



**Belong To LGBTQ+**  
Youth Ireland

# **SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION**



## **Rationale**

The teaching and learning of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides a unique space where students can develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values needed to support their physical, emotional, social and spiritual\* wellbeing, now and in the future. The SPHE specification is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion and empathy.

Adolescence is a time of important change and challenge for young people as they come to a clearer sense of their identity and gain a more secure sense of who they are. The lifelong process of 'becoming your own person' and gaining a secure sense of identity is a prime developmental concern in adolescence. All young people need knowledge and skills to help them develop a strong sense of self, make informed and healthy decisions, be able to take care of themselves and others, and manage life's challenges.

This course places a strong focus on the development of important life skills that young people need growing up in a fast changing and complex world. Specifically, it focuses on developing the core social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills. These have been shown to determine how well people manage changing and challenging environments and can influence many important life outcomes.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of, and connects with, aspects of SPHE. It is of particular importance for young people at this stage of their lives as they reflect on questions such as

‘what kind of person am I?’ and ‘what matters for me in relationships?’ As they continue to form their identity, they are making sense of life experiences, information, images and messages about relationships and sexuality from a range of informal sources such as their peers, family, the media, online world. Having the opportunity to think about and discuss relationships, sexuality and healthy sexual expression within a safe classroom setting and with a skilled teacher is vitally important.

Through the use of critical and participative pedagogies, SPHE can provide a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space where students’ self-awareness and awareness of others can grow, and where they engage in reflection and dialogue, and identify actions they can take to protect and promote their own wellbeing and that of others. By affirming and developing young people’s strengths and capacities as active agents in their own lives, SPHE can play an important role in enabling young people to find their voice and develop self-efficacy.

In junior cycle, six indicators have been identified as central to students’ wellbeing. Teaching and learning within the SPHE classroom can provide meaningful learning opportunities to foster all six indicators of wellbeing, helping students become more Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware. SPHE is thereby a core pillar of a school’s Wellbeing programme in junior cycle.

This specification supports teachers in adopting an approach that is inclusive in accordance with principles of equality, human rights and responsibilities. This ensures that all students can see themselves, their families and their communities reflected across the learning and can learn to value diversity as a feature of humankind and as a source of enrichment. SPHE thus contributes to building a cohesive, compassionate and fair society; one that is inclusive of all genders,

sexualities, ethnicities, religious beliefs/worldviews, social classes and abilities/disabilities.

## **Structure**

This course aims to build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth; to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives; empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others; and enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society.

### **Strand 1: Understanding myself and others**

- 1.2 Reflect on their personal strengths and values and how they bring these into relationships.
- 1.3 Explore the range of influences and life experiences that can impact on self-image and self-esteem and identify ways to nurture a positive sense of self-worth
- 1.4 Recognise the factors and influences that shape young people's self-identity, such as family, peers, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnic background, dis/abilities, religious beliefs/worldviews
- 1.5 Reflect on gender equality and how gender stereotypes impact on expectations, behaviour and relationships
- 1.6 Discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments

- 1.7 Communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others
- 1.8 Reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy and discuss ways that can be expressed

## **Strand 2: Making healthy choices**

- 2.7 Assess the benefits and difficulties associated with their online world and discuss strategies for dealing with a range of scenarios that might arise
- 2.8 Discuss how to share personal information, images, opinions and emotions in a safe, responsible and respectful manner online and in person
- 2.9 Explore why young people share sexual imagery online and examine the risks and consequences of doing this
- 2.10 Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information, supports and services about health and wellbeing

## **Strand 3: Relationships and sexuality**

- 3.1 Reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships
- 3.2 Examine the benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships- friendships, family relationships and romantic/intimate relationships

- 3.3 Identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships
- 3.4 Appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others
- 3.5 Consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health
- 3.6 Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways
- 3.7 Explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices
- 3.8 Appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building care relationships and from a legal perspective
- 3.9 Explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- 3.10 Discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations, and social norms in relation to sexual expression
- 3.11 demonstrates how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

## **Strand 4: Emotional Wellbeing**

- 4.1 Discuss the fluid nature of emotional wellbeing and ways to nurture and protect it
- 4.2 Recognise and acknowledge their emotions and recognise the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- 4.4 Discuss ways to support themselves and others in challenging times and where/how/when to seek support, if needed
- 4.6 Recognise different kinds of abusive and bullying behaviour that can occur in interactions online and in person
- 4.7 Explain why noticing and responding to different kinds of abusive or bullying behaviour that can occur in person and online is important and discuss appropriate responses including why, how, where and when to report
- 4.8 Identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up
- 4.9 Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information and services aimed at supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health

## **Ideas for Teaching and Learning:**

### **Facilitate your students to:**

- Discuss cultural, social or familial expectations around gender, for example expectations that boys shouldn't cry, or that girls shouldn't play football.
- Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced in diverse ways.
- Choose the gender pronouns they prefer (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/their). NB: stress that no one should feel pressured share pronouns or other personal information.
- Hear you use language that is inclusive of different kinds of relationships- for example, partner instead of boyfriend/girlfriend, sibling instead of brother/sister.
- See diverse imagery- for example, families with same-gender parents.
- Discuss inclusive case studies, representing people with different sexual orientations or gender identities.
- Explore how gender is represented in the media by thinking about questions such as 'How do gender stereotypes relate to or affect LGBTQ+ people?' 'How do they also affect other groups of people who aren't LGBTQ+'?
- Hear diverse first-person accounts from LGBTQ+ people and their experiences.
- Produce and display an inclusion calendar with key LGBTQ+ dates and events.

- Create an information and advice leaflet to support parents/guardians of LGBTQ+ children and young people. See: <https://www.fflag.org.uk/>
- Input at a year or school assembly on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia during Anti-Bullying Week or Stand Up Awareness Week.
- Critically evaluate school policies and highlight where they could be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people.
- Analyse how the school, local community or country could be made more inclusive for all types of people.
- Evaluate how and why LGBTQ+ people may sometimes feel excluded and create ways to overcome these barriers (in school, society, law, politics, etc.).
- Engage with activities in existing SPHE resources which focus on LGBTQ+ related issues. (See sample resources below.)

## **Health Service Executive (HSE) and Junior Cycle SPHE Resources**

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/understanding-ourselves-unit-of-learning/>
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/healthy-choices/>
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/training-and-resources-for-post-primary-school-teachers/relationships-and-sexuality-education-training-and-resources-for-post-primary-school-teachers.html>

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/rse/>
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/emotional-wellbeing/>

**Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).  
‘Coming out to others: lesson’**

- <https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/LGBTI+%20English%20Print.pdf#page=39>

**Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).  
‘Transgender identity: lesson’**

- <https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/LGBTI+%20English%20Print.pdf#page=45>

**NCCA SPHE/RSE Specification and Toolkit**

- <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/2780c6c6-993c-46fb-8ba6-b647188337c9/JC-SPHE-Short-Course-2023-EV-FINAL.pdf>
- <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-Cycle/Short-Courses/SPHE-2023/SPHE-toolkit/Resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-SPHE/>

**Belong To YouTube Channel**

- <https://www.youtube.com/user/BeLonGToYouthService>

**Stand Up Awareness Week Resource Pack:**

- <https://www.belongto.org/professionals/standup/>



**Belong To LGBTQ+**  
Youth Ireland

**Belong To is a national organisation supporting LGBTQ+ youth.**

Since 2003, we have worked with LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland offering safety and support through our services. Let your students and youth groups know about Belong To and what supports are available for them including LGBTQ+ youth groups, crisis counselling with Pieta and digital support services.

For educators, we offer online training, support and initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark. For youth workers, we support a National Network of LGBTQ+ youth groups and run the Rainbow Award – an action-focused accreditation programme that supports a whole-organisation approach to safe and supportive services for LGBTQ+ youth.

**Learn more at [www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)**



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