

# Respectful relationships education



## Tip guide for teachers to engage parents and families

For many schools, respectful relationships is a new program. Curriculum content includes child safety, personal interactions, emotions, relationships, power and how people and groups interrelate. Parents may be curious or concerned about the content.

This guide provides you with tips and strategies for working with parents and families, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds when teaching about respectful relationships in your school.

## Parents and families as partners in respectful relationships education

The aim of respectful relationships education is to support students to develop the skills and attitudes required to build and maintain respectful relationships throughout their lives. School-based learning is most effective when it is consistently reinforced and modelled at home.

Getting buy-in from parents and families is important. The accompanying parents and families guide has been developed and translated into several languages. You can distribute it to provide your school community with accurate information about the learning that will take place in respectful relationships education and how they can support it at home.

## Issues to consider when communicating with parents and families about respectful relationships education

There may be misconceptions about what students learn about in respectful relationships education. The following points may help clarify what is being taught.

- Much of the content in respectful relationships education is based on existing social and emotional learning programs and/or child protection programs.
- The curriculum content includes a focus on gender roles, stereotypes and use of power as a result of wishing to address some of the drivers of violence against women and children.

- Respectful relationships education has gained greater impetus in schools to address the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- Respectful relationships education has an established place in the Australian Curriculum in key areas such as Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capability, Intercultural Understanding and other areas such as English.

Some members of the community may consider aspects of respectful relationships education sensitive or controversial. These concerns are most commonly expressed in regard to:

- topics that deal with sexuality
- topics that challenge gender roles or stereotypes
- age-appropriateness of content.

These sensitivities can be heightened in communities that have a high level of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

## Key considerations

### Difference in values

Many parents from CALD backgrounds hold fears for their children about the loss of traditional culture and values through the perceived westernisation of their children. These fears can affect their willingness to allow their children to participate in respectful relationships education programs.

### Language barriers

Language barriers can be a challenge when trying to explain the purpose of respectful relationships education.

Parents may rely on their children, who may be more confident in English, to take on the role as advocate for the family, providing assistance with interpreting. Ensuring that children are well versed in the purpose and nature of respectful relationships education programs can also help them to explain to their parents and families what they are learning at school in the program. Accessing a trusted community translator is sometimes a useful strategy.

Your school may also find it useful to collect information at enrolment and ask parents to identify an individual, like a supportive relative or friend, to attend meetings and assist them with understanding content.

### Concepts of family and authority

Not all family structures are based on the 'nuclear family'. Extended family relationships are very important in a wide range of different cultures. For some families it is important that the head of the family (such as an uncle or other older male relative) is involved in all important matters, or families may want an older sibling to attend meetings as an advocate on their behalf. It's important for schools to anticipate and be welcoming of these arrangements.

## Communicating with a diverse parent population

If your school community includes students from many different cultures, you may face additional challenges engaging with parents effectively.

It is important not to rely solely on written communication (newsletters or website communication) as your only communication with parents and families, even when translated. Parents may be competent *speaking* in their own language, but may not be literate in the language. You might consider other forms of communicating information to engage parents and families, such as using visual communication or convening a group conversation session with a translator.

Consider how your school website supports parents and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. You might consider translating important information on your website into the languages of your parent groups.

Ask parents and families about their preferred methods of online communication. You may find that there are preferred social media platforms and channels that your school is not currently using that can be used to build relationships.

When planning your engagement strategies, find out who within your school has had previous experience in engaging parents from CALD backgrounds at your school. You may have staff, such as bilingual aides, with particular expertise or experience who you can get involved.

Forming collaborative partnerships between your school, local community organisations and individual ethnic communities can also be helpful in engaging parents from CALD successfully. Find out if you can partner with organisations that have experience working with CALD communities. Partnerships may include staff from local migrant community organisations, migrant resource centres or services such as community health or youth and family services. These connections can help to support engagement between parents and the school. If your school is located in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria or Queensland you can make links with your local Community Hub or consider creating your own. Find out more on the [Community Hubs](#) website.

## Organising parent information meetings about respectful relationships education

Language or culture-specific meetings can be an effective tool for engaging parents about respectful relationships education if your school community includes members from shared cultural or linguistic groups. Separate meetings for each cultural or linguistic group will allow for shared discussion to address the particular issues that each community may have and reduce the complexity of communicating individually in different languages.

Involving students may also enhance the success of parent and family engagement activities. Students can offer practical advice on the most effective approach to take with their families and what is appropriate for their culture and religion. However, some parents may prefer that students not be included, due to the sensitive subject matter, so it is important to always check before involving them.

It is also important to be flexible and accommodating when setting times for meetings, such as being aware that some cultural groups have important times of the day or week, such as prayer times or sabbath, when it would be inappropriate to attend a meeting.

When selecting a venue for meeting parents, consider a meeting location where parents feel comfortable and that allows for effective participation in discussions. Avoid any venue in the school that may feel intimidating or overly formal. Consider holding meetings at an offsite location that is familiar to parents to encourage involvement, such as a local community centre or cultural meeting space.

## Accessing interpreter services

Interpreting and translating services are also an option to ensure that parents who require an interpreter are better able to communicate with schools. The [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS\) National](#) is available all over Australia for non-English speakers who need to communicate with an agency or a business. Most education authorities will also have interpreter and translation services that can be accessed by schools.

## Useful resource on parent and community engagement

[Opening the school gate: Engaging migrant and refugee families](#)