gender relationships throughout the school, ensure multiple exposure to key messages across the curriculum, and provide a professional learning strategy to build teacher skills and confidence
- **Partner** with families, carers, the community, and services working in the area of wellbeing, mental health and gender-based violence
- **Support** students needing additional assistance, including care for students experiencing psychosocial distress, and educative strategies for those who have exhibited negative treatment towards others
- **Refer** those in need to appropriate services dedicated to supporting the health and safety of those who may need assessment, treatment, care or protection.



# Student Learning

The **Building Resilience** online portal ([www.education.vic.gov.au/resilience](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/resilience)) makes available a wealth of tools and resources designed to support leadership of a comprehensive school-wide approach to building respectful relationships and promoting the social and emotional learning, resilience, rights and wellbeing of students.

Additional resources to guide schools in their efforts to embed a whole school approach to respectful relationships education are available on the Department of Education and Training's website: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respectfulrelationships>

The **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships** classroom program is informed by a strong evidence base that highlights the elements of effective practice in enhancing student learning about social and emotional learning and respectful relationships.

All learning materials can be downloaded from: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respectfulrelationships>

## The Curriculum

The **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships** learning materials have been produced to align with the Victorian Curriculum.

Learning activities are available for the following Victorian Curriculum Levels:

### Primary

- Foundation
- Level 1–2
- Level 3–4
- Level 5–6

### Secondary

- Level 7–8
- Level 9–10\*
- Years 11 and 12

The **Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out Against Gender-based Violence** resource for Level 8, 9 and 10 can be used in combination with the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships learning materials.

\*The RRRR Level 9–10 learning materials cover topics 1–6 only. Teachers are advised to use the **Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out Against Gender-based Violence** Units 2 and 3 for topics 7 and 8. Download the BRR resource at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respectfulrelationships>

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 includes eight learning areas and four capabilities. The **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships** learning materials address content descriptors and aspects of the achievement standards in both the Health and Physical Education learning area, and Personal and Social Capabilities.

## PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY

The **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships** learning materials address all strands of the Personal and Social Capability curriculum. The curriculum is organised under two strands: Self-Awareness and Management, and Social Awareness and Management. Personal and Social Capability involves students in a range of practices including:

- Recognising and regulating emotions
- Developing empathy for others
- Understanding relationships
- Working effectively in teams
- Handling challenging situations constructively
- Developing leadership.

This capability encompasses students' personal/emotional and social/relational dispositions, intelligences, sensibilities and learning. It develops effective life skills for students, including understanding and managing themselves, their relationships, learning and work.

Although it is named 'Personal and Social Capability', the words 'personal/emotional' and 'social/relational' are used interchangeably throughout the literature and within educational organisations. The term 'Social and Emotional Learning' is also often used, as is the SEL acronym.

## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The Personal, Social and Community Health Strand of the Health and Physical Education curriculum develops knowledge, understandings and skills to explore the concept of identity and to promote safe and respectful relationships. The following two focus areas provide the context through which the content descriptors and achievement standards about safe and respectful relationships are taught and assessed.

**Relationships and sexuality** focuses on establishing and managing respectful relationships. Students develop knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to strategies for respectfully relating to and interacting with others. They also develop strategies for dealing with relationships when there is an imbalance of power such as bullying, harassment, violence and discrimination including violence based on race, gender and sexuality.

**Safety** addresses safety issues that students may encounter in their daily lives, including those in the home. Students develop knowledge, understanding and skills to make safe decisions and behave in ways that protect their own safety and that of others, including strategies for dealing with unsafe or uncomfortable situations, managing personal safety and safety in relationships and dating.

## ORGANISATION OF SCHOOL TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRAMS

Schools have flexibility in the design of their teaching and learning program to best utilise local resources, expertise and contexts. Victorian schools need to ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn the knowledge, understandings and skills defined in the Victorian Curriculum, but can develop their own areas of expertise and innovation. This will include providing a strong home for explicit teaching about respectful relationships and social and emotional learning.

The school's plan will show how the content of the Personal and Social Capability and the Personal, Social and Community Health Strand of Health and Physical Education are explicitly taught, assessed and reported on. Schools may elect to address the content within Health and Physical Education, in a discrete Health education subject, or English. The content can also be taught as part of school programs such as home group, pastoral care or integrated studies.

### Pedagogy

The **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships** learning materials use a range of collaborative learning strategies which in themselves, provide opportunities to develop social skills. The activities also explicitly engage with the key content areas of:

- Emotional literacy
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Positive self regard
- Stress management
- Positive coping
- Help-seeking and peer support
- Gender and identity
- Positive gender relationships.

The teaching and learning activities use a range of collaborative learning activities such as paired sharing, small group problem solving, scenario-based discussions, skill development exercises, role plays, storytelling, games, experiential activities and class discussions. Use of these collaborative learning strategies requires the teacher to exercise a high level of facilitation to organise and moderate student interactions with the tasks and their peers.

The activities are designed to be delivered in sequence, but can be modified by the teacher to suit the needs of the learners, and to integrate with their broader approach to teaching the Victorian Curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to use these learning activities in conjunction with other available curriculum in the broader health and wellbeing area. The activity plans include recommended links to relevant high quality resources in the area of sexuality education, human rights education, gender education, and bullying and violence education. Links to these resources are available via the Building Resilience online portal:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/resilience](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/resilience)

## Assessment and Reporting

The Victorian Curriculum F-10 Achievement Standards recognise that learning in any learning domain occurs along a continuum and students learn at different rates. The Achievement Standards are presented in levels from Foundation-10. Any one group of learners may include students who are operating at a wide range of levels across the learning continuum. In tailoring the program to meet the learning needs of their students, teachers may find it useful to review activities pitched at an earlier or later level.

Assessment tasks have been developed for these learning materials. Schools are required to assess student progress in relation to the Victorian Curriculum Achievement Standards for both Health and Physical Education and the Personal and Social Capability. Schools are required to report student progress against the content of the Victorian Curriculum, consistent with the whole school teaching and learning plan.

The Insight Assessment Portal provides assessment advice, tools, example tasks and templates to support teachers to assess student progress. See: <http://www.insight.vic.edu.au/>

For more information, visit: **Victorian Curriculum – Personal and Social Capability**, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2015, accessed from: <http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au>

# Teacher guidance

## Teacher professional preparedness

Teachers who are new to leadership of this program may benefit from working with colleagues to:

- Read and discuss the literature review that informs the program
- Trial the learning activities
- Review and refine learning activities to suit the class context
- Anticipate and plan for students' responses.

Some schools may elect to use a co-delivery or co-teaching model.

## Preparing to teach topics on gender-based violence and discrimination

Some teachers may find that leading activities about gender-based violence and discrimination triggers memories of violent situations that they have experienced. Prior to implementing the program, it is advised that teachers consider whether they need interpersonal support, or whether they would benefit from discussing a challenge of this nature with a trusted colleague, senior member of staff or counsellor. Some teachers may find it supportive to co-teach with a colleague, or to negotiate with school leaders about who will be best equipped to teach particular elements of the program.

- *1800 RESPECT* (1800 737 732) provides telephone and online counselling delivered by qualified, experienced professionals 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

- *Lifeline* is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Telephone: 13 11 14

Website: [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

## Setting up a safe space

It is important for teachers to work with students set up a safe space for learning. This means establishing a friendly and respectful atmosphere in which students and teachers feel safe to explore topics, raise questions and share views without fear of judgement or silencing.

It is important to involve students in identifying or reviewing the rules and expectations needed to maximise participation and learning. Specific introductory activities are provided within the materials to guide participatory approaches to establishing rules and agreements.

Providing a safe social space also entails setting standards which relate to privacy. This includes being clear about what is appropriate to share in the group space and what should be kept saved for disclosure in a more private setting (e.g. between a student and a teacher or welfare officer).

The program does not call on students or staff to disclose their own experiences. Rather it uses the notion of protective distancing, providing generic examples and scenarios as the focus for the learning activities. There may be times when the teacher needs to remind students about privacy, or to use the technique of 'protective interrupting' if they think a student is about to make an inappropriately timed disclosure. It is recommended that the teacher follow up with the student to seek further information, and arrange for further follow up if warranted.

Teachers should notify the relevant wellbeing staff prior to delivering the program as it may prompt an increase in disclosures, help-seeking or peer referrals.

## Discussing issues of violence with students

It is important for students to be told in advance they will be covering issues about violence. This forewarning can enable them to seek additional support if they find these issues personally confronting. Some teachers may worry that talking about violence could have negative effects for those who have experienced violence. However, teachers can make discussions about violence prevention non-threatening and productive through the use of carefully constructed learning activities and the use of scenarios rather than personal stories. Teachers can also shift the focus by the use of more celebratory or playful learning activities, which can reintroduce a positive mood.

The learning activities in this program are designed to assist students to explore the issues in a blame free environment. They aim to assist students to question harmful attitudes and practices without resorting to blaming or naming, and without the need to call on their personal stories.

Nonetheless, some of the activities may trigger sad or angry emotions in the students, or in teachers themselves. Some students may react defensively, and show discomfort by laughing, joking, accusing or denying the existence or effects of gender-based violence. In this case, teachers can use a combination of effective positive classroom management practices to deal with any potentially unruly or belittling behaviour, and provide additional support or referral for those finding the material difficult. For those students who find the material upsetting, it is important to provide some alternative activities and to follow up, strengthen coping strategies, and/or connect the student with additional support services.

## Observe, enquire, respond and refer

Within a whole school approach, school staff are expected to make efforts to notice and respond appropriately to those who may be experiencing mental health distress, or be the victim of gender-based violence. Teachers can fulfil these responsibilities by:

- Watching, listening and responding to patterns of rough interaction, play or forms of verbal harassment across the school
- Watching for patterns of interaction between older and younger students
- Following up with students who are often absent, report feeling sick at school or often fall asleep in class
- Asking about bruises, injuries, torn clothing, or missing books or equipment
- Following up if students seem down, teary, aggressive, withdrawn, or easily alarmed
- Following up when there are unexplained changes in behaviour, relationships, dress or grooming, attendance, participation or grades
- Monitoring areas where students report feeling less safe
- Identifying and following up with students who are isolated in the class or the yard.

## Teacher follow up in response to signs of distress

If a teacher suspects that a student may be distressed or if believes that a student may have an issue that they need assistance with or may want to disclose, it is important that they initiate a follow up conversation or request collegial assistance. As many students are reluctant to seek help, it is important for adults to take responsibility for initiating the conversation. Such a conversation is best conducted in a safe environment that is private, so as not to stigmatise or embarrass. During a follow up conversation it is important for teachers to remain calm. Open questions can be used to assist the student to tell their story. It is recommended that teachers:

- Listen attentively, without making judgment
- In response to disclosures, reassure the student that telling was the right thing to do, and that they will be taken seriously
- Remind the student that it is the teacher's role to seek relevant assistance to help make sure the child is safe and receives the help they need
- Avoid promising the student that their disclosure will remain a secret. Offer efforts to keep the matter private rather than confidential, explaining that information may be passed to those who need to know to help address the situation
- Reassure the student that there are things that can be done to help in these situations.

It is essential that teachers are familiar with relevant school policies, procedures and personnel so they can give the correct advice to students, and themselves engage with additional staff to refer or act upon concerns.

Some questions that could help a teacher to open a conversation with a student include:

- *Many young people experience being treated badly by others. Has this been happening to you, your classmates or other people in your life?*
- *What sorts of things have been happening for you?*
- *How is this affecting you?*
- *Where is this happening? How often is this happening?*
- *Who is involved?*

The Victorian Department of Education and Training provides the **SAFEMinds** professional learning and resource package for schools and families, to support school communities effectively identify and respond to the mental health needs of children and young people.

It uses 'NIP it in the bud' model to highlight the importance of the three key steps of Notice, Inquire, Plan. These are at the heart of the early intervention and referral pathway. This NIP model prompts school staff and teachers to 'notice' early signs of emotional distress, offer school-based support and refer appropriately when needed.

Access the SAFEMinds resources at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/safeminds.aspx>

## Responding to instances of student disclosure

In instances when students do disclose, it is important that teachers respond appropriately. Here are some things a teacher can say if a student does report an experience of violence:

- *It is good that you told me about this.*
- *It should not be happening to you.*
- *You do not deserve this.*
- *It is not your fault when someone is violent.*
- *It can be hard to talk about, but can you tell me more about what has been happening?*
- *I want to help.*
- *We need to work out how to get you the right kind of help.*
- *The school wants to get this kind of behaviour stopped.*
- *Thank you for telling me this. I know it can take courage to tell someone this. Now we need to work out who else needs to know to help keep you safe, and who else needs to know to help to get this behaviour stopped.*

When students disclose matters that have implications for their safety and wellbeing, teachers must share this information with the relevant senior staff. Teachers should respect students' needs for privacy and protection when referring such matters, and use methods that consider the safety and wellbeing of the student. In some cases, there will be a need for a mandatory reporting response. All staff should refer to the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse to ensure they fulfil all of their legal obligations. This can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/protect>. This should be done in a way that ensures protection of the child during and after the notification process.

## Mandatory reporting

In Victoria, teachers, as mandatory reporters, must make a report to Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form reasonable belief that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse, and
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

It is a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances.

All adults (not just professionals who work with children) are obligated to report to police where they have formed a reasonable belief that another adult may have committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence. Failing to disclose a sexual offence based on concerns for the interests of the perpetrator or organisation (e.g. concerns abuse reputation, legal liability or financial status) will not be regarded as a reasonable excuse.

The Department currently requires all teachers and relevant school staff to undertake online Mandatory Reporting Training to be aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities around identifying and reporting suspected child safety issues. Family violence is covered in this training.

Staff members are required to repeat this training every 12 months.

For further information on identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools, see: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/protect>

## Resources/Links to external organisations

Throughout the learning materials, there are links to a range of helpful organisations. They include the links to online and telephone counselling services including:

- *Kids Helpline* provides free 24 hour counselling services online, via email or phone for Years F-12. Tel: 1800 55 1800. <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/>
- *Reach Out* is an online service for young people that provides information, support and resources about mental health issues. <http://au.reachout.com/>
- *The Line* is an online resource and forum for young people which focuses on relationships, gender, and healthy and respectful approaches for teens, parents and teachers. <http://www.theline.org.au/respect>
- *The Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) Forum* is the peak body which works to ensure that women, children and men who are survivors of sexual assault have access to comprehensive and timely support and intervention to address their needs. <http://www.casa.org.au/>
- *Headspace* is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services for 12–25 year olds. Young people can access face-to-face services through headspace centres or online through the 'headspace' counselling service. <http://headspace.org.au/>

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