



CONSENT ED

Whole School Approach
Model for Sexual Violence
Awareness and
Prevention



Foreword

There may be an array of reasons or a specific rationale as to why a school may decide to develop and implement a whole school approach. One thing a whole school approach can do is be of significant benefit for everyone in their respective school community and beyond. Deciding to engage in a whole school approach, or specifically one encompassing sexual violence prevention and awareness, a school will need to ensure it has a strong foundation underpinning the purpose, setting the minimum standards for its construct, and execution, and the importance of monitoring and evaluating emanating from a holistic perspective.

Ireland's Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy presents a very clear aim of zero tolerance within our communities and society around DSGBV premised upon four pillars, 'Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Policy co-ordination'. Collectively we can effect real change and this can be achieved from 'grass root' levels in communities, embracing the ethos of the 'Prevention Pillar' nurturing positive steps in DSGBV awareness and prevention.

The Consent Ed Project will propose a suggested whole school approach model for schools which possesses key aspects to its composition and phases. Schools can utilise this model and adapt it to meet the specific and individual needs of their school culture, ethos, community and environment. Implementing a whole school approach is not a linear process, only constant evaluation and adaptation of the whole school approach will lead to progress and lasting change within any school community achieving the aims and goals of its unique whole school approach.

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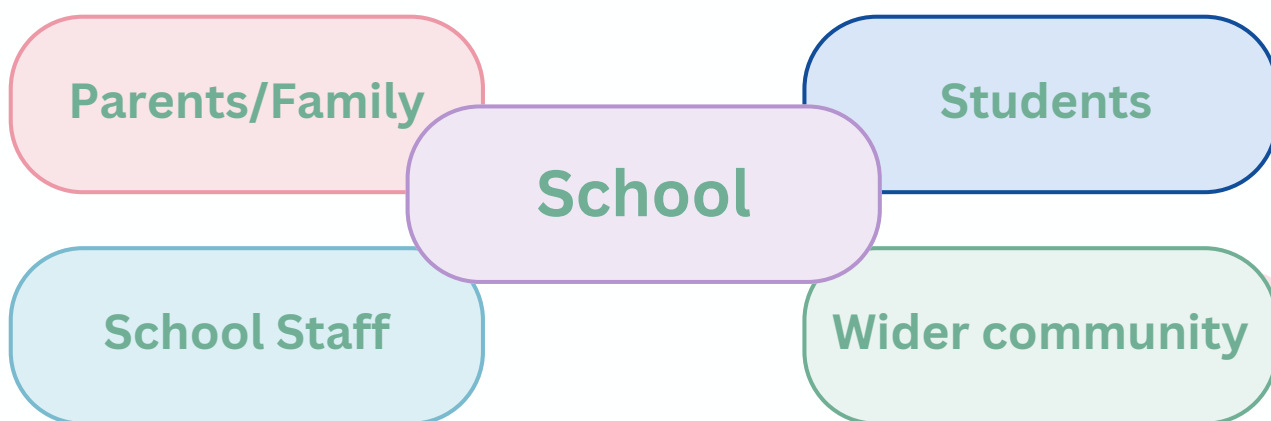


Whole School Approach concept

Phase 1:

A whole school approach is a strategy that considers the interconnectedness of schools, communities, and families with the aim of improving the school environment for students, staff, and community members. This is pivotal to a whole school approach being successful as it ensures involvement of all members of the school community engaging in a collaborative process of change to improve specific areas of school life that impact on wellbeing. (gov.ie). Schools are considered essential settings for individuals' socialisation and positive development (Okumu et al., 2017, 2020), while teachers are seen as caregivers and agents of classroom development and change (Bhana et al., 2006; Pillay, 2017). Parents, families, peers, the wider community and society all play a role in the learning and socialisation processes for young people, that is why a whole school approach will intrinsically link all this together and incorporate their participation and inclusion in it. A whole school approach essentially is a 'wrap-around' approach model embracing all the relevant elements that make up part of the formal educational process complemented, and supported, by those outside of that process.

Figure 1: Illustrates the key stakeholders who form a whole school approach.



Thus, in this initial infancy stage, a school must be clear and committed to the rudiments involved in creating, establishing and introducing a whole school approach and is inclusive of all genders and identities. When a school in its creation phase of a whole school approach, what is important to reflect upon is its purpose and pedagogical approaches ensuring a clear message is identified as the font upon which the whole school approach is built on and around.

- Why - to what end do we learn?
- What do we teach?
- How do we learn?
- Who do we learn from?
- Where do we learn?
- Who do we learn with?
- What is it we want to learn and inform about?
- What do we want the outcomes to be?

The answers to the above questions will help direct and shape each school's whole school approach in its own unique way ensuring all parts of the school work together and are committed from senior management, teachers, all school staff, as well as parents, carers and the wider community with the school as the hub and centre of community life strengthening all these relationships. Physical, emotional and social safety – are basic needs and conditions that form the foundation for learning. It is important to ensure that an environment is created in which students feel safe and supported in these basic needs. It reflects a safe and secure environment where students experience a sense of belonging and know that the concerns and contributions of parents, students and teachers are considered. A positive school climate and atmosphere nurtures self-confidence, and self-worth and promotes respectful and caring relationships throughout the school.

Understanding how the Socio-ecological Model explains how individuals, families and broader social structures, and community social norms, shape gender norms and contribute to gender inequality and discrimination. By considering how this shapes our views, attitudes, beliefs can be informative and progressive in complementing the creation of a whole school approach.



Phase 2: Developing a Whole School Approach on Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention

It is critical when any school establishes and introduces a whole school approach that they do so having firstly engaged in Phase 1, knowing whom they key stakeholders are and what exactly the fundamental aim is. If the basics are there, the whole school approach is solid and robust, it should be able adapt, evolve and transform successfully.

Figure 2 exemplifies and summarises the key concepts involved in the setting up, delivery and evaluative processes associated with a whole school approach and each component will be explained.

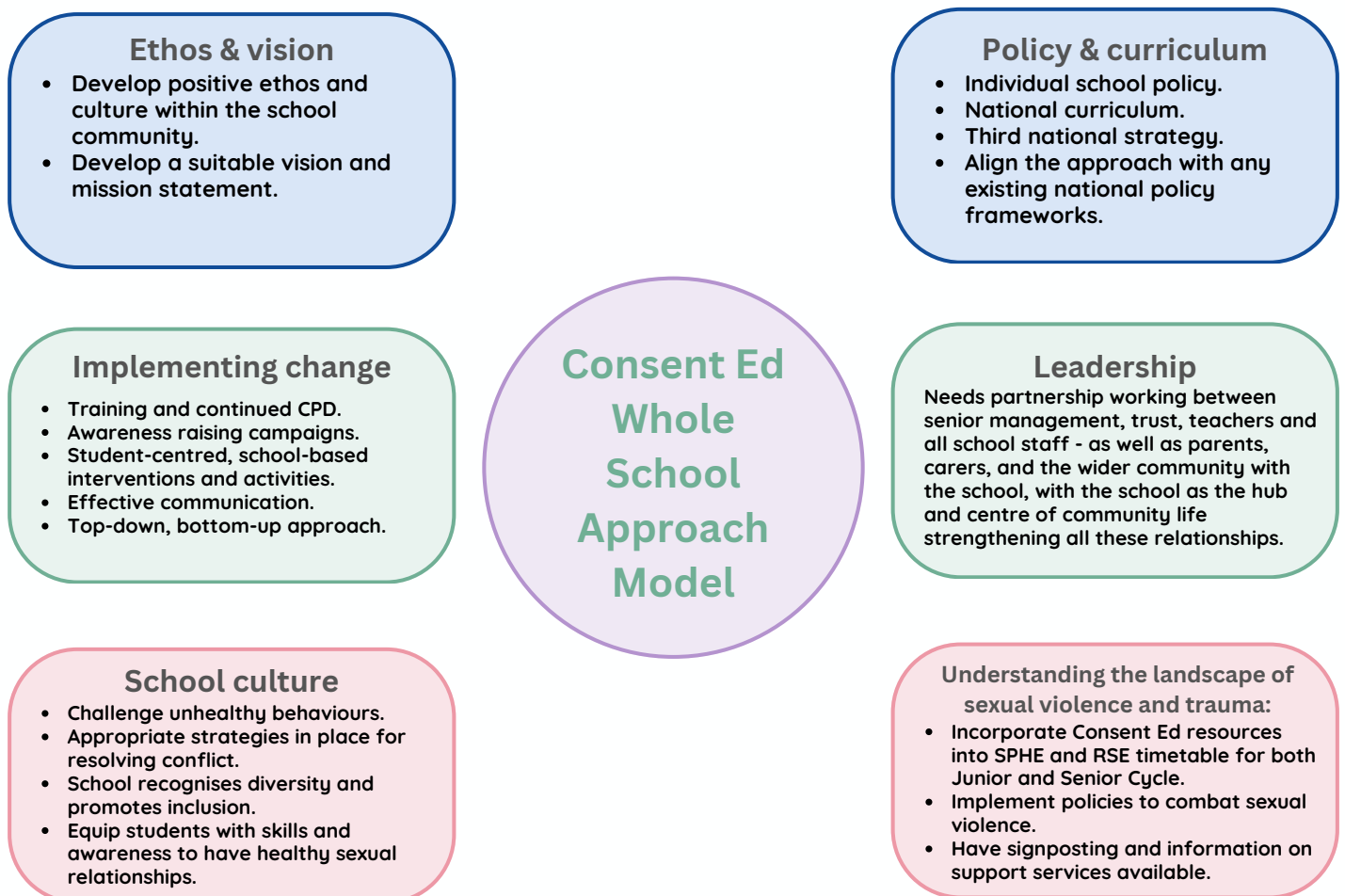
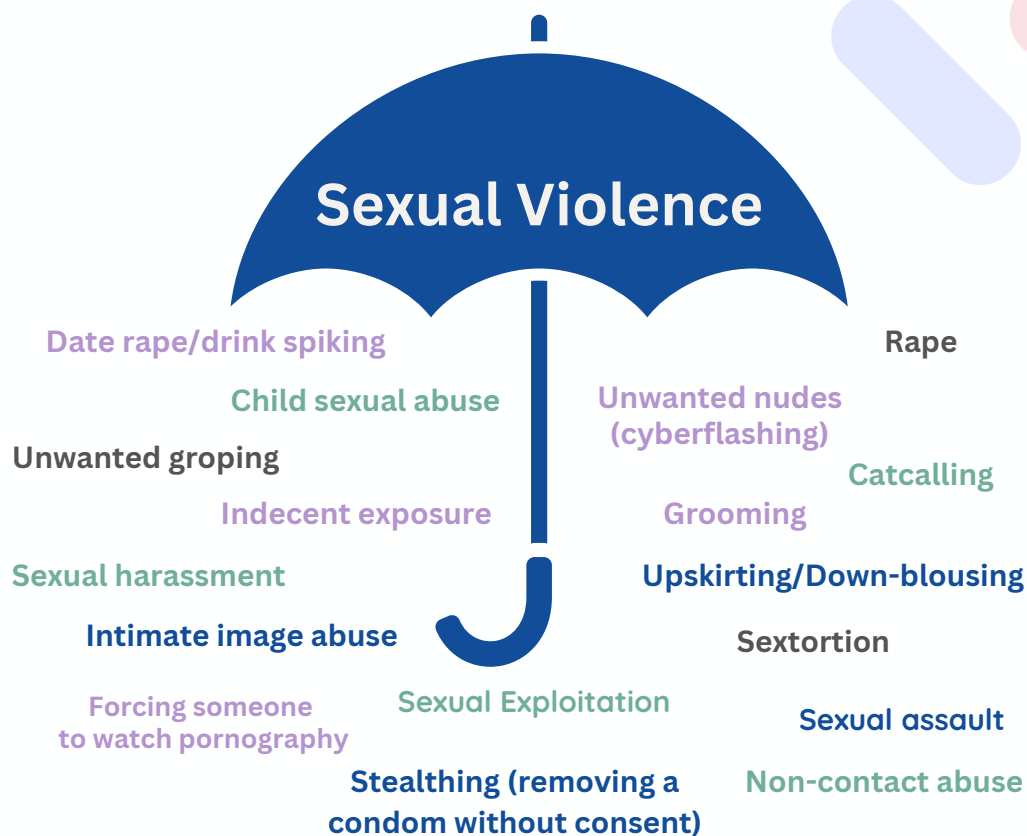


Figure 3: Portrays examples of sexual violence.



Ethos and Vision:

Developing a positive ethos and culture within the school community is something which can build upon what is already there and will help elevate it and help to re-focus the lens upon which the whole school approach is specifically concentrating on. Developing a suitable mission and vision statement is important in terms of bolstering the premise of the whole school approach by clearly setting out the intentions and purpose of same. Developing a common understanding of what sexual violence is, and how it may be identified and addressed, this will help to reduce ambiguity and provides educators, students, and parents, a clear and consistent point of reference as to what is expected in terms of the ethos and vision of the school.

Implementing Change:

A further fundamental aim of any whole school approach is the setting of minimum standards across the entire school and activities. Effective communication processes must be an integral aspect using a 'top down, bottom up' approach whereby everyone within the school community is aware and informed. For this to be effective, schools need to identify and address their individual needs and engage in a continuous, cyclical processes for improvement through ongoing professional development, key and targeted student centred, school-based interventions and activities, awareness raising campaigns and initiatives for both students, parents and the wider community, enveloped in a clear evaluative process to review, refresh, renew and reform the whole school approach meeting emerging and established need.

Being responsive and adaptive is key to the sustainability of any whole school approach. Strategies to address sexual violence prevention and awareness will work far more successfully if they are student-centered and developed in active consultation with students, taking into account what interests or motivates them in the subject area, playing on their strengths but also recognising their weaknesses and then how best to address those.

School culture:

Notably, it should have an emphasis on positive discipline which is an approach that focuses on strengthening positive behavior rather than just punishing negative behavior which in turn helps to foster a positive culture within the school environment. Additionally, a whole school approach extends the learning environment from what is taught inside the classroom, from establishing a benchmark for effective school-based interventions, to how students' well-being is supported outside the classroom. This type of approach is commonly recognised as characterising a health promoting school.

The whole school approach should incorporate safe and constructive approaches to challenge unhealthy behaviours; include appropriate strategies in place for resolving conflict; recognising diversity and promotes inclusion. Equip students with skills and awareness to have a healthy sexual relationships. A whole school approach covers all vulnerable groups by identifying that in some way how sexual violence does not discriminate.

Policy and curriculum:

The role and influence of policies at a societal level can be significant in helping to shape and align with what is best practice, responsive and progressive when establishing and introducing a whole school approach. With relation to a sexual violence and awareness whole school approach, it would be extremely beneficial to inform the strategic direction and trajectory for the development and creation of same. Ireland's Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy which outlines the Government's goals for the next five years, built around a framework containing the four Istanbul pillars of: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Policy Co-ordination.

Individual School Policies must be revisited, updated and/or amended where appropriate. If a new school policy is warranted or beneficial to this whole school approach that should be actioned. Refer to the National Curriculum and align the whole school approach with any existing national policy frameworks that are relevant informing the content, construct and essence of the whole school approach as this can help create consistency and adds legitimacy to the school-based framework.

Leadership:

Ultimately a whole school approach will necessitate key drivers for the creation, introduction and monitoring of same and this will need partnerships working together between senior management, the Trust, teachers and all school staff, as well as parents, carers and the wider community with the school as the hub and centre of community life, strengthening all these relationships. It is very important too for any school not remain to static, by engaging in continuous reflection and modification that balances fidelity to the school's whole school approach but is flexible enough to integrate new and emerging trends or needs that present whilst maintaining that inclusive and partnered approach with all stakeholders. Natural leaders may emerge from the young people or parents or teachers, and it is important to nurture and foster these skills and commitment. Good leadership encourages authenticity, empathy and understanding which are key qualities which support sexual violence awareness and prevention.

Understanding the landscape of sexual violence and trauma:

Where a school is implementing a sexual violence prevention and awareness whole school approach, it is critical it weaves into its concept, (Phase 1), what the precise purpose is and that it possesses a clear understanding of the landscape of sexual violence and trauma. Everyone within, and outside, the school community who are part of this whole school approach, should be supported in understanding what constitutes sexual violence and trauma this is achieved through key interventions, activities and upskilling for all involved, parents/guardians' information workshops. Importantly, it is underpinned by a rights-based approach, which aims to achieve a positive transformation of power by strengthening the capacity of duty bearers and empowering the rights holders. Equally a beneficial action is to incorporate the Consent Ed resources into SPHE and RSE class timetabling in both Junior and Senior Cycle. Implement, amend or update policies to combat sexual violence and/or revisit current or existing policies within the school. By addressing patterns of behavior over time, addressing actions that contribute to patterns of behavior rather than isolated incidents increases the effectiveness of a whole school approach, as patterns of violence can develop and become consolidated over time if left unchecked (UNESCO, 2017a). Signpost information of support services available as a key strand to the whole school approach.

In conclusion, the creation, implementation and continued evaluation of a whole school approach around sexual violence awareness and prevention involves the engagement of various stakeholders at the school level, as well as in the local community and wider context. Importantly, it possesses a range of different activities/interventions with the aim of making schools safer, supporting increased understanding of sexual violence and its effects for all stakeholders. How to create and sustain a young person friendly environment for learning to take place in an inclusive and safe space for everyone positioned under the overarching internal and external policies in existence, nurturing the aim of zero tolerance as enshrined in Ireland's Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy.

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Glossary of Terms

Consent:

The Sexual Offences Act 2017 states that a person 'consents to a sexual act if he or she freely and voluntarily agrees to engage in that act'. According to Irish law, the legal age for consenting to sexual acts is 17.

Force:

Often we hear the phrase 'by force' and think of only physical violence. However, 'force' does not always refer to physical pressure. Perpetrators may use emotional coercion, psychological force or manipulation to coerce a victim into non-consensual sex. Some perpetrators will use threats in order to get compliance, e.g. threatening to hurt the victim or other intimidation tactics.

Intimate partner violence:

Violence that occurs between people in sexual or romantic relationships. This can include physical, verbal, emotional, economic and sexual abuse including humiliation, degradation and coercive acts and behaviours.

Grooming:

This is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them. Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked.

Pedagogy:

A teacher's pedagogy helps unlike children engage with educational content and learn effectively, knowing that learning is different for individuals. The process of planning, organising and delivery subject matter using a range of methodologies to support understanding and learning.

Positive discipline:

This is an approach to student discipline that focuses on strengthening positive behaviour rather than engaging a punitive response to the presenting behaviours.

Sexual Assault:

Happens when someone touches another person in a sexual manner without their consent, or when someone forces another person take part in a sexual activity with them without that person's consent. It includes unwanted kissing and sexual touching.

Sexual Coercion:

Is unwanted sexual activity that happens when you are pressured, tricked, threatened or forced in a non-physical way. Coercion can make you think you owe sex to someone.

Sexual Harassment:

Any unwanted sexual behaviour that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way.

Social Norms:

Common standards within a social group as to what is socially acceptable or appropriate behavior in particular social situations. Breaching these norms has social consequences.

Statutory Rape:

Consensual sex with anyone under the age of 17 may be legally referred to as Statutory Rape. What this means is that even if the person has consented to sex, their consent is not considered legally valid because they are underage.

Rape:

Unlawful sexual intercourse with someone who does not consent to it. It is sexual assault that includes penetration.

Violence:

Any action, explicit or symbolic, which results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm.

Violence against children:

All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Violence against women:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

