

Working together to strengthen consent education

The NSW Department of Education (the Department) is collaborating with the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW (P&C) to engage parents and carers as critical partners in driving cultural change around sexual violence and improve supports regarding consent education.

On the 17 June 2021 the Department and the P&C co-hosted a webinar for parents and carers across NSW. It was the first of a proposed series of webinars, and is one part of our engagement strategy on this important issue. The following information was shared in response to the questions submitted by webinar registrants.

What is the Statement of Intent?

Earlier this year, the heads of NSW public schools, Catholic Schools NSW and the Association for Independent Schools NSW signed the [Statement of Intent](#). The Statement responded to the calls from young people to improve consent education in schools. It highlights a clear goal of strengthening our students' understanding of consent: both through what they learn at school and what they learn and experience outside the school gates.

It identifies key areas in which education systems and schools can lead meaningful change. They are:

- promoting student voice and agency
- working as equal partners with parents and carers
- providing quality curriculum, and supporting teachers and school leaders.

Other important steps we are taking in the education cluster to achieve the goals in the Statement of Intent are:

- developing a suite of curriculum-aligned teaching and learning respectful relationships resources, which will be available for all teachers on the Department's Learning Resources Hub.
- updating mandatory child protection professional learning with a strengthened focus on harmful and problematic sexual behaviours
- providing more guidance to schools about high quality third-party programs they may wish to run to strengthen respectful relationships education

- and of course, our colleagues at NESA are undertaking large-scale curriculum reform, which will include updating the PDHPE curriculum where the issue of consent is taught. Renee will provide more detail on that.

Where does consent sit in the NSW Curriculum?

Consent is a concept embedded in child protection education. Child protection education is part of broader respectful relationships education in our schools.

Curriculum delivery is one part of respectful relationships education in NSW public schools.

Consent is also addressed through sexuality education programs reflective of the NSW Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) K-10 syllabus.

The curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge and skills students need to develop and enhance respectful relationships, including understanding and negotiating consent.

From Kindergarten to Year 12, learning about consent is explored through different situations that students may be exposed to, including online and offline environments.

Are the changes to the curriculum impacting both primary and secondary schools?

Learning about consent was strengthened in the new K-10 PDHPE syllabus, after extensive consultation with academics, community, students and teachers. This syllabus was implemented in all NSW schools for kindergarten to year 10 from 2020.

The new and strengthened K to 10 PDHPE syllabus focuses on:

- respectful and positive relationships
- the clear and age-appropriate teaching of consent.

These changes are reflected in both primary school content and high school content. The resources developed by the NSW Department of Education to support this important learning were updated in 2020 and 2021.

Further review of these resources will continue in 2021 to reflect legislative reform to embed affirmative consent.

Would students learn about consent in single sex or coeducation classes?

This decision is made at the local school level. It is a question that arises often and there is no clear-cut answer. Teachers often use a mix of single sex and mixed sex groupings in the classroom. This will depend on the student cohort. Parents and students can raise questions with their teachers.

What does the learning look like for primary school versus high school students? What do students actually learn at each stage?

The following outlines what learning about the concept of consent explicitly looks like in our schools. However, consent is not taught in isolation. The concept is integrated with learning about influences on decision making (such as pressure, alcohol or other factors), problem solving skills, ethical behaviour online and offline, and the body – including bodily autonomy and other relevant content and issues.

All activities used in our classrooms rely on a positive and strong trust relationship between the teacher and the children in their class, as well as positive relationships with parents and carers.

Whilst the curriculum in NSW provides evidence based, age-appropriate content for student learning, teachers are best placed to decide the time and emphasis given to teaching syllabus content, reflective of the needs of their students.

Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) and Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2)

At the beginning of primary school, the syllabus facilitates opportunities for students in Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 to learn about:

- the body's reaction to a range of situations, including safe and unsafe situations, and comparing the different emotional response
- parts of the body which are private and the concept of privacy
- how people have the right to give consent and tell others not to touch their body when they do not want to be touched
- the right to say yes or no to affection, e.g. tickles, hugs, kisses
- appropriate touch and how to respond to inappropriate touch
- people that can help in different situation, e.g. when hurt, upset or sad
- ways of seeking help in a range of different scenarios, e.g. call 000 during an emergency, use No-Go-Tell when feeling unsafe.

Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4)

In Stage 2 (years 3 and 4), students who are 9 or 10 years old would build upon the learning in previous stages by learning rights and responsibilities in relationships, types of abuse, power in relationships, protective and help-seeking strategies.

The Department's resources support students to:

- practise responses and strategies to promote personal safety in unsafe situations, including ways to assertively communicate messages through activities such as role plays
- explore a wide range of scenarios and describing the difference between an accident and abuse.

Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6)

In Stage 3 (years 5 and 6) students – who are 11 or 12 years old – extend their understanding of consent and rights and responsibilities in relationships and learn skills and strategies to develop new, and to maintain, respectful relationships. They would do this through activities such as:

- role plays which allow students to identify where consent has been given and rights and responsibilities were respected. Students would describe how to respond to situations where a person does not respect their rights and suggest strategies to resist coercion.

Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8)

In Stage 4, which is years 7 and 8 where students are aged 12-14, the focus of the learning is on:

- understanding the laws related to consent and age of consent in NSW and the importance of consent as part of a respectful relationship – with a focus on sexual or intimate relationships
- demonstrating the skill of assertive communication and strategies to protect themselves and others, including ways to clearly ask for and receive consent.

The activities in the classroom for this learning would include:

- explicitly investigating the laws of consent and applying those laws to scenarios
- using case studies and scenarios to identify examples of sexual consent and where it has been given and received.

Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10)

In Stage 5, which is years 9 and 10 where students are aged 14-16, the focus of the learning is on:

- practising negotiation of boundaries in a range of scenarios. As different scenarios are provided to students, they would work together to predict some potential problems that may arise when it comes to negotiating consent and develop solutions to overcome these barriers
- practising the use of personal skills to communicate their boundaries and give and receive consent clearly in a range of situations such as an intimate relationship or refusing requests from people to send sexual images or videos
- linking the concept of consent to the sharing of images online (ethical behaviour online and offline).

Years 7-10 PDHPE Life Skills outcomes and content

For students in Years 7-10 with a disability, particularly an intellectual disability who are not able to access the regular PDHPE outcomes and content through adjustments, can undertake the PDHPE Life Skills outcomes and content.

Through the PDHPE Life Skills outcomes and content, students will develop the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to develop and enhance positive, respectful relationships, including understanding and negotiating consent.

Stage 6 or senior students - Life Ready

The Life Ready mandatory 25-hour course in NSW public schools promotes respect, responsibility, enjoyment, inclusion and social justice for self and others.

The course content is divided into six relevant and contemporary learning contexts, of which one is relationships and one is sexuality and sexual health.

Through Life Ready, students learn about promoting safety, equality and respect in relationships and negotiating consent as part of safe and ethical behaviour.

Learning experiences and activities are designed to address challenges and situations that account for the wider social context within which young people operate. This includes social situations where exposure or use of alcohol and drugs may influence behaviour. It also refers to the wide range of relationships (online and offline) which young people can and will experience.

How often would this learning occur for students?

We know from the research related to effective respectful relationship education that:

- one-off lessons are not sufficient and therefore students need the opportunity to revisit the content over time to build understanding and skills
- programs should include activities focused on skill development and be interactive.

Therefore, this content needs to be explicitly programmed to ensure regular touchpoints across a term, a year, and a stage of learning to consolidate and build a student's understanding and skills. This learning can then be supported through discussions at home. Schools are encouraged to address this content each year. The emphasis and time allocated are determined by the teacher.

How do I know when and what my child is learning in relation to this content?

Some members of the community including students can consider aspects of PDHPE and Life Ready to be confronting, sensitive or controversial. This includes aspects which address abuse, consent, violence, drugs and alcohol and sexual behaviours.

The Department's [Controversial issues in schools policy](#) provides guidance and direction for the management of these issues in schools.

Schools are advised to work with parents to inform them of the specific details of the program, so that parents can make informed decisions about withdrawing their child from a particular session. This should be done before the learning begins.

Parents and carers can also access the Department's [Child Protection Education website](#) to explore what their child will learn [at each stage](#). The [PDHPE syllabus](#) is also publicly available on the NSW Education Standards Authority website.

Question 7: How do parents assist in teaching consent?

Families have a strong role in teaching their children values and attitudes towards relationships, consent and sexuality. Families will lay the foundations for well adjusted, confident and healthy children who go on to experience positive, respectful relationships.

Accessing reliable and accurate information about a wide range of relationships, sexuality and sexual health issues is important to have the discussions at home. Working in partnership with the school will maximise the outcomes for each child.

The Department does not endorse or mandate external resources, programs or providers. Principals and teachers are empowered to make these decisions at a local level. These decisions are made based on student needs and community context and resources.

However, there are some good resources to support parents with discussing consent or aspects or relationships, sexuality or sexual health at home. Parents are encouraged to speak to teachers to find out which resources are used in their school.

Through the [Statement of Intent](#), we have committed to providing greater support and resources for parents and carers to continue these conversations beyond the school gate.