

# A Catholic Perspective on Relationships and Sexuality Education



## SCHOOL-WIDE RELATIONSHIPS SEXUALITY & CHILD SAFETY EDUCATION WITHIN BRISBANE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

### Background

Education in human sexuality is primarily the responsibility of the parents. However, this responsibility has never been an easy one and in the 21st century it is further compounded by many additional challenges and difficulties. Consequently, school, Church and the wider community play a significant role in assisting parents to fulfil their educational responsibilities (*BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.8*).

Catholic Education, as an agent of the Catholic Church, exists to give witness to Jesus' vision of reality through the integration of faith, life and culture. It is committed to wholeness, and the freedom that comes from living life wholeheartedly according to God's plan. From this basis, Catholic Education promotes human growth in its every dimension and possibility and recognises Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as fundamental to realising its mission. Consequently, RSE is a vital component of formal education within the Catholic faith. Through this school-based educational activity, young people explore the Catholic vocation to love responsibly and to live life whole-heartedly (*BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.8*).

### Catholic Perspective

Embedding a Catholic perspective into RSE is a response to:

- the human being's ongoing quest in seeking the purpose and meaning of life and relationships
- the Christian narrative, theology and Church tradition
- the Catholic vision for human living.

The distinctiveness of Catholic perspective is found in responses to the Christic question of 'Who do you say I am?' and responses to questions such as: Who are we? Who are we trying to become? How do we get there? It is the Christian narrative that provides us with responses that deepen our understanding and thereby increase our capacity to flourish.

The Christian narrative explains that all creation is good and has been made by Love (God) for love (us), and why, being made in the image of God means each human being has been gifted with an unrepeatable and unique *dignity*. It describes why it is we long for *wholeness* and *union* despite our limitations and our ability to wound and harm one another. It reveals our capacity and disposition to embrace one another with *tenderness, mercy, forgiveness* and *compassion*. It breathes *hope* into our lives by gracing the unfolding human story with extraordinary possibility for *restoration* and *redemption*.

The Catholic vision for human thriving cherishes personhood, relationships and sexuality as fundamental to living *life to the full* (John 10:10). It rests on the assumption that all young people deserve, and have a right to, a deepening understanding of the human person and a comprehensive approach to RSE that follows research-based best practice guidelines. Essentially, RSE in Catholic schools focuses 'upon the lifelong journey toward wholeness, from egoism to self-giving love as a person created in the image of God and one who contributes to the common good' (Living Life to the Full, BCE, 2005, p.6 in *BCE RSE Shape Paper*, 2016, p.16).

### **Intention of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Catholic Schools - Archdiocese of Brisbane**

The intention of RSE in Brisbane Catholic Education is to empower young people to advocate for, and actively participate in:

1. personal safety and ongoing transformation physically developed, psychologically integrated, interpersonally loving and responsible, and spiritually holy.
2. enriching the lives of all others.
3. cultivating loving, just, and safe communities.

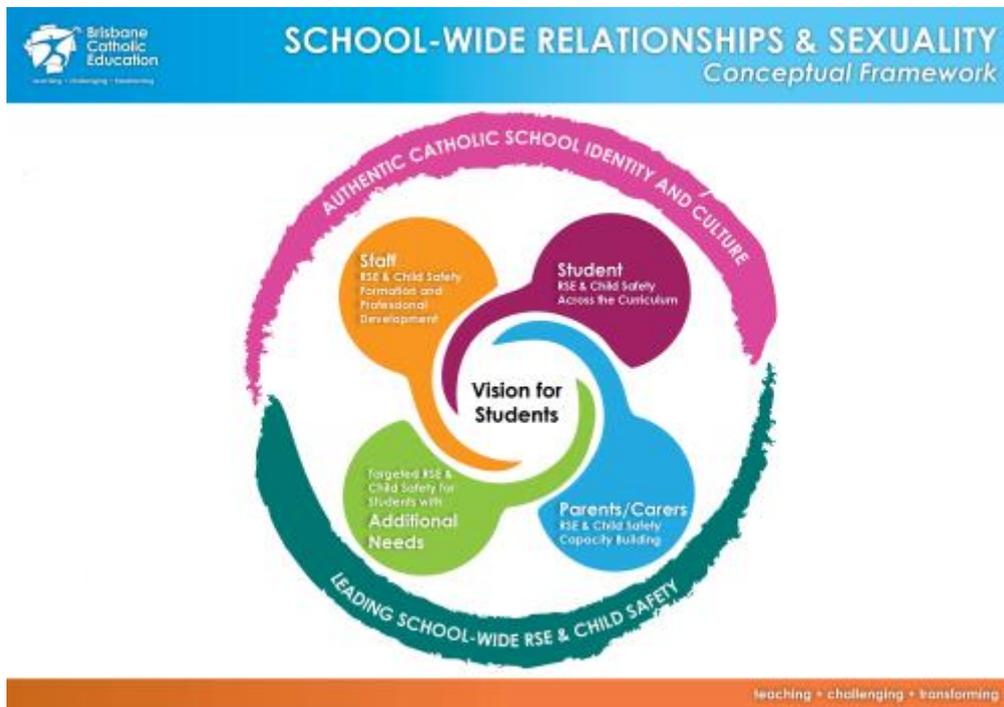
This intention is consistent with Brisbane Catholic Education's vision. Its approach to RSE within the Catholic tradition is inspired by the life and witness of Jesus Christ and, as such, RSE is devoted to *love* and *justice*.

Brisbane Catholic Education holds in creative tension its aspirations, and the truth of what it means to be human and to live in this glorious, yet complex and challenging world. It understands that the goal of education, and indeed life, is not perfection. Rather, it is about creating the educational contexts in which young people learn how to live wholeheartedly. Here, a wholehearted life is understood as one that embraces vulnerabilities and weaknesses (Brown, 2012). The pathway to wholeness and freedom rests largely on what we decide to do with our disappointments, frustrations, failures, betrayals, injustices and hurts. It is only when weaknesses are accepted as part of our humanity that we can be transformed. The Christian narrative teaches us that in each struggle there is a divine gift - conversion, independence, faith, courage, surrender, limitations, endurance, and transformation (Chittister OSB, 2003). Holding the tensions of these struggles teaches us wisdom and leads us to an increased capacity for compassion, forgiveness and love (Rohr, 2011). *Cited in BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.11.*

### **Leading School-Wide Relationship and Sexuality Education**

Leading relationships and sexuality education from a Catholic perspective depends upon unifying the community, developing shared goals and direction, and providing adept oversight, supportive infrastructure and appropriate resourcing (O'Brien & Resnick, 2009 in *BCE RSE Shape Paper*, 2016, p.17). Research affirms that a school-wide approach to RSE balances the 'learning to know' and 'learning to do' with 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' (Roffey, 2015). It engages key members of the school community in making decisions about the why, what, when, who and how of RSE. Specifically, it focuses on the way it is taught and lived within the classroom and broader school culture. As a result, this approach to embedding a Catholic perspective in RSE serves to strengthen and deepen the three themes of BCE's Strategic Framework (2017-2020) and in particular, *Strong Catholic*

Identity (BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.16). Within this context, this is named as *Authentic Catholic School Identity and Culture* and is captured in *BCE's School-Wide Relationships and Sexuality Education Conceptual Framework* (BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.16).



Operationalising the *BCE's School-Wide Relationships and Sexuality Education Conceptual Framework* is dependent on leadership and its support in cultivating a capable, committed and resourced School-wide RSE Implementation Team. This team will grow in the ability to implement this conceptual framework within their own context (BCE RSE Shape Paper, 2016, p.18) with the ongoing support of BCEO.

There are a number of key Elements (and their Components) in the conceptual framework, that need to be planned for, monitored, evaluated and reported on, over the years of school-wide implementation. These Elements, which are the basis for school-wide RSE planning, are captured in the diagram above and listed below:

1. **Leading** School-Wide RSE & Child Safety
2. **Staff** RSE & Child Safety Formation and Professional Development
3. **Student** RSE & Child Safety Learning and Teaching
4. **Parents/Carers** RSE & Child Safety Capability Building
5. Targeted RSE & Child Safety support for Students with **Additional Needs**

Effective implementation of the Elements (and their Components) equips leadership with a vehicle for school improvement, having implications for every imaginable aspect of human life.

### **Professional Learning**

Please click on the link for [Professional Learning RSE](#) that is offered this year.