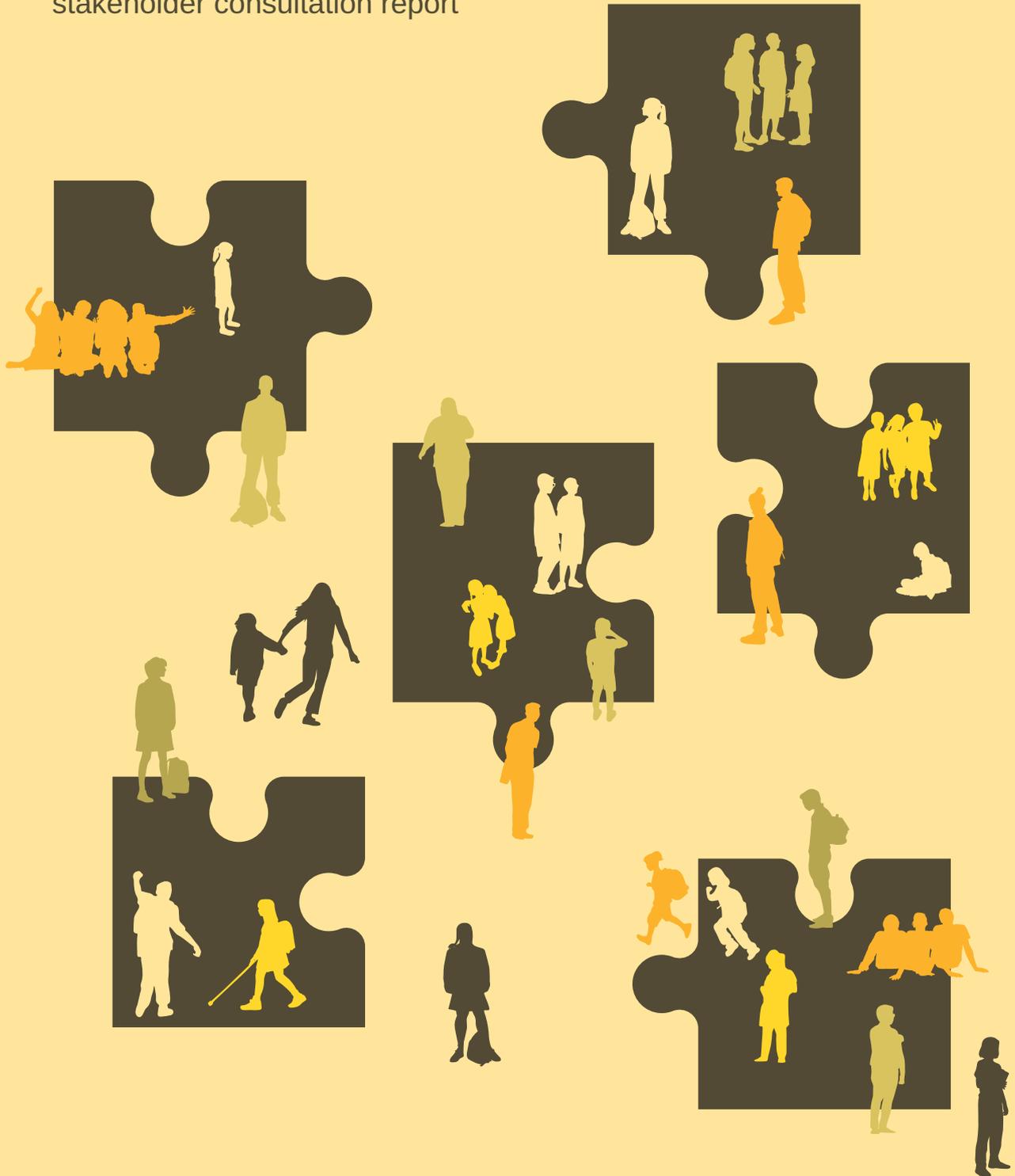


# Respectful Relationships Education Framework:

Rapid literature review and  
stakeholder consultation report



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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we come together to conduct our research and recognise that these lands have always been places of learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We honour and pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders—past and present—and acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and their ongoing leadership in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

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## 2 Acronyms & Abbreviations

<b>Acronyms &amp; Abbreviations</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>ACARA</b>	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
<b>AC-HPE</b>	Australian Curriculum in Health and Physical Education
<b>AITSL</b>	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
<b>Change the story</b>	Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of women in Australia
<b>CSE</b>	Comprehensive sexuality education
<b>CRRE</b>	Consent and Respectful Relationships Education
<b>DET</b>	Victorian Government Department of Education and Training
<b>DFSV</b>	Domestic, family and sexual violence
<b>Disability Royal Commission</b>	Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
<b>DoE</b>	Australian Government Department of Education
<b>HPE</b>	Health and Physical Education
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexuality, gender, and bodily diverse people and communities
<b>National Plan 2022–2032</b>	National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032
<b>National Stocktake and Gap Analysis</b>	Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis of Respectful Relationships Education Materials and Resources Final Report
<b>NRREEWG</b>	National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Working Group
<b>PDHPE</b>	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
<b>PLD</b>	Professional learning and development
<b>RRE</b>	Respectful Relationships Education
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sexuality Education
<b>SEL</b>	Social and Emotional Learning
<b>UDL</b>	Universal Design for Learning
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

### 2.1 TERMINOLOGY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands now collectively referred to as Australia. First Nations peoples is an encompassing term that refers to the numerous Traditional Custodians of Country across Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2022). The terms First Nations peoples and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are used interchangeably in this report. We acknowledge that definitions of these terms vary, and we do not intend to cause offence through the use of certain language. We apologise for any harm this may cause.

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# 4 Executive Summary



## 4.1 WHAT WAS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

In the October 2022 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced the [Consent and Respectful Relationships Education \(CRRE\) measure](#): a \$83.5 million investment to support schools to provide evidence-based, age-appropriate CRRE to help prevent gender-based violence and support young people to live lives free from violence. This budget announcement followed ministerial endorsement of the [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#) in May 2022. The new national curriculum seeks to ensure that students receive more explicit CRRE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2022).

The Australian Government is committed to supporting this national CRRE initiative and implementing the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](#) (the “National Plan 2022–2032”) (Australian Government Department of Social Services [DSS], 2022). With funding through the [CRRE measure](#), the Australian Government Department of Education (DoE) is leading this work. In 2023, DoE commissioned a multidisciplinary research team from Monash University, Deakin University and the University of Queensland to undertake a rapid review of the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in Australian schools and develop a Framework to guide the delivery of high quality, evidence-based RRE across Australian primary and secondary schools.

This multi-stage project included:

1. Stage One: A national Rapid Review survey with a number of state and territory Education Departments, teachers and school staff on how RRE is delivered in schools across Government, Independent and Catholic education sectors.
2. Stage Two: A rapid literature review providing the initial evidence base for a draft RRE Framework, followed by a series of national stakeholder consultations to develop, test and refine the draft RRE Framework with experts and professionals from education, government, health, community services, and domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) sectors, as well as youth advocates and representatives.

The RRE Framework was finalised through consultation with the DoE and the National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Working Group (NRREEWG), which was established to help guide implementation of the [CRRE measure](#).



## 4.2 WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE SAY?

RRE has been the focus of much international and Australian research over the past fifteen years (Carmody and Wills, 2006; Dyson, 2009; Kearney et al., 2016; Keddie and Ollis., 2019, 2020; Lamb and Brodt, 2017; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2014; Ollis, Coll et al., 2022; Ollis and Harrison, 2016; Stanley et al., 2015; Sundaram, 2013; Tutty, 2011; VicHealth, 2009). Drawing on evidence from existing research and literature, the rapid literature review identified eleven practice domains that can influence the quality and effectiveness of RRE delivery in schools. Based on these practice domains, RRE should:

- Address the gendered drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Reflect a critical and transformative pedagogical approach to power, inequality, violence and harm.
- Apply a sexual ethics informed approach.
- Embed a sustainable, whole-school approach.
- Be founded on an evidence-based and documented curriculum.
- Embody an inclusive and accessible approach.
- Be culturally safe, culturally responsive and context relevant.
- Be developmentally appropriate.
- Embody a trauma-informed approach.
- Embody a strengths-based approach.
- Represent student voice, agency and leadership.

Notably, the research literature emphasises that these domains of RRE practice are interconnected, and therefore, effective RRE programs and resources should work across all eleven domains concurrently.

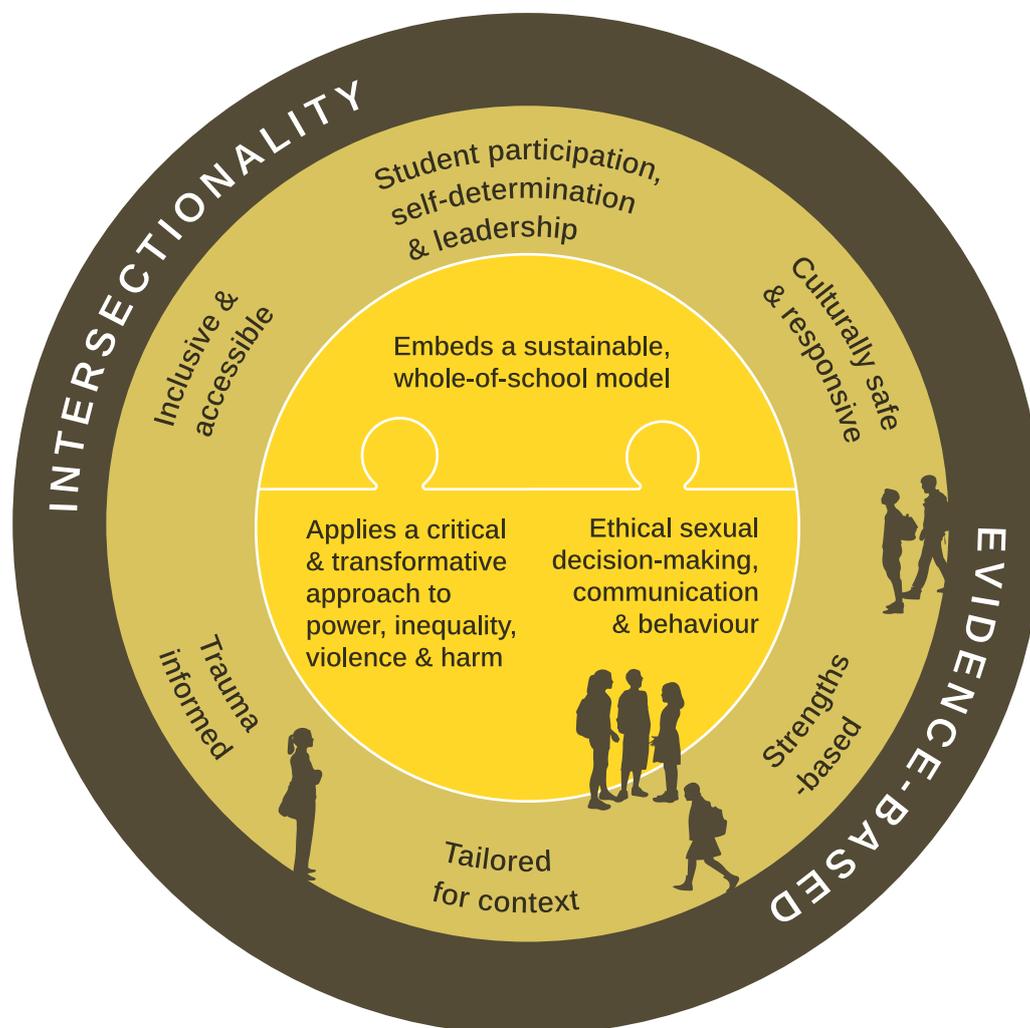
## 4.3 WHAT DID THE STAKEHOLDERS SAY?

National stakeholder consultations were conducted across September and October 2023 to inform the development of the RRE Framework. The national consultation process was based on an iterative design involving two waves of consultation workshops to develop, test and refine the draft RRE Framework (see Appendix B). Over the two-month period, the research team conducted nine virtual consultation workshops with a total of 175 stakeholders.

Stakeholders expressed general support for all eleven practice domains identified in the rapid literature review. A recurrent theme across the stakeholder consultation workshops was that all the elements identified in the literature review are inextricably linked and must be addressed in combination with each other to deliver high quality, evidence-based RRE.

Through the consultation workshops, stakeholders developed a multi-dimensional framework (see Figure 1) that included three foundational principles, six supporting principles, and two overarching principles. Figure 1 below illustrates the interrelationships between each of the principles. The foundational principles are featured in the centre of the diagram, the supporting principles in the middle layer, and the overarching principles are represented in the surrounding outer layer.

Figure 1: Overview of the interrelationships between each principle in the draft RRE Framework developed through the national stakeholder consultation process.



#### 4.4 WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

During the national consultation process, stakeholders discussed a range of strategies to support implementation of RRE in Australian primary and secondary schools. The suggested implementation strategies include:

- Professional learning and development (PLD) for all school staff.
- Actively engaging families and communities in RRE.
- Preparing for backlash and managing resistance to RRE.
- RRE quality assurance and evaluation.
- Greater cross-sectorial collaboration.
- Resourcing schools and educators to provide high-quality RRE.

Informed by the national stakeholder consultations, this report identifies the following recommended key actions for the future:

### **Strengthening the workforce**

- The Australian Government and higher education providers should support the implementation of the recommendations from the Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel report where relevant to RRE.
- The Australian Government should explore opportunities with states and territories to pursue embedding RRE in the Initial Teacher Education core content, which may include referencing RRE in the responsive teaching component.

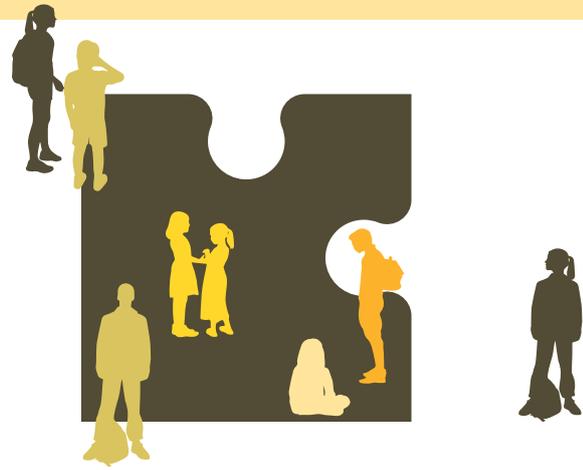
### **Advance respectful relationships education**

- The Australian Government should review the RRE Framework within four years to accommodate the rapidly growing international evidence base for RRE.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should work towards greater collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, people from migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and people in remote and rural communities to ensure that RRE is informed by, and tailored for, local school communities.

### **A whole-of-community approach**

- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should convene a national Community of Practice to support the development of guiding principles for greater collaboration between education institutions, domestic, family and sexual violence services, and health services. These guiding principles could include real life case studies to illustrate successful collaborative partnerships in different school contexts and communities. Membership of the Community of Practice should include teachers, school leaders, ACARA curriculum experts as well as representatives from education sectors and jurisdictions, and domestic, family and sexual violence peak bodies.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should support the development of practical resources, such as conversation guides, factsheets, briefings and information nights, to engage parents, carers, guardians and families in RRE that can be adapted for different school contexts and communities.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should support the development of practical resources, such as conversations guides, fact sheets and briefings, to help schools manage resistance and to respond to backlash against RRE.

# 5 Introduction



Prevention is one of four focus areas in the [National Plan 2022–2032](#), alongside early intervention, recovery, and response and healing (DSS, 2022, p. 78–88). Primary prevention is designed to stop violence from occurring in the first place by addressing and transforming the underlying causes of gender-based violence and gender inequality, thereby creating ‘upstream’ change (Heise, 2011; Our Watch, 2021a; World Health Organization [WHO] and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Primary prevention in Australia is informed by [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia](#) (“Change the story”), which is endorsed by the National Plan 2022–2032. Australia’s [National Plan 2022–2032](#) identifies strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships between all people as a key objective under the prevention focus area (DSS, 2022, p. 81). This strong focus on respectful relationships builds on the previous [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022](#), which established promoting respectful relationships as a priority action (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009).

## 5.1 THE HISTORY OF RRE IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

RRE is receiving increasing political attention and investment in Australia, and is positioned as a central pillar of policies to address gender-based violence (DSS, 2022; COAG, 2009; Our Watch 2021b; Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2014). The [National Plan 2022–2032](#) calls for all young people to receive RRE (DSS, 2022). This follows the recommendations made in the [Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report](#) (AHRC, 2020), which recommended that all Australian governments ensure children and young people receive RRE in schools.

RRE has a long and varied history in Australian schools, having been taught in some form for over 40 years (Ollis and Coll, 2018). A focus on RRE was first formalised in 1993 with the release of the Australian Government-funded *Gender and Violence Position Paper* (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993). This document was the first dedicated policy in Australia to provide a whole-school framework for education about gender-based violence and reviewed the context and content of teaching about respectful relationships. The position paper identified teaching resources under the groupings of ‘Violence Against Women’, ‘Violence in the Home’, ‘Violence’, ‘Sex-based Harassment’, ‘Sexual Assault’, ‘Gender Construction’, and ‘Personal Safety’ (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993). The Australian Government then developed and distributed resources in line with this approach for primary and secondary schools across Australia (Australian Government Department of Employment Education and Training, 1995).

While the 1993 position paper laid the Australian foundation for what has globally come to be known as RRE, RRE has a much longer history in Australian education (Ollis, 2011). As early as 1975, successive girls' educational policies recognised the direct relationships between violence experienced by girls at school and in their personal lives with their ability to take advantage of educational opportunities. Subsequent policies and action plans (e.g., *Girls, School and Society* (Commonwealth Schools Commission [CSC], 1975); *Girls and Tomorrow: The Challenge for Schools* (CSC, 1984); *National Policy for the Education of Girls* (CSC, 1987), and the *National Action Plan 1993–97* (Australian Education Council [AEC], 1993)) recommended that schools and schools systems develop curriculum material aimed at increasing student awareness of “abuse of power in relationships ... [and of] the part that violence plays in the establishment of power” (Ollis, 1995, p. 8). The *National Action Plan 1993–97* (AEC, 1993) also stated a “need to understand sex-based harassment and related issues and learn that sex-based harassment is unacceptable” (Ollis, 1995, p. 12).

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) has been used as a foundation for teaching RRE for more than 40 years (Ollis and Coll, 2018). Recognition of the impact of gender-based violence in the 1980s and 1990s broadened the focus of sexuality education in Australia to cover issues such as sexual assault, family violence, sexual harassment and homophobic violence—rather than focusing predominately on biomedical and reproductive health and hygiene (Ollis, 2009). The legacy of this model is evident in successive approaches to RRE content developed in the Australian Curriculum over the past 30 years (Curriculum Corporation Victoria, 1994; ACARA, 2012, 2022a; Ollis, Iannucci et al., 2022). In secondary schools, RRE has mainly been taught in the Health and Physical Education (HPE) or Personal Development and HPE (PDHPE) learning area, although historically, aspects have also been taught in home economics, the science disciplines, and to a lesser extent, in gender equity programs (Ollis, 2005). Currently in Australia, RRE is taught in a range of school contexts that often include RSE as part of HPE, and less commonly in positive behaviours education, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and body and personal safety units, as well as in dedicated RRE programs (Cahill et al., 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2022).

The history of RRE in primary schools differs to that of secondary schools because the teaching and learning design has overwhelmingly been the responsibility of classroom teachers rather than discipline specialists (Ollis, 2009). Further, concerns about ‘age appropriateness’ has meant that RRE has tended to be relegated to secondary rather than primary school education. Historically, primary schools have used dedicated programs such as *Protective Behaviours* and *Personal Safety* to teach about sexual abuse and body autonomy, if they taught it at all (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993).

Currently, states and territories vary greatly in how they address RRE in primary schools. Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania use dedicated RRE resources while some jurisdictions, such as South Australia, teach RRE in the context of child protection. The Health Education component of HPE remains the main context in which RRE is taught in most states and territories, particularly the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria; although the breadth and depth of learning vary enormously. Figure 2 shows the range of contexts used to teach RRE in Australia and the connections between RRE and broader RSE, SEL, protective behaviours and child safety initiatives.



Figure 2: Identifying the linkages between RRE, RSE, SEL, and personal safety<sup>1</sup>



## 5.2 AN OVERVIEW OF RRE IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

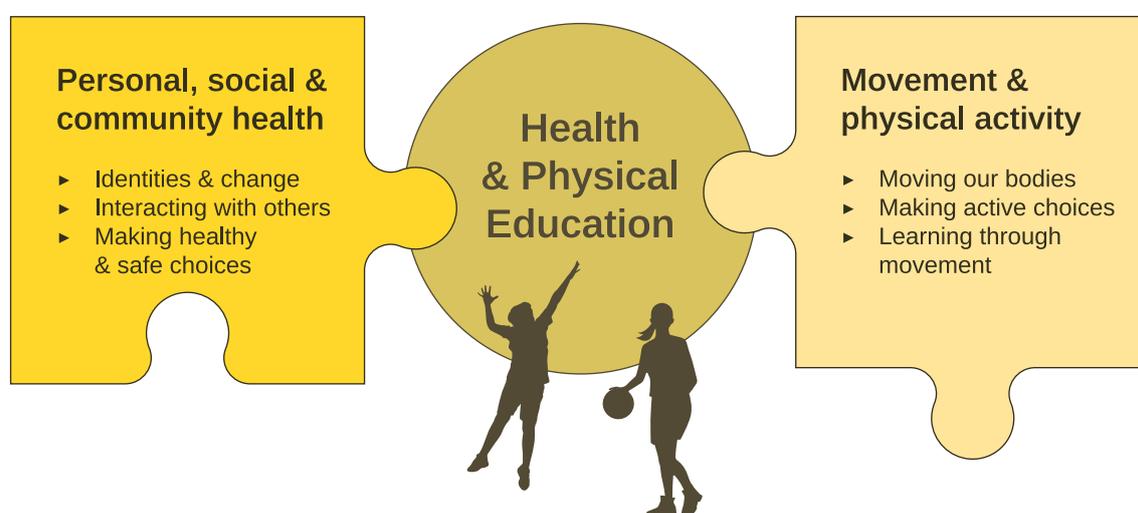
The increased community support for teaching children and young people in Australia about RRE coincided with a review of the Australian Curriculum for Foundation to Year 10 by ACARA (see ACARA, 2021). The updated [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#) was released in May 2022 for implementation from 2023, and aims to ensure that students receive more explicit education on respectful relationships and consent. Teaching and learning for RRE is embedded across the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum: learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. There are four key aspects for learning that are used to highlight the content of RRE across the [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#) (ACARA, n.d.):

<sup>1</sup> Diagram adapted from Cahill et al. (2019, pp. 16–17).

- recognising and practising respect,
- developing personal and social skills,
- recognising how gender norms and stereotypes can influence choices and actions, and
- taking action to create equal and respectful communities.

Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum in Health and Physical Education (AC-HPE) is presented in two-year band levels from Year 1 to Year 10, with Foundation presented as a single year level (ACARA, 2022b). Content in the AC-HPE is organised under two strands: personal, social and community health, and movement and physical activity (see Figure 3). Respectful relationships and consent education sits within the personal, social and community health strand (ACARA, 2022a).

Figure 3: Health and Physical Education content structure in the Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0 (ACARA, 2022a, p.5)



The personal, social and community health strand of the AC-HPE develops students' understanding of identity and equips them with the knowledge and skills to make healthy and safe choices (ACARA, 2022a). Through this strand, students learn to interact fairly and respectfully with others and develop an understanding of contextual factors that influence the health, safety, relationships and wellbeing of individuals and communities. This strand supports students to recognise and challenge discrimination and harmful stereotypes, and promotes appreciation of diversity, inclusion, consent and respect in all social settings (ACARA, 2022a). In this strand, content descriptions and elaborations relevant to developing students' knowledge, understandings and skills in establishing and managing respectful relationships can be found across all year levels, from Foundation to Year 10 (ACARA, 2022b).

Although RRE is primarily situated in the AC-HPE, there are key understandings, knowledge, behaviours and skills across the content of other Learning Areas (e.g., English, Humanities and Social Sciences, Digital Technologies) that support teaching and learning for RRE (ACARA, n.d.). There are also links to RRE in the general capabilities of the [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#), including Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, and Digital Literacy, as well as Cross-curriculum Priorities, specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ACARA, n.d.).

# 6 Project Objectives And Scope

The objectives and scope of this project as articulated by DoE were to deliver:

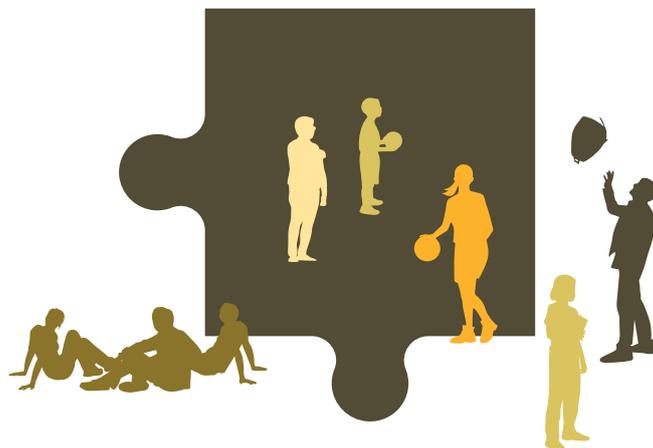
1 A Rapid Review that maps the delivery of RRE in Australian schools. This mapping exercise sought to:

- Identify RRE delivery models currently being used in Australian schools including whole-school approaches, delivery by internal school staff or external providers, and the use of specialist staff to support delivery.
- Identify RRE delivery models tailored to specific priority cohorts (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, students from migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, queer, intersex, asexual and other gender and sexual minorities (LGBTQIA+), and students in regional, rural and remote areas).
- Document any PLD provided to school leaders and teaching staff (e.g., face-to-face, self-paced online, on the job).
- Identify effective RRE delivery models and evidence gaps.
- Provide recommendations for governments and relevant stakeholders.

2 A National Framework for RRE including:

- A rapid literature review of international evidence on best practice delivery of CRRE.
- National stakeholder consultations to inform the development of the Framework.

The project team provided periodic draft reports and presented key findings for consideration by and feedback from the DoE and the NRREEWG over the course of the project.



# 7 Review Design And Method



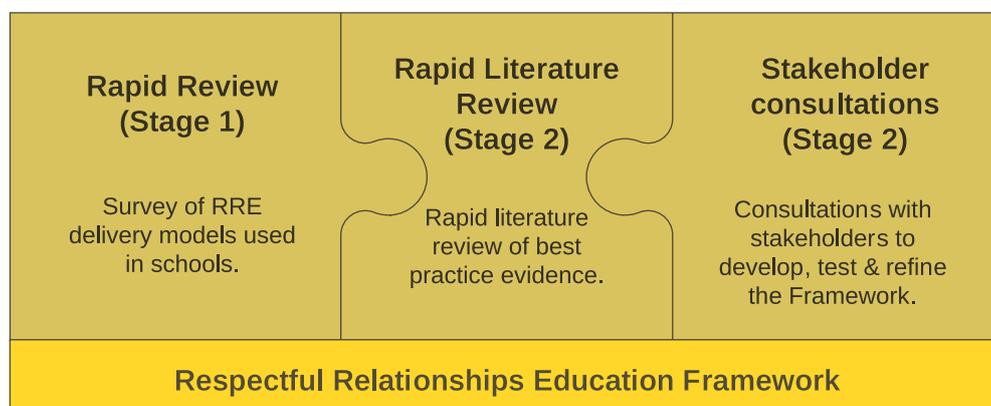
This project was undertaken two stages:

1. A Rapid Review of RRE delivery models used in Australian schools.
2. The development of a draft national RRE Framework.

This project utilised a multi-methods and phased approach to carry out the Rapid Review and national stakeholder consultations to inform the development of an RRE Framework for Australian schools (see Figure 4). The research project was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.<sup>2</sup> The Stage 1 Rapid Review sought to map RRE delivery models currently used in Australian schools across Government, Independent and Catholic school sectors. Through an online survey, this mapping exercise identified existing RRE delivery approaches and documented relevant PLD provided to school staff for RRE, among survey respondents.

Stage 2 centred on the development of a draft national RRE Framework and involved an iterative design process (see also Appendix B). The first step was a rapid literature review of international evidence to identify the characteristics of best practice delivery of RRE. The review findings (summarised in Section 8) informed the development of a draft RRE Framework through a national stakeholder consultation process. The draft RRE Framework was then developed, tested and refined through two waves of virtual national stakeholder consultations, the findings from which are presented in Section 10. The consultations provided an opportunity for the project to elevate the experiences and expertise of youth representatives and those working across respectful relationships, consent and sexuality education, the DFSV sector, and from different student groups and communities. The RRE Framework was then finalised through further consultation with and feedback from the NRREEWG, the DoE, and other policy stakeholders including the Schools Policy Group.

Figure 4: The multi-phase design for the Rapid Review and National Framework for CRRE Project.



<sup>2</sup> Project Number 39446.

## 7.1 STAGE 1: RAPID REVIEW SURVEY OF RRE DELIVERY MODELS USED IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

The purpose of the Stage 1 Rapid Review survey was to map the range of RRE delivery models used in Australian primary and secondary schools. Using an anonymous, online survey, this stage sought to capture and report on different ways in which RRE is currently delivered in Australian schools. At the time the Rapid Review survey was conducted, several jurisdictions had measures in place to reduce school workloads. To accommodate these restrictions, the survey was designed to provide multiple ways for schools and/or education representatives to contribute across each sector (Government, Independent and Catholic). For example, some responses reported on the delivery of RRE at individual schools. Other responses were provided by State and Territory school sector representatives who reported on the delivery of RRE at a systems-level. It is important to note that the Stage 1 Rapid Review survey was not intended to be nationally representative as this was beyond the scope of the project. The survey responses do not have equal weighting and the findings cannot be used to determine the prevalence of specific RRE programs in Australian schools or jurisdictions. It was also outside the scope of the project to provide any critical assessment or evaluation of the specific programs identified by survey respondents. For a recent review and critical analysis of RRE programs used in Australian schools, please see the [National Stocktake and Gap Analysis](#) (Pfitzner et al., 2022).

## 7.2 STAGE 2: DEVELOPMENT OF A DRAFT RRE FRAMEWORK

### 7.2.1 Rapid literature review

The rapid literature review drew together findings from the existing international evidence base to map current knowledge of the factors that influence the quality and effectiveness of RRE in schools. Through the rapid literature review, eleven domains of effective RRE practice were identified (see Section 8), which were then used to develop the initial draft RRE Framework for use in the national stakeholder consultations (see Appendix B).

### 7.2.2 National stakeholder consultations

National stakeholder consultations were held between September and October 2023. The research team conducted nine virtual workshops with a total of 175 stakeholders to inform the development of the RRE Framework. Individual and small group consultations were also undertaken where key stakeholders were unable to attend a group workshop due to logistical or privacy reasons. The consultations included stakeholders from:

- Government, Independent and Catholic School sectors.
- State and territory Education Departments and school authorities.
- Curriculum and subject/discipline-specific organisations.
- Principals' associations.
- Specialist DFSV services and peak bodies.
- Respectful relationships, consent and sexuality education providers.
- Women's health and gender equality organisations.
- Specialist community-led organisations (e.g., disability advocacy organisations, LGBTQIA+ services).
- Youth advocacy organisations and student representatives.
- Faith leaders.
- Parent/carer associations.
- Academics and subject matter experts.

A full list of contributing stakeholders is provided in Appendix A.

### ***Approach to the national stakeholder consultations***

The development of the draft RRE Framework through the national stakeholder consultations was based on an iterative design process with consultations undertaken in two waves (see Appendix B for further details). The first wave of stakeholder consultations (September 2023) focused on identifying and getting consensus on the principles of the draft RRE Framework, determining the configuration of the Framework (e.g., different layers or levels), and priority areas and actions to support implementation. Three virtual workshops were held involving youth representatives, and experts and practitioners working on respectful relationships, consent and sexuality education, and from the DFSV sector.

The second wave of stakeholder consultations (October 2023) were intended to further test and refine the draft RRE Framework. Six virtual workshops were held in the second wave to capture insights on providing a flexible RRE Framework that would be relevant and appropriate for the diversity of Australian school populations. These dedicated workshops were organised around RRE with the following student groups and communities:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- People with disabilities.
- LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Migrant, refugee and faith-based communities.
- Regional, rural and remote communities.
- Youth representatives.

Young people were invited to participate in workshops across both waves of consultations in addition to the standalone youth representative workshop in October. The virtual workshops in both waves followed a semi-structured design with Padlet<sup>3</sup> activity tasks, small and large group discussion, and expert facilitation (Blomkamp, 2018). Each of the themed workshops carried out in wave two were co-facilitated by a relevant population group expert from the research team.

### ***Data analysis***

With participants' consent, the virtual workshops were recorded and professionally transcribed. The Padlet responses and consultation transcripts were thematically analysed (Braun et al., 2019) to develop a rich understanding of stakeholders' perspectives on the development of the RRE Framework, as well as current knowledge and resources gaps for RRE in Australian schools. Findings from the [National Stocktake and Gap Analysis](#) (Pfitzner et al., 2022) were used to develop an initial coding framework. Coding involved a two-stage, cyclical and collaborative process where codes were added, revised, or disregarded where they did not fit the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Each transcript was independently coded by two team members to identify key themes within and across the consultations. The full team then discussed and reviewed the codes for similarities and divergences within and across the stakeholder consultations to construct meaningful explanations of the data (Bazeley, 2013). This thematic analysis was used to further refine the draft RRE Framework before being presented to the DoE and NRREEWG for feedback. The draft RRE Framework was further refined in consultation with the NRREEWG, the DoE, and other policy stakeholders including the Schools Policy Group. The DoE will finalise the Framework in consultation with the NRREEWG. Sections 9 and 10 of this final report present the thematic narratives and main findings from our analysis of the stakeholder consultations.

<sup>3</sup> Padlet is an online tool for facilitating interactive question and answer discussions that allows participants to anonymously respond to provided prompts and 'like' the responses of other participants.

# 8 Stage 2: State Of Knowledge: Respectful Relationships Education

RRE has been the focus of much international and Australian research over the past fifteen years (Carmody and Wills, 2006; Dyson, 2009; Kearney et al., 2016; Keddie and Ollis., 2019, 2020; Lamb and Brodt, 2017; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2014; Ollis, Coll et al., 2022; Ollis and Harrison, 2016; Stanley et al., 2015; Sundaram, 2013; Tutty, 2011; VicHealth, 2009). This rapid literature review outlines eleven domains of effective RRE practice identified in the research evidence base that can influence the quality and effectiveness of RRE. It is important to recognise that these domains are interconnected, and best practice RRE programs and resources should work across all eleven domains concurrently.

## **8.1 ADDRESS THE GENDERED DRIVERS OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

The focus on gender in primary prevention initiatives including RRE reflects the gendered dynamics of domestic, family and sexual violence (Heise, 2011; Pfitzner et al., 2022; Our Watch, 2021a; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018; WHO, 2019). International and Australian research illustrates the gendered patterns of perpetration and victimisation of domestic, family and sexual violence, with most violence perpetrated by men against people of all genders (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; WHO, 2021). The research evidence also clearly shows that violence supportive attitudes are linked to support for traditional gender roles and gender inequality (Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], The Social Research Centre, and VicHealth, 2010; Coumarelos, Weeks et al., 2023; Coumarelos, Roberts et al., 2023; Uthman et al., 2009; VicHealth, 2014; Webster et al., 2018). Local and international studies have revealed persistent gender gaps in attitudes towards violence, with young men more likely to agree with pro-violence statements than young women (Coumarelos, Roberts et al., 2023; Harris et al., 2015; National Crime Prevention, 2001; Nayak, et al., 2003).

These findings on the association between attitudes to gender and attitudes to violence against women clearly indicate that effective education strategies must address not only individuals' attitudes towards violence against women and gender inequality but also the social context in which violence supportive attitudes are formed and sustained. Effective education must challenge conceptualisations of gender roles—including masculinities and femininities—that reinforce violence supportive beliefs (AIC et al., 2010; Banyard et al., 2019; Flood and Pease, 2009; Heise, 2011; Uthman et al., 2009; VicHealth, 2014). There have also been growing calls and efforts to more explicitly focus prevention work to engage men and boys in challenging harmful and rigid gender norms and relations (Barker et al., 2007; Carmody et al., 2014; Dworkin et al 2015; Keddie, 2021; McCook, 2022).

This growing body of international research is reflected in the gendered drivers and reinforcing factors identified as targets for primary prevention in [Change the story](#) (Our Watch, 2021a, pp. 36-54):

- Driver 1: Condoning of violence against women.
- Driver 2: Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.
- Driver 3: Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
- Driver 4: Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.
- Reinforcing factor 1: Condoning of violence in general.
- Reinforcing factor 2: Experience of, and exposure to, violence.
- Reinforcing factor 3: Factors that weaken prosocial behaviour.
- Reinforcing factor 4: Resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts.

The research evidence indicates that primary prevention interventions that address the gender-based inequities that drive gender-based violence, including gendered attitudes, values, stereotypes, behaviours and discourses, are more likely to be effective in achieving change (Barker et al., 2007; Casey et al., 2018; Glinski et al., 2018; Our Watch, 2021a).

## 8.2 A CRITICAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO POWER, INEQUALITY, VIOLENCE AND HARM

The AC-HPE includes critical inquiry as one of five key propositions for informing all teaching and learning practices under this learning area (ACARA, n.d.). Critical inquiry describes processes through which students learn to “critically analyse and critically evaluate contextual factors that influence decision-making, behaviours and actions, and explore inclusiveness, power inequalities, assumptions, diversity and social justice” (ACARA, n.d., para. 12). Analytical skills and nuanced understandings of power, inequality and behaviour experience are therefore central concerns for the delivery of RRE under the AC-HPE. In this way, the AC-HPE reflects critical pedagogical approaches to education and social change.

Critical pedagogies are educational strategies that aim to identify, challenge and transform oppression and power inequalities in society (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogies aim to be democratic and participatory, allowing educators and learners to work together in alternative ways that are not based on traditional power structures or unilateral learning, and that are more attentive to student lived experience, engagement and voice (Enns and Forrest, 2005). In the context of RRE, a critical pedagogical approach can support both teachers and students to examine and deconstruct how gendered norms, structures and power relations can shape their lives and contribute to violence (Keddie, 2021). Education scholars like Lawrence (2016) have argued to frame this more explicitly as a feminist critical pedagogy to recognise the focus on transforming gender and power. These framings have also been useful within RRE programs. For example, Ollis, Iannucci et al.'s (2022) evaluation of a six-month student-led RRE pilot in Australia identified that directly discussing gender-based violence whilst practicing critical awareness of power in society is an effective strategy for transformative change. These researchers found that where students can identify key issues for discussion (e.g., sexual violence) and critically reflect through a process of deconstructing and reconstructing meaning, common issues like victim-blaming can be reduced (Ollis, Iannucci et al., 2022). As discussed below, it is also important within a critical pedagogical approach to recognise multiple forms of power, inequality and harm, including racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia (Keddie and Bartel, 2021; Zembylas, 2012).



### 8.2.1 A gender and sexuality transformative approach

International best practice for the primary prevention of gender-based violence is to adopt a gender transformative approach (Casey et al., 2018). The focus on gender transformative change in violence prevention stems from Geeta Rao Gupta's (2001) continuum for health programming on gender, sexual health and HIV/AIDS. Within Gupta's (2001) framework, transformative approaches are distinguished from 'gender reinforcing', 'gender blind' and 'gender sensitive' approaches, each of which fall short of the radical and deep change needed to address patriarchy and violence (see also Dworkin et al., 2015). For example, a reinforcing model or framing would maintain hierarchical ideas about men-masculinity and women-femininity, and would continue to normalise beliefs that gender is a binary of only man or woman. A gender sensitive approach would recognise different lived experiences and needs based on gender, but it would not attempt to question or change the social and structural conditions that reproduce gender inequality. In contrast, a gender transformative approach requires critically deconstructing gendered attitudes, behaviours, norms and structures to create alternative ways of being and relating, no longer defined by a rigid gender binary. The distinction between reinforcing, sensitive and transformative approaches is critical in prevention, as there is a substantive risk that efforts can reproduce patriarchal power relations and binary gender norms and stereotypes (Casey et al., 2018; McCook, 2022; Seymour, 2018).

Gender transformative models for prevention have proven to be effective in increasing support for gender equitable attitudes and in some instances, for decreasing reported rates of violence perpetration and victimisation within target communities (e.g., Abramsky et al., 2014; Banyard et al., 2019; Dunkle et al., 2020; Dworkin et al., 2013; Jewkes et al., 2014; Kato-Wallace et al., 2019; Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). For example, a 2007 review of 58 health and violence programs for men and boys found that transformative models that addressed men's understandings of gender roles and promoted gender equitable relationships were more effective than interventions that were gender neutral or gender sensitive (Barker et al., 2007). The researchers found that 41% of the 27 programs assessed as being gender transformative were effective in changing attitudes and behaviours, whereas only 29% of the total 58 programs were assessed as effective in this regard (Barker et al., 2007). Importantly, however, meaningful and long-term gender transformation requires more than identifying and analysing unequal norms, attitudes and stereotypes; there must be parallel attention to challenging and transforming structural inequalities, privilege and power (Brush and Miller, 2019). A critical pedagogical approach that directly engages with and challenges oppression is therefore central to transformative models for preventing gender-based violence (Keddie, 2021; Keddie and Bartel, 2021).

There is also growing evidence for the effectiveness of gender transformative approaches within schools-based prevention programs like RRE (e.g., Banyard et al., 2019; Ollis et al., 2021; Pérez-Martínez et al., 2023; Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). A recent systematic review of violence prevention education with young people emphasised the importance of models that directly and critically engage with gender norms for achieving reductions in violence and increased support for gender equality (Pérez-Martínez et al., 2023). The review also noted the role of community engagement in extending the reach and impacts of gender transformative change (Pérez-Martínez et al., 2023). Other studies have highlighted the potential harms that RRE can contribute to when not informed by a gender transformative model. For example, work by Canadian academic Jeffery (2022) shows that a narrow focus on consent within prevention education and other programs can reinforce problematic gender norms and heteronormative myths (e.g., "men are biologically driven to persistently desire and seek sex" and that "women are responsible for communicating (non)consent").

More recent commentary on Australia's education system has emphasised the need to include and extend understandings of sexuality in efforts to achieve gender transformative change (e.g., Coll et al., 2019; Ferfolja

and Ullman, 2020). Such an approach recognises the overlapping drivers of gender-based violence and other forms of violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ communities (Carman et al., 2020). Previous Australian research has also demonstrated the higher rates of interpersonal violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ communities (Hill et al., 2020), and the harmful impacts of heteronormative, homophobic and transphobic myths and stereotypes for victim-survivors of this violence (Mortimer et al., 2020). Ferfolja and Ullman (2020) therefore argue for considering gender inequality and patriarchy alongside cisnormativity, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia as part of a broader gender and sexuality transformative lens within schools. To date, the inclusion of such content in RRE has been ad hoc and dependent on individual schools and educators, whilst young people have relied on alternative sources of information for more comprehensive relationship and sexuality education (Ferfolja and Ullman, 2020; Waling et al., 2020).

This call for more inclusive RRE is echoed by Australian students. In Waling et al.'s (2020) national survey with 2,316 young people, 69% (n=1,600) described negative experiences of RRE with comments highlighting poor or no coverage of LGBTQIA+ experiences, bodies and relationships. These sentiments are mirrored in the international literature, where students have critiqued the use of overtly binary, cisgendered and heteronormative information and stereotypes (Hobaica and Kwon, 2017; Hoefer and Hoefer, 2017; Pound et al., 2016), and a failure to acknowledge diverse sexualities and gender identities or expressions (Bradford et al., 2019; Fisher, 2009; Grant and Nash, 2019; Pingel et al., 2013; Pound et al., 2016). [The National Stocktake and Gap Analysis](#) of Australian RRE similarly identified a clear absence of sexuality transformative RRE programs, alongside a continued prevalence of cis- and heteronormative resources (Pfitzner et al., 2022).

### **8.2.2 Embedding intersectionality and other transformative social change approaches**

Efforts to prevent gender-based violence must also be informed by critical understandings of how gender intersects with other forms of power, inequality and violence. Intersectionality refers to Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) call to recognise how multiple forms of oppression like gender, race and ability can overlap to create specific experiences of harm or privilege. Intersectionality is now considered a fundamental lens for the design and delivery of initiatives to prevent gender-based violence in Australia (Chen, 2017; Our Watch, 2021a), and is embedded as a guiding principle for the [National Plan 2022–2032](#) (DSS, 2022). The development of an RRE Framework for Australian schools presents an opportunity to ensure future prevention work is informed by multiple frameworks for achieving transformative social change including anti-racism, decolonisation, and disability justice. However, previous research suggests RRE and related education programs or initiatives have often lacked intersectional understandings of gender, sexuality and violence, in effect contributing to the erasure of diversity and reproduction of discriminatory discourses including racism, ableism and transphobia (Ferfolja and Ullman, 2020; Ollis et al., 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2022).

An intersectional approach to RRE would require teaching and learning resources to recognise and address the multiple systems of power and discrimination that intersect with gender and patriarchy including race/ism, class/ism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia, migration or visa status, religion, age, location, and other factors (Ferfolja and Ullman, 2020; Sibosado and Webb, 2022; Vanner, 2020). For example, the UNESCO's (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education calls for young people to develop the skills and attitudes to treat others with respect, support and empathy, regardless of ethnicity, race, social or economic status, migration experience, religion, ability, gender identity or expression, sexuality, or sex characteristics. Taken together, the existing evidence points to the need for more meaningful applications of intersectionality in the design, delivery and evaluation of RRE.

### 8.3 A SEXUAL ETHICS INFORMED APPROACH

A sexual ethics informed approach has been identified as another central component to developing effective RRE in schools. Using sexual ethics further develops the established human rights approach to ensure that the rights of all are considered in the context of sexuality, consent and relationships education. UNESCO's (2018) *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* advocates a human rights approach, stating that every child has a right to sexuality education. This approach aims to ensure that children and young people are empowered to have a safe and fulfilling sexual life—when they are ready for it—and helps them make informed decisions while exploring their own sexual identities (Steutel, 2009).

However, contestation can arise about whose rights are prioritised within rights-based approaches to education. To overcome this, Stonehouse recommends a sexual ethics informed approach:

An approach based on ethics may be helpful in navigating the intricacies of relationships, gender, power, and the growing needs of the child to build and develop their sexual subjectivities and navigate the ongoing moral dilemmas and emotional intensities that are part of the messiness of sexuality education. (2023, p.229)

A sexual ethics approach is well-suited to the complexities of sexuality education—including respectful relationships and consent education—because it is grounded in relationality, acknowledges and challenges power, and recognises tensions that may not readily be addressed by law or by black and white questions about the “right thing to do” (Gilligan, 1993, p.26; Albury et al., 2011; Carmody, 2009a, 2009b; Carmody and Ovenden, 2012; Hayward, 2020). These complexities include issues like shame, affect, the fluidity of sexual identities, the varying nature of relationships, moral dilemmas encountered, and the value-laden topics that are addressed in RRE (Stonehouse, 2023). There may not be a right or wrong answer to some of these issues and dilemmas; if relying on a rights-based approach, tensions arise as to whose rights are accounted for, including child, parent, teacher, school and community. Further, existing evidence suggests that approaches to sexual consent that focus only on legal definitions, rather than the knowledge and skills to negotiate consent and power within different relationship contexts, are not effective or sufficient for preventing violence and harm (Burton et al., 2023; Fileborn, 2018; Hinds, 2022; Jeffrey, 2022; Kubota and Nakazawa, 2022; Mason, 2023; Setty, 2022). Table 1 summarises the key distinctions between rights-based and sexual ethics approaches.

*Table 1: Rights-based versus a sex and ethics approach (Ollis, 2022; Ollis and Stonehouse, forthcoming)*

<b>Rights-Based Approach</b>	<b>Sex and Ethics Approach</b>
Individual	Social Person
Autonomy	Relationships
Abstract and universal principles	Situated practice
Rights	Responsibilities
Declaration of experts	Voice and negotiation
Conflicting rights	Compromise
Individual achievement / exercise of rights	Self-care and care of others
Public	Private
Resolution through laws/rules	Resolution through communication and negotiation
Masculism	Feminist

The sexual ethics informed approach uses the idea of care as a central framework for ethical decisions (Stonehouse, 2023). This approach establishes guiding principles to assist students to come up with solutions to issues they face in a social world via care for self, care for others, negotiation and reflection (e.g., Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society [ARCSHS], 2015). Each component is seen to be inter-related and dynamic, and is a continual process that is context specific and open to change. This conceptual approach premised on care comes from Moira Carmody's (2009a, 2009b, 2015) sexual ethics framework:

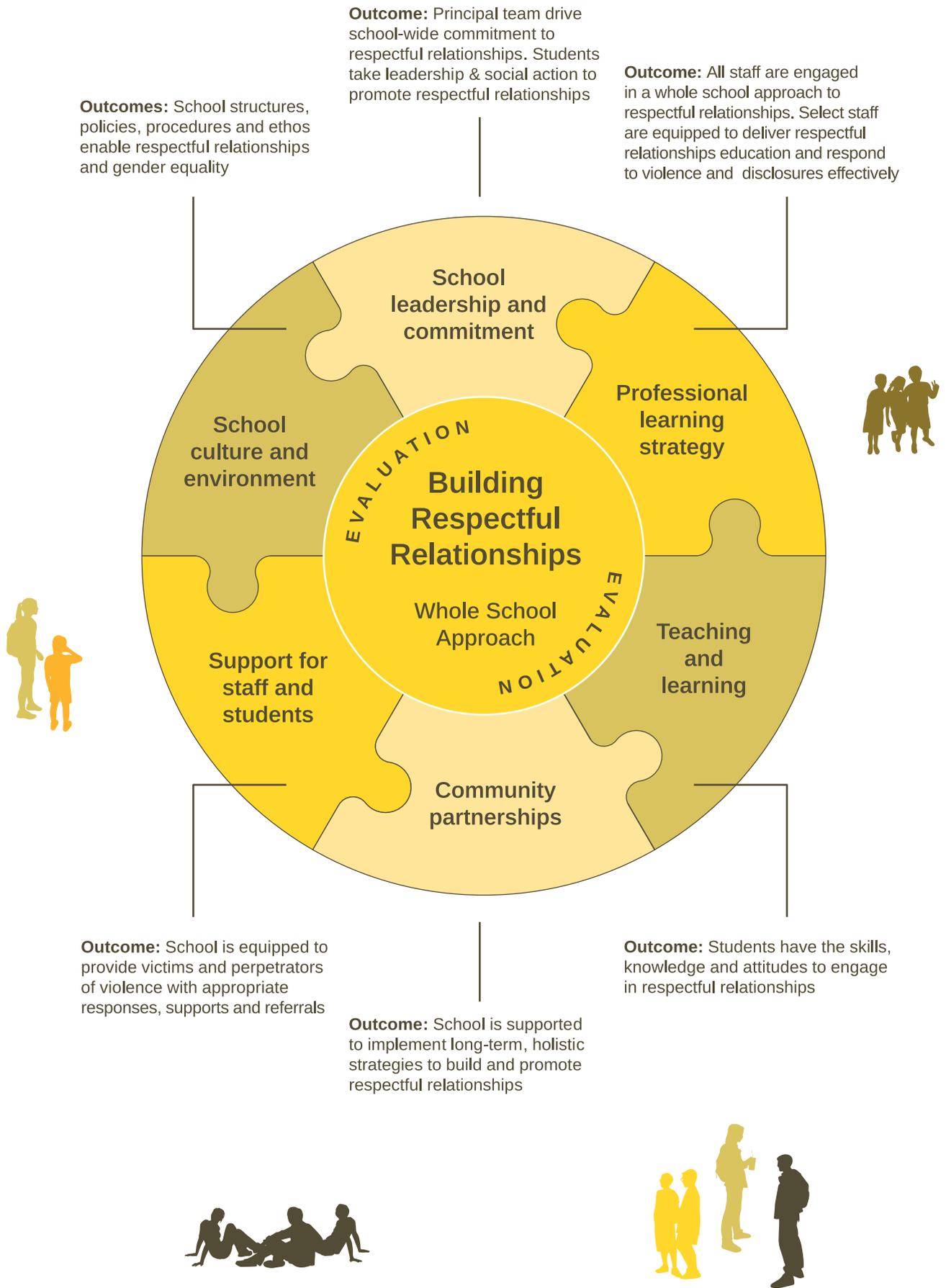
- Care for self: Encourages people to be ethical in their approach to others in sexual relationships. This step “encourages awareness of our own feelings and thoughts in contrast to just complying with someone else’s desires” (Carmody, 2009b, p. 89). Understanding how we feel and what we want is important before we start caring for others.
- Care for others: In some cases, this can be an easy process. However, often care for self exists in opposition or tension to care for others. For example, in a relationship the wants and needs of each partner may not align, and work may need to be done to understand each other’s point of view or experience. Ethical practice includes both partners needs and desires.
- Negotiation: To be able to deal with the messiness and varying range of issues that come up in relationships, it is imperative that people of all ages are able to communicate and negotiate a mutually agreeable solution. Students build knowledge, understanding and skills to contend with the complexities of the physical, social and emotional requirements to negotiate sex, gender, sexuality and relationships (see also UNESCO, 2018). This stage also ensures that consent is gained.
- Reflection: This stage allows people to make sense of their experiences of interactions. It uses ethical questioning to evaluate their experience in both the interpersonal interaction and contextual domain to help them consider an action plan for future experiences or interactions.

In the context of RRE, rather than being told by teachers or parents/caregivers what to do, a sexual ethics informed approach helps students to build the personal and social skills for critical self-reflection, empathy, communication and negotiation, which in turn supports the pursuit of healthy, safe, respectful and caring relationships—sexual or otherwise.

## **8.4 A SUSTAINABLE, WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH**

The efficacy of the whole-school approach has been well established when it comes to the development and delivery of RRE (Gleeson et al., 2015; Kearney et al., 2016; Ollis and Harrison 2016; Our Watch, 2021a, 2021b; Pfitzner et al., 2022; Victorian Government Department of Education and Training [DET], 2018). This report draws on the whole-school approach described in the DET (2018) resource, *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping out against gender-based violence* (see also DEECD, 2014). This model, as illustrated in Figure 5, exemplifies the interconnectedness and multi-level support and planning that is required to successfully implement RRE within a school community. Centred around partnerships across and within the school community, a whole-school approach needs to consider and support staff, students, families and communities. It also needs to be supported by the school leadership, whose commitment should be evident in the school culture and environment, and in the PLD provided to staff. All of these factors influence and support teaching and learning of RRE in Australian classrooms.

Figure 5: A whole-school approach to preventing gender-based violence and building respectful relationships (DEECD, 2014).



Recent studies of prevention education in Victoria have demonstrated the importance of a whole-school approach for addressing structural factors that can limit RRE delivery (e.g., Dadvand and Cahill, 2021; Keddie and Ollis, 2020). For example, Dadvand and Cahill (2021) identified key barriers for teachers delivering content on gender diversity, gender-based violence and family violence including curriculum crowding and a lack of a 'home' for RRE, insufficient access to PLD, and a lack of awareness of and familiarity with RRE among teachers overall. Their participants also raised concerns and fears regarding backlash and resistance, and concerns about dealing with disclosures and responses to the material relating to gender-based violence (for a more in-depth discussion on the emotional, political and pedagogical labour required of teachers in delivering RRE, see Cahill and Dadvand, 2021). Each of these barriers could be addressed by applying the whole-school model depicted above (see Figure 14), alongside the other core approaches outlined in this report (e.g., gender and sexuality transformative, trauma-informed, strengths-based approaches). Most importantly, these findings highlight that there is a significant need for adequate and ongoing PLD for staff tasked with the delivery of RRE and support of students (see also Pfitzner et al., 2022).

Recent Australian studies have also identified several enablers to support educators in the implementation of RRE (e.g., Dadvand and Cahill, 2021; Keddie and Ollis, 2019, 2020), which again map to the whole-school approach depicted above. These enablers focus predominantly on adequate resourcing and investment, teacher training and guidance, providing sufficient time for teachers to prepare for the delivery of RRE, and time within the curriculum to deliver RRE in full. Participants in these studies also highlighted the need for active support for the implementation of RRE throughout the school, including leaders, program champions and/or leads, and colleagues (Cahill and Dadvand, 2021; Dadvand and Cahill, 2021; Keddie and Ollis, 2020).

## 8.5 EVIDENCE- AND CURRICULUM-BASED TEACHING AND LEARNING

Existing research and literature indicate that evidence- and curriculum-based teaching and learning are critical to success when it comes to education for preventing gender-based violence including RRE. For example, a recent systematic review of education for preventing gender-based violence found that programs succeeded when they were evidence-based and integrated into curriculum across the school (Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). Respectful relationships and consent education are now explicitly embedded within the Australian Curriculum, primarily within HPE (ACARA, n.d.). However, achieving curriculum-based teaching and learning is not as simple as it sounds given the confusing range of potential resources available to assist teachers, schools and school sectors to translate high level curriculum documents like the AC-HPE into effective learning experiences. In this context UNESCO's publication, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*, provides useful guidelines for effective 'curriculum' emphasising the need for a practical curriculum guide that:

...includes key teaching objectives, the development of learning objectives, the presentation of concepts, and the delivery of clear key messages in a structured way (2018, p. 16).

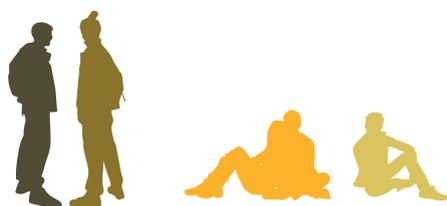


UNESCO and others recommend achieving this by developing holistic teaching and learning programs supported by comprehensive teaching and learning packages (UNESCO, 2018; Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). Comprehensive teaching and learning packages should include sequenced learning intentions, describe activities to develop the intentions, identify expected capabilities, provide assessment criteria, and recommend related teaching and learning materials (UNESCO, 2018; Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). Examples of such evidence- and curriculum-based RRE teaching and learning packages can be found in *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* (DET, 2021) and *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping out against gender-based violence* (DET, 2018), which were developed to support mandatory RRE in Victorian Government schools.

Inclusion of RRE within such an evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, documented teaching and learning program that guides educators' efforts to support students' learning over a specified period of time, would allow for consistent, appropriately supported implementation of RRE across Australia. Development of such programs would also address many of the issues raised by students and teachers with regards to poor and out-of-date messaging (Cahill, 2022; Pound et al., 2017; Waling et al., 2020), and build teacher confidence in the delivery of RRE and provision of care to students (Cahill and Dadvand, 2021; Dadvand and Cahill, 2020). The integration of RRE teaching and learning programs into the broader school curriculum is also seen as a key success factor for gender-based violence prevention education. This would address concerns about inconsistent and one-off delivery of RRE by supporting ongoing and iterative delivery and student development (Pfitzner et al., 2022; Pound et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2018; Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). To ensure the curriculum is evidence-based, it should be developed in partnership with subject matter experts and be monitored and evaluated to ensure it remains current with the latest research evidence and pedagogical approaches (Pfitzner et al., 2022).

## 8.6 AN INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE APPROACH

In the recent [National Stocktake and Gap Analysis](#) (Pfitzner et al., 2022), stakeholders identified that strengthening adaptability of RRE is a priority action to respond to the increasing diversity of Australian classrooms and school communities. There is also a growing body of work on the effectiveness of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in supporting inclusive education (Rose and Myer, 2002; Leif et al., 2021), such as adaptability in RRE practice through flexible curricula that respond to a diverse range of learners. Inclusive and accessible RRE is critical given the history of exclusion for and segregation of students with disability from education—particularly regarding sexuality and relationships—and the need to address the intersections of gender inequality and ableism in ending violence (Brownlow et al., 2021; East and Orchard, 2014; Frawley and Wilson, 2016; Hannah and Stagg, 2016; Schaafsma et al., 2017). UDL is premised on the principle that “there is no ‘average’ learner and that learners come with a wide variety of prior experiences, abilities, preferences and needs” (Jwad et al. 2022, p.3). At its core, UDL aims to cater for diverse learning needs and preferences by ensuring that curricula are written flexibly to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn and demonstrate their learning through inclusive assessment practices (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Tai et al., 2023). In this approach to teaching and learning “student difference is the norm, rather than the exception, in the classroom setting” (Leif et al., 2021).



As Leif et al. (2021) explain, UDL is underpinned by three principles:

1. *Provide multiple means of representation.* This involves presenting content in different formats, such as text, pictures, audio, video, modelling, etc.
2. *Provide multiple means of engagement.* This involves providing students with different ways to actively engage with the content.
3. *Provide multiple means of action and expression.* This involves providing students with different ways to demonstrate their learning.

UDL seeks to make learning environments more accessible and provides a general education framework that improves learning and outcomes for *all* students, regardless of ability or background. It offers a powerful approach to learning that can accommodate the multiple complexities that need to be addressed in effective RRE.

## **8.7 CULTURALLY SAFE, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, AND CONTEXT RELEVANT**

Creating inclusive and safe learning environments for RRE requires adaptable teaching and learning materials. Research clearly demonstrates that diversity in school contexts and communities, such as differences in socio-economic status, location, cultural, spiritual and religious ethos, can have a considerable impact on the delivery of CRRE (Joyce et al., 2018; Keddie and Ollis, 2020; Sanjakdar, 2018; Villardón-Galego et al., 2023). Ensuring that RRE teaching and learning materials are adaptable, culturally relevant and appropriate for different school contexts and communities aligns with the National Plan 2022–2032 (DSS, 2022) and the accompanying Outcomes Framework 2023–2032 (DSS, 2023). For example, one of six long-term outcomes identified in the Outcomes Framework 2023–2032 calls for future prevention programs to be “effective, culturally responsive, intersectional and accessible” (DSS, 2023, p. 2).

Creating culturally safe and responsive learning environments is central to inclusive RRE. In the context of education, cultural safety refers to learning environments where students feel safe to be themselves and express their cultural and spiritual identities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2022). Cultural safety as a principle was developed by Māori nurses to challenge assumptions in mainstream health services about the impacts of discrimination and inequality on First Nations people’s wellbeing and care needs (Ramsden, 2002). Cultural safety is distinct from cultural awareness due to the explicit focus on examining colonisation and racism as dynamics of mainstream culture and social structures, and their impacts on health and education (Indigenous Allied Health Australia [IAHA], 2019; Mackean et al., 2020). Cultural safety represents a shift from service provision regardless of difference, to identifying and addressing the specific cultural needs of individuals and communities (IAHA, 2019). Cultural safety is an ongoing process that requires policymakers, service providers, educators and others from the dominant, colonial culture to proactively challenge inequality and harm, whilst foregrounding First Nations’ knowledge and experiences (Mackean et al., 2020; Taylor and Guerin, 2019).

Cultural safety is the core of cultural responsiveness, which focuses on the *how*: the actions taken to deliver and maintain culturally safe care (IAHA, 2019, p. 5). Cultural responsiveness is strengths-based and emphasises transformative action to meet the specific needs of individuals and communities that services and schools work with (Morrison et al., 2019). Cultural safety and cultural responsiveness are inextricably linked with decolonisation (Hughes and Fricker, 2024), and are foundational to delivering RRE in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and migrant, refugee and faith-based communities in Australia.

Educators need to be aware that across all learning areas including RRE, teaching content that touches on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities can risk re-traumatisation of First Nations students (Fernando and Bennett, 2018). For this reason, when schools are required to teach parts of the Australian Curriculum that consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and perspectives, this must be done in empowering and culturally nurturing ways (Lowe and Weuffen, 2023). Schools and educators must create a setting that challenges the ideals and myths of colonisation, acknowledges the perspectives of First Nations peoples in their dispossession from Country, and unpacks the healing needed as a result of the ongoing, systematic removal of children by the Government (Burgess et al., 2023; Hogarth, 2022; Morrison et al., 2019). Furthermore, educators must provide a learning environment that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through self-determination (Lowe and Weuffen, 2023). This is in part done through the formation and actualisation of genuine and meaningful learning partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, kinship and communities (Fricker et al., 2023). Classroom teachers, as the front line of engagement, must be supported by the leadership to invest in these relationships, which will have flow-on positive impacts for the whole school and the community that it serves.

It is essential that RRE provides all students the opportunity to examine and challenge the cultural structures, norms and behaviours that influence relationships and people's choices within them (UNESCO, 2018). In the Australian context, this must include critical attention to the history and ongoing impacts of colonisation, including the links to gender-based violence experienced by First Nations women and girls (Sibosado and Webb, 2022). Bennett et al. (2011) argue that culturally responsive educators need to guide all students in their development of cultural courage. Cultural courage is working towards a positionality where the destination is the "working with, not the doing to" (Bennett et al., 2011). Educators must also be critically reflective around both their and their students' responses to trauma-laden curricula including the impacts of colonisation and racism (Feucht et al., 2017). For example, the use of yarning has been identified as an effective method of culturally responsive engagement when dealing with culturally sensitive content. Yarning involves the use of narrative, storytelling and counter-storytelling in the learning environment (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Yarning is used by First Nations peoples to learn, teach and explore diverse experiences, and when implemented within a school demonstrates respect of the strong history and traditional practices of First Nations peoples that continue to this day (Bacon et al., 2013).

Another powerful tool for educators to facilitate meaningful partnerships and sustainable change in schools is through reflexivity (Feucht et al., 2017). This builds on the reflective practices that are implemented in teacher education and as part of annual performance reviews. Teacher reflexivity may take the shape of introspection, dialogues with peers about issues and perhaps participation in research (Feucht et al., 2017). Reflection becomes reflexivity when teachers' deeper assumptions are challenged, including those surrounding culturally responsive practices, and cultural expectations and beliefs around power structures. Through reflexivity, educators can promote deep professional learning and sustained student and community engagement. For example, Wilson (2014) identified how reflexivity allowed them in their own practice to experience key learnings around working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the importance of relationships, the importance of time, transparency and trust in relationships, reciprocity, the importance of listening, a partnership approach, and the impact of First Nations cultures and past experiences. Establishing a standpoint through reflexivity allows educators a low-cost and highly effective tool to develop their cultural safety and cultural responsiveness (AITSL, 2022; IAHA, 2019; Wilson, 2014). Reflexivity is foundational to RRE when working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In being culturally responsive, Pound et al. (2017) highlighted the need for RRE and related programs to be adaptable whilst still retaining core components and learning objectives. In relation to the development of an RRE specific curriculum, this would mean ensuring implementation of RRE can be adapted based on differing community contexts, including diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, family and kinship structures and school learning requirements, as well as individual class dynamics and inter-/intrapersonal needs. Ongoing cultural safety and cultural responsiveness PLD for educators is urgently needed to better equip them with the skills necessary to be adaptable in the delivery of RRE (AITSL, 2022; Hughes and Fricker, 2024). In particular, all school systems, schools and educators must adopt a *working with* approach rather than a *doing to* approach when in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

## 8.8 DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

RRE learning and teaching materials need to be developmentally appropriate (Pfitzner et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2018). The inclusion of RRE in the current [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#), across all year levels provides a starting point, however the development of RRE specific curriculum accommodating the approaches would ensure that outcomes, resources and experiences are responsive to the age and developmental status of individual learners.

In a review of reviews on school-based sexual health interventions, Pound et al. (2017) found that programs like RRE should be tailored to students' age and potential sexual experience. This study identified that often, CRRE is provided too late in a young person's development and therefore fails to meet their needs (Pound et al., 2017; see also Waling et al., 2020). The *7th National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health* (Power et al., 2022) showed that the average age of first sexual experience is 15 years in Australia. This average lowers to 13.6 years when looking at non-penetrative sexual activities, such as sexual touching, online sex, sexting and viewing pornography (Power et al., 2022). These statistics need to be taken into consideration to ensure that young people have had adequate time to build their knowledge, understanding and skills to navigate these experiences within relationships, something that has been identified as lacking to date (Johnson et al., 2016; Ollis et al., 2019; Pound et al., 2017).

In addition to adopting the various approaches outlined in this literature review (e.g., gender and sexuality transformative, intersectional, trauma-informed, strengths-based), teaching and learning materials should be presented in formats and language that are appropriate for learners' ages and development. This includes the use of authentic learning experiences that are suitable for learners, accommodating for developmental diversity, sexual experience and supporting all students to understand and critically engage with the content (Pound et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2018).

## 8.9 A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

A trauma-informed approach is one that creates and maintains a safe and supportive environment for students with trauma backgrounds, as well as the educators and staff charged with their care (Avery et al., 2021). This is pertinent when delivering RRE and exploring sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, and is a critical factor for student engagement (Waling et al., 2020). In practice, this requires acknowledgement and understanding from teachers and other RRE facilitators of the impact trauma can have on learning, behaviour and emotions of young people—and for their families and wider communities (Berger and Martin, 2020). This includes recognising how domestic, family, dating and/or sexual violence

may already be impacting young people's lives and relationships, as victim-survivors, users of violence, and bystanders (Hobbs, 2022). Trauma-informed practice ensures that school staff, especially those delivering RRE to young people, understand that two in three students are exposed to abuse, neglect and family violence (Haslam et al., 2023). RRE curriculum delivery should be informed by this understanding and teachers should apply principles of trauma-informed practice when delivering RRE content. Adequate, ongoing PLD for educators and staff is key to this consideration and has been shown to improve knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma (Berger, 2019; Berger and Martin, 2020). Inclusion of the wider school community, including parents and external service providers, and supportive and proactive school policies and procedures are also necessary to support students, as well as teachers delivering RRE to students (Avery et al., 2021; Berger and Martin, 2020).

A common approach to increasing teacher awareness of the prevalence, impact and approaches to respond to student trauma during RRE is to apply the four Rs of trauma-informed practice: *realisation*, *recognition*, *responses* and limiting *re-traumatisation* (Berger and Martin, 2020). *Realisation* and *recognition* refer to acknowledging and understanding the prevalence and impacts of trauma, *responses* describes the upskilling of staff in how to respond to children and adolescents experiencing trauma, and *re-traumatisation* looks to limit further trauma of students by taking a harm minimisation approach. This means that teachers delivering RRE should understand which aspects of RRE may remind students of their trauma experience(s) and take active steps to ensure that information is delivered sensitively. It also involves ensuring that students have access to adequate support from a trusted adult or mental health provider to discuss any aspects of RRE which may have been re-traumatising (Berger and Martin, 2019; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). Importantly, adopting a trauma-informed approach has been shown to improve engagement and academic achievement, and reduce incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression in students (Berger, 2019).

Our Watch's (2022a, 2022b) *RRE Toolkit* is a good example of a trauma-informed, whole-school approach to RRE that utilises the four Rs. Premised on *realisation* and *recognition* of the prevalence of gender-based violence among students and staff, the *RRE Toolkit* is designed to ensure safe, sensitive and appropriate responses to disclosures and incidents of gender-based violence. This is done through appropriate training for staff on how to deal with disclosures of violence, harassment or discrimination, and what the referral processes are (Our Watch, 2022a, 2022b). The *RRE Toolkit* recommends supporting teachers by embedding the steps required to respond to disclosures or incidents of gender-based violence in school policies (Our Watch, 2022a, 2022b). It also identifies the need to *recognise* the reality that staff may have their own trauma histories. This requires the development and provision of appropriate support systems, such as training, peer support, opt-out clauses and access to paid family violence leave and specialist support services for teachers. Developing partnerships with local specialist support services provides an additional layer of expertise and support for students and staff, and should be part of a whole-school, trauma-informed approach to delivering RRE. Providing support to all stakeholders (e.g., staff, students, families) in the delivery of RRE, ensures that *re-traumatisation* is limited and that staff are protected from any secondary trauma they may experience.

Trauma-informed practice can also be utilised by staff to recognise and respond to signs of distress when delivering RRE to students. Signs of distress may involve withdrawal, refusal to participate, agitation, decreased attention, hyperactivity or heightened anxiety. Trauma-informed practice reminds us that students can exhibit a range of signs when they become re-traumatised by any content related to delivery of RRE (Berger and Martin, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014). Therefore, it is essential that teachers and staff delivering RRE receive comprehensive, trauma-informed PLD, and that they have access to resources to recognise signs of distress in students, and support students and themselves when delivering RRE in schools.

## 8.10 A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

In 2012, ACARA moved away from a deficit model of delivery of HPE—including RRE—to instead recommending a strengths-based approach (ACARA, 2012). Such an approach allows for consideration and exploration of the challenges and risks associated with relationships and sex, as well as protective factors and development of skills. Importantly, it also acknowledges the “interplay between physical, psychological, environmental and social aspects” of health and relationships (McCuaig et al., 2013, p. 112). Adopting a strengths-based approach allows for RRE learning and teaching materials to be developed and delivered with a greater acknowledgement of, and emphasis on, the abilities, knowledge and capacities of students. It promotes the identification of learners’ resources as opposed to exclusively focusing on harm minimisation, concentrating on the origins of health as opposed to disease and risk (McCuaig et al., 2013).

Key to this approach is the acknowledgement that young people come to the classroom with strengths and existing knowledge that they can build on and experiences they can share (UNESCO, 2018). The use of inquiry-based pedagogies, or learner-centred methods, provides students with the opportunity to share their existing knowledge and experiences, as well as develop and refine their problem-solving skills. Similar to the gender and sexuality transformative approaches, this approach to teaching and learning supports students to move beyond simply acquiring information to engaging in a deeper understanding of the complex issues RRE addresses, such as the prevention of gender-based violence and supporting them to make informed decisions and take informed actions (McCuaig et al., 2013). All of which reflect what young Australians want when it comes to CRRE, as identified in the latest *National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health* (Power et al., 2022). Crucial to the success of learner-centred pedagogies is adequately training and supporting support for those charged with delivering RRE (UNESCO, 2018).

Although the body of literature is limited at present, there is evidence to suggest that the use of learner-centred teaching techniques can have a positive effect on students’ experiences of CRRE (Cahill, 2022; Keddie and Ollis, 2019; Ollis, Iannucci et al., 2022; Pound et al., 2017; Waling et al., 2020), and on educators’ knowledge and attitudes towards the issues of gender, sexuality, relationships and violence more broadly (Cahill, 2022; Kontula, 2010; UNESCO, 2018). For example, Cahill and Dadvand’s (2022) study with Victorian teachers and support staff undertaking a two-day *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* training course found that participants considered the sampling of student learning activities to be the most effective element of the training. Participants valued engaging in the critical reflection and collaborative learning activities that they would use with their students (Cahill and Dadvand, 2022). Further exploration found that teachers’ lack of training, and thus lack of confidence, often resulted in their reverting to traditional didactic or teacher-centric methods of teaching, which did not include student-centred activities such as collaborative learning, skills development and critical thinking (Cahill and Dadvand, 2022). These findings reinforce the need for a greater focus on learner-centred and inquiry-based techniques in teacher training to build confidence in, and understanding of why these teaching approaches are necessary, particularly in relation to delivering RRE (Pfitzner et al., 2022).

As discussed in Section 8.11 below, a strengths-based RRE approach also requires listening to and encouraging the voices of young people in the classroom, as well as engaging them in the development of educational resources and strategies. This requires feedback from teachers *and* students involved in RRE educational programs and resource development.





## 8.12 CONCLUSION

This rapid literature review was undertaken as the first step in the iterative design process for developing a draft RRE Framework. Drawing on international and Australian research, the rapid literature review identified eleven domains of effective RRE practice. The eleven domains were used as a provisional start list of principles for the development of the draft RRE Framework through the national stakeholder consultation process. See Section 7.2.2 and Appendix B for further details on the iterative design process used in the development of the draft national RRE Framework.



## 9 Stage 2: Stakeholder Consultations



This section presents the findings from the national stakeholder consultations that were undertaken to inform the development of the RRE Framework. Over a two-month period from September 2023 to October 2023, the research team conducted nine virtual consultation workshops with a total of 175 stakeholders. Individual and small group consultations were also undertaken with key stakeholders who were unable to attend a group workshop due to logistical or privacy reasons. The key themes, findings and recommendations for implementation presented here reflect the diverse views and experiences of the stakeholders who participated in the consultation process. It is important to note that the consultation process was not intended to be representative, and that this section does not speak on behalf of the wider communities or organisations that consultation participants come from. We acknowledge that there will be a greater diversity of views than has been captured and presented through the consultation process.

### 9.1 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS: KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

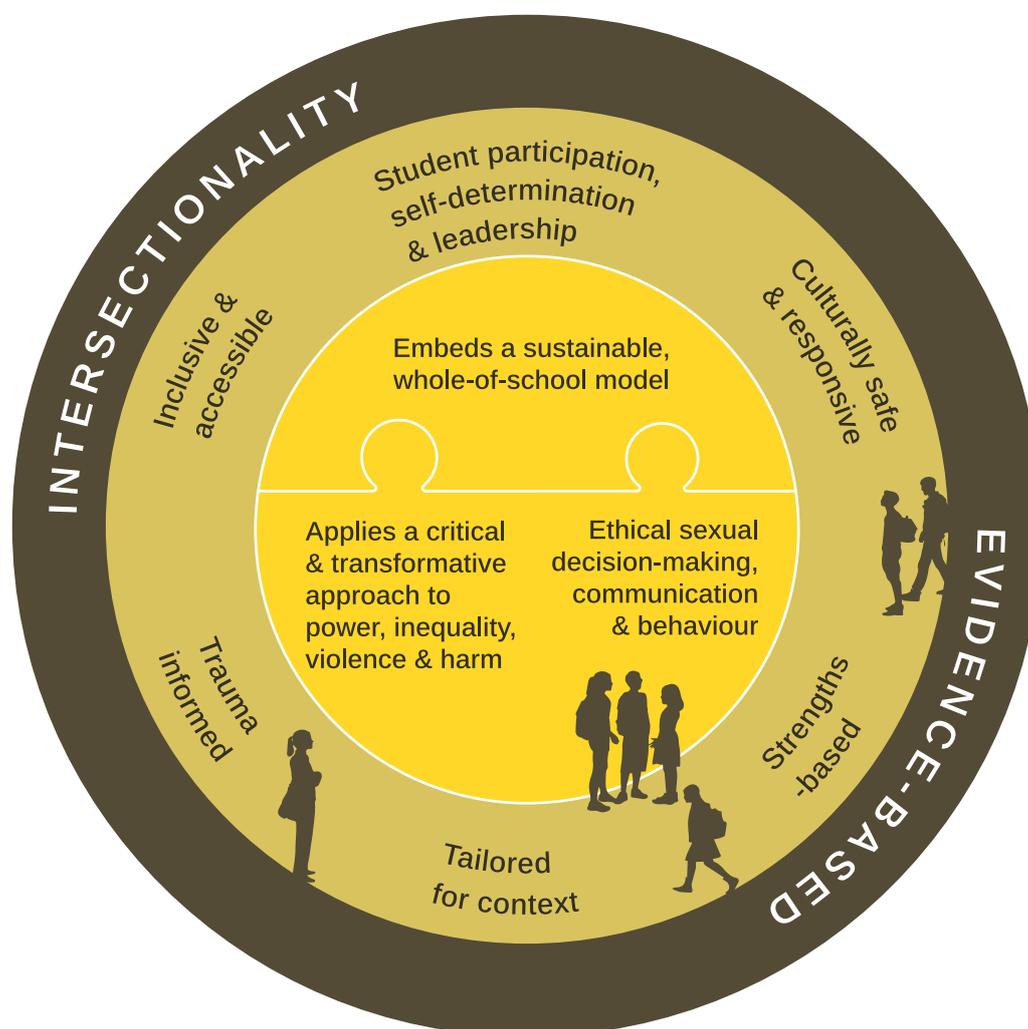
Stakeholders expressed general support for all elements of effective RRE identified in the literature review of research evidence (see Section 8). A recurring comment from stakeholders across all consultation workshops was that the eleven domains of practice are inextricably linked and must be done in conjunction with each other in order to deliver high quality, evidence-based RRE. In the words of one stakeholder:

*I think it's really hard to pull out one or two that could be prioritised and just looking at the way they all interact with each other. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

While there was recognition that the elements are interconnected, throughout the two waves of consultations, stakeholders came to the shared view that the elements identified in the literature review could be grouped into three categories. Stakeholders envisioned some elements as “foundational principles” of RRE and others as “supporting principles” that shape the effectiveness and quality of RRE delivery. According to the stakeholders, underpinning both the foundational and supporting principles is the overarching principle of an intersectional, evidence-based approach. The findings from the consultation process suggested the need for a nested model to illustrate the relationships between each identified principle, which is illustrated in Figure 6. The three foundational principles are the centre of the diagram, the six supporting principles are the middle layer, and the two overarching principles is represented in surrounding the outer layer. Stakeholders’ reflections on each of the principles in the nest model are discussed below.



Figure 6: Overview of the interrelationships between each principle in the draft national RRE framework developed through the stakeholder consultation process



## 9.2 OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES: AN INTERSECTIONAL, EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Across the stakeholder consultations there was consensus that any national RRE framework must be grounded in an intersectional, evidence-based approach. Stakeholders were clear that children and young people are not a homogenous group and that it is essential to embed an intersectional approach to the prevention of gender-based violence. This must recognise and reckon with how multiple forms of oppression and violence, including gender inequality as well as racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and ageism, can shape people's lives and relationships. Stakeholders emphasised that intersectionality is crucial to shaping the forms of gender-based violence perpetrated interpersonally, institutionally and systemically. They strongly advocated that if these intersectional forms of power, inequality and violence are not actively named and challenged in a national RRE framework, they will continue to produce exclusion and oppression within our communities, preventing sustainable, transformative social change.

Stakeholders considered that an intersectional approach extends beyond addressing intersecting forms of power and discrimination to ensuring inclusive representation of the diverse personal identities, backgrounds and experiences of young people, including how these play out in their intimate and sexual relationships; and should be evident throughout RRE curricula. Stakeholders said that positioning intersectionality as an overarching guiding principle for a national RRE framework would provide an opportunity to champion broader social inclusion, such as promoting different body types and sizes. Discussing the positioning of intersectionality as an overarching imperative, one stakeholder commented:

*The intersectional approach, it might not be thought of but it would be a really good place to put, for example, body positivity. That we're talking about different body sizes, we're talking about different types of bodies, we're talking about intersex bodies, different anatomy and that in there, as an aspect or an element of that intersectionality. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Another primary imperative throughout the consultations was that a national RRE framework must be evidence-based:

*Certainly evidence-based across a broad array of evidence which has come from a broad array of settings ... rather than a narrower perhaps Western European type setting as well. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*The evidence-informed approach, I absolutely agree we need to make sure it's all evidence-informed. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

As one stakeholder explained, a strength of good quality RRE is that it is evidence-based:

*I think one of the strengths is that [RRE] is evidence-based, and I think that needs to be perhaps promoted more, that this is evidence-based, it's not just something that's been whipped up. And it actually isn't related to any particular political sphere because one of the things that seems to come up is "this is just some new program that's been thought up by the current government" ... No matter what government is in, this is the actual facts. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

In addition, there was agreement that a national RRE framework should seek to build the evidence base for what works, for whom and in which circumstances, including through evaluation and sharing learnings. As several stakeholders noted:

*I think the highlighting of building that evidence, not just being evidence-based but also building evidence while we're doing it is so important. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*As much as possible, [we need] to continually gather evidence and over time as well and use that to inform what we are doing. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Second, stakeholders argued that evaluation is "crucial" to the success of a national RRE framework, ensuring that it is continuously developed and improved via learning opportunities:

*I recall there's some stuff in the National Stocktake and Gap [Analysis] report, I think it was, around the value of standardised evaluation methods, and public evaluations, so that, actually, findings and learnings can be shared and you can have that collective, kind of ongoing, continuous improvement. And different schools and different approaches, [to] be able to learn from what's working in other places, rather than be doing it on their own. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*A lot of operators ... don't necessarily have the ability to commission massive gold standard evaluations with universities, so I think maybe we also have to shift the thinking a little bit and recognise ... what learning on the ground at the grassroots level can give you to understand what young people need, listening to young victims and survivors ... Not only about doing formal evaluations but ensuring that programs and content that's being created is maybe research-driven rather than based on a gold standard academic evaluation. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

It was acknowledged by stakeholders that rigorous evaluation requires financial commitment. Consultation participants therefore recommended that RRE should be informed by feedback from young people and existing research where direct evaluation is not possible. As these reflections have illustrated, the consultations sent two clear messages: an effective national RRE framework must be grounded in evidence, and must take an intersectional approach across the board.

## **9.3 FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES**

In addition to the overarching principle of an intersectional, evidence-based approach, stakeholders proposed nine principles for a national RRE framework. This section reports on the thematic findings for each of the principles. Stakeholders stressed that each of the principles should be read as requiring an intersectional, evidence-based approach.

### **9.3.1 Embeds a sustainable, whole-school approach**

Across the consultations there was strong support from stakeholders to embed a whole-school approach in a national RRE framework. Despite strong support for whole-school approaches to RRE, some stakeholders talked about the need for clarity on the practical measures involved in implementing whole-school approaches to RRE:

*I think that's an excellent backing for our system to really support the approach of a whole-school. But what I want to know more of is, what does that look like, what does it sound like, what does it feel like? How can we be more tangible in the space of really clarifying that? (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

One stakeholder recommended updating whole-school models to RRE and drawing on the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework developed by WHO that adopts a whole-school approach to health promotion. This stakeholder praised the inclusion of support services in the WHO whole-school model commenting that:

*The World Health Organization has recently redefined a whole-of-school promoting or Health Promoting Schools approach and there's a new model or framework which I think is absolutely beautiful and particularly, the new addition is the recognition of school-based health services as well and the role that actually having services onsite or well connected to schools can do. So, I would encourage you to use that updated model when defining a whole-of-school approach. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

While many stakeholders felt that whole-school approaches to implementing RRE are important, they also reported that not many schools have successfully implemented whole-school approaches to date. Stakeholders identified systemic and institutional barriers, particularly resourcing, staffing and skills gaps, that continue to inhibit schools from implementing whole-school approaches.

For instance, many stakeholders noted that RRE often continues to be taught as a standalone subject, typically as part of health and physical education, rather than integrated in the curriculum across learning areas:

*Working in a rural area—and I'm pretty sure it's probably the same in a lot of schools—[RRE is] often taught as a discrete subject, and you've got one or two teachers, often the PE teachers who seem to be given this as a little project. And I think one of the downfalls at the moment is that it isn't whole-of-school in a lot of schools. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Nearly all stakeholders raised the issue of skills gaps when it comes to RRE and the urgent need for workforce development in this area. For example, discussing whole-school approaches to RRE one stakeholder commented that:

*It's aspirational to think of every teacher being trained and confident to present this material but we recognise this is an ongoing state of transition, particularly when teachers are already teaching other subjects without training. We need to be realistic about the kind of resourcing schools need to make this work. Schools actually need to be resourced; an ongoing role at the school rather than ad hoc and add-on for other teachers who come and go. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

The need for PLD and sustainable funding to support staff continuity in the delivery of RRE were spoken about by many stakeholders as key to the successful implementation of whole-school approaches to RRE:

*Also the sustainability of it too. Having that really broad approach where it is consistent across different schools, and it's not just a particular staff member that gets it, that cares about it, that it happens, and then they leave the school and that whole program leaves the school. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Consultation participants emphasised that as part of effective, whole-school approaches, RRE implementation must be sustainability-driven. As one stakeholder summarised:

*I think sustainability is really important to have in there from our point of view anyway. From such a strong rollout at the beginning, that sustainable conversation needs to be really [clear] and I'm glad to see that part of it [the draft framework]. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

In addition, stakeholders raised concerns about overcrowded curriculums and timetabling competition that restrict the implementation of whole-school approaches to RRE in many school contexts. As one stakeholder remarked:



*We have great curriculum content already in the Australian Curriculum but because it's immersed within Health and Physical Education, often RRE is competing with other parts of that specific key learning area. And so I think schools may have a really good intent for a whole-of-school approach, and based on a trauma-informed approach and strengths-based approach, but actually getting, in many cases timetabling—certainly in secondary, but even in those primary year levels where it's absolutely mandatory to establish these underlying concepts of RRE—there's other competing factors across the curriculum which makes that challenging to actually roll that out in schools. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Several stakeholders identified the need to strengthen the community aspect of whole-school approaches noting that this element is often underdeveloped. As one stakeholder commented:

*The aspect that I'd like to see within this process is explicit community connection. So, seeing the focus on community as well, not just whole-school approach. And I know that community is a component within the whole-school approach, but I think it just needs to be a little bit broader than that, yeah, explicit and broader. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

The importance of implementing RRE through strong community partnerships was also emphasised across the consultations in relation to multiple potential principles within a national framework.

Given the concerns shared by stakeholders about existing barriers to implementing whole-school approaches to RRE, a few stakeholders advocated for the national RRE framework to aim for schools and educators to work towards the ideal of a whole-school approach. For example, discussing resourcing and workforce capacity limitations that can inhibit schools from implementing a whole-school approach to RRE one stakeholder stressed that:

*I would like to see a framework that's ambitious and that says to government, "Actually, to do this well, we need —". Like in Victoria, we have the staff in every Department of Education region whose role it was to support the whole-school implementation of RRE, and that was nowhere near enough resourcing. So, what does the ideal look like? And then perhaps there's ... it's sort of a transition or it's a stopgap. Knowing that we don't have the ideal right now, what are the other pieces that might go in place to try to make it as good as it can be in that process? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Overall, there was a clear agreement from stakeholders that sustainable, whole-school approaches are key to high quality RRE and a necessary component of any RRE framework. However, nearly every stakeholder noted that support for successfully implementing and sustaining whole-school approaches requires ongoing investment and commitment from governments and schools' associations.

### **9.3.2 A critical and transformative approach to power, inequality, violence and harm**

*I do think that gender and sexuality transformative approaches are one of those central or core tenets. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Reflective of the research evidence base (see Sections 8.1 and 8.2), stakeholders identified gender and sexuality transformative approaches as crucial components of a national RRE framework and as central to effective, high-quality RRE. As one stakeholder explained:

*With the addressing the gendered drivers, I'm really big on what about the social context drivers as well? So, that's that stuff around young women, women still believing that if a man does a certain number of things, he's earned sex ... And we know when young people are developing their understandings of the world, "they bought me this", or "we went there", or "they spent all day with me", "they put a lot of effort in"—these are the social drivers. And I think these are really important things if we're talking about helping young people especially, grasp where there are social drivers and social pressures and context to some of this internalised individual behaviour or responses ... I think sometimes trying to extend out people's understanding ... I really want to see us being a bit more brave about that bit. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

As this excerpt illustrates there was recognition among participating stakeholders that RRE should not only critically unpack the gendered drivers of gender-based violence but also seek to challenge and transform the wider social context in which the drivers play out.

### **Extending beyond gender and sexuality transformative paradigms**

*Going beyond just gender as a driver and also expanding that to power dynamics full stop. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

There was agreement among stakeholders that there is a need to extend transformative paradigms used in RRE beyond gender and sexuality to also focus on addressing decolonisation, anti-racism and disability justice. This reflects recent research by the Australian Human Rights Commission that recommended addressing racism in schools (AHRC, 2024). Stakeholders who participated in consultations with a specific focus on people with disability, First Nations communities and students from migrant, refugee and faith-based communities called for enhanced visibility and attention to intersectional forms of inequality, discrimination and violence in a national RRE framework. For example, one stakeholder discussing gender transformative approaches to RRE commented that:

*So, of course, gender relates to power dynamics and how that influences the consent conversation but also when we talk about disability or ability, when we talk about race and culture, religion, faith, language, so many different facets of power and identity that influence consent or capacity to consent. So, I think it's great that gender is specifically named and it needs to be discussed in the consent conversation, but I think it needs to be broader than just gender—so, power generally. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Throughout the consultations many stakeholders raised the need to use a broader transformative approach in a national RRE framework to more meaningfully reflect the multiple and intersecting drivers—including gender and sexuality—that shape young people's experiences of discrimination, inequality and violence. For example:

*Some of the more contemporary terms I think could be looked at being incorporated like not so much inclusive approaches but expansive approaches. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I think it's so important the conversations that have been had today about how do we invite more things into this framework and design, inviting in the conversations of drivers around racism and race and culture and stereotypes, rather than this becoming a conversation of something versus something. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

In particular, stakeholders in the thematic consultation workshops dedicated to First Nations peoples and migrant, refugee and faith-based communities consistently emphasised the need for a pedagogical approach that also centres decolonisation and anti-racism as well as gender and sexuality within a national RRE framework. As one stakeholder explained:

*A guiding principle, I think, would have to be that decolonial process. Because, you know, the relationships that we experience today, or rather I should say that the power, the manifestations of power in the relationships that we experience today, are colonial constructs. There's no way we can get around that ... We have to be calling that out and we have to be making it very clear ... the way that we divide our community today are all colonial constructs. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

These stakeholders stressed the importance of more explicit integration of anti-racism and decolonial approaches in a national RRE framework, and in RRE more broadly. As two stakeholders explained:

*Unless we address racism and name it ... it's just lip-service. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

*I think personally for me, what I've noticed over the years is that in this country when we talk about diversity, often we talk about gender and we talk about gender in the context of also sexual orientation. And I think what that means [is] that I see not a lot of mention about race there ... We've just been saying today how young people are being marginalised on the basis of their culture or their race or things like that ... Where is the active language on antiracism in this? Because there is no way a Black child is going to feel respected if their racial background is constantly being disrespected in school. So if we're going to have very open, clear language on gender and sexual orientation, why are we actively erasing race in this part? So that's an aspect of bringing that in and bringing it in an intentional way that is going to make children who are not White to feel like they've been thought about ... (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Similarly, stakeholders in the thematic consultation workshop on RRE and people with disability expressed the need to more explicitly integrate ableism and disability justice into the transformative component of a national RRE framework. As two stakeholders commented:

*Disability certainly needs to be absolutely front and centre with this, and the intersectionality of [disability]. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*You have gender and sexuality transformative but are there paradigms and frameworks relating to disability that can be folded into this one to move it beyond just sexuality, just gender and also bringing in disability? (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

There was a shared view among stakeholders, particularly in the thematic workshop on RRE and people with disability, that RRE has historically tended to ignore the presence and needs of young people with disability. These stakeholders highlighted, for instance, the importance of challenging segregationist ideas that intimacy cannot occur across disability / non-disability.



*I think that it needs to move in a direction of acceptance and understanding of disability in relationships, especially as part of sexual health and sexual education is that yes, you can have sexual relationships with disabled people and disabled people can have sexual relationships with each other. It doesn't have to be if you're disabled you're only with disabled people, if you're non-disabled you're only with non-disabled people. I think that kind of thing is really important to focus on ... that understanding and acceptance of disability in the respectful relationship space. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Stakeholders who participated in the thematic consultation workshop on disability held the view that addressing ableism as part of a critical and transformative approach to RRE should be a cross-curriculum priority and implemented as part of a whole-school approach. They explained that this can be done, for example, through critical reappraisals of literature in English studies noting that literature often only represents persons with disability as asexual or undesirable and gay/lesbian characters as miserable and doomed. As one stakeholder explained:

*If you're looking at the relationships between a non-disabled person and a disabled person, the way that the disability is portrayed in books as well as the way that sexuality and gender are portrayed in books and how the general approach when you have a gay character, is that character is struggling with their gayness and it's not just, oh, they're in a relationship with someone, it's they have to struggle with their gayness. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

These stakeholders noted that acknowledging ableism and addressing intersectional concerns in a national RRE framework would require PLD for school staff. They reported that teacher training on understanding disability in the context of RRE is underdeveloped. For example:

*In terms of historically looking at resources to support teachers to work with disabled students in respectful relationships context, I've always found it to be very fragmented in a way that you don't get for a lot of other community groups. In the sense that you might have a little page in a module that says, "Disability exists, here's a link to a research report for intellectual disabilities. Here's a video for autistic students", and that's it. It doesn't have that grounding at the beginning...It assumes a lot about a teacher's knowledge around disability. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*I know that at our school we did a whole lot of work last year and this year around how to have difficult conversations with students around things like race and gender diversity and sexuality and disability and all that sort of stuff. So, I think that would be really valuable to be built in a part of the actual curriculum. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

A few stakeholders questioned whether a single framework would work for the diverse peoples and communities in Australian schools, and they suggested that bespoke frameworks for different population groups would be more appropriate. As one stakeholder commented:

*The problem is, how are we saying this is the framework that is going to cover everyone when we know there is so much diversity. So instead of a national framework, we should have some frameworks that will cover different population groups or different priority groups because it can't look the same and it will never look the same for everyone. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Overall, the stakeholders' views indicate that when it comes to forms of power and inequality that contribute to the violence and harm experienced by young people in Australian society, intersectionality needs to be at the centre of transformative approaches. In addition to a transformative approach to gender and sexuality, this requires RRE to critically deconstruct and transform other forms of power and inequality, such as colonialism, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia, and the implications for children and young people's relationships with others (including intimate, family, social and professional relationships). Across the consultations, stakeholders felt that embedding a more expansive transformative approach in a national RRE framework that addresses the gendered drivers of gender-based violence as well as the drivers of other intersectional forms of power and inequality, is more likely to lead to the sustained, systemic change required to holistically end gender-based violence.

### 9.3.3 Ethical sexual decision-making, communication and behaviour

There was unanimous agreement across the stakeholder consultations that consent is a critical part of RRE. However, stakeholders also acknowledged that consent education that focuses solely on requests for sex and consent or refusal does not promote respect, pleasure, empathy, fairness or safety when it comes to sexual decision-making. The stakeholders' views align with research that shows that a request and consent or refusal model of consent education is not effective in preventing sexual violence and unwanted sex as core issues of power are often not adequately addressed and young people are not supported to build the skills for sexual communication and negotiation (Jeffery, 2022; Mason, 2023).

It was widely felt by stakeholders that embedding a sexual ethics approach to addressing sexual decision-making, communication and behaviour in a national RRE framework would be beneficial. Sexual ethics is a skills development approach that provides young people with a framework for ethical sexual decision-making, communication and behaviour. As discussed in Section 8.3, sexual ethics is based on taking care of ourselves, thinking about the impact of our actions on others, ongoing communication and each person having an equal say, and learning from experience (ARCSHS, 2015; Carmody, 2015; Stonehouse, 2023). Stakeholders in Victoria were particularly encouraging about the use of a sexual ethics approach, where all the updated CRRE curricula have used this model.

*What I like about this proposed framework is that it does include sexual ethics informed approach. So, as a Victorian, ... the last few years we've had the RRE program in our schools, the feedback from schools is that ... there hasn't been enough information within the RRE curriculum around sexual health and promoting healthy relationships and sexual choices. So, it's good to see in this framework that it's in there. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Participants in the consultation with youth representatives praised the focus on active, ongoing communication and attention promoted in the sexual ethics model:

*I really like the idea of checking in that what you're putting out has been received by people ... Every single one of us has a different idea of what a respectful relationship is. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

Stakeholders also raised concerns about consent education solely focussed on the ability to say "No" explaining that such models do not contextualise sexual negotiation in a social situation where there are other/s influencing the response:

*We're doing a great disservice, I think, to all the feminists who've gone before to ... try and pick up what's essentially a legal concept around consent and violence and push it into a curriculum and a pedagogical approach without acknowledging some more of that broader context and where it fits and what else we need to know. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Nor do they promote a sex positive approach that considers pleasure and desire as core components:

*The focus a lot of the time is on communication and then consent and then a version of sex that is often heteronormative or heterosexual sex, penetrative sex. There's no discussion about intimacy, pleasure, and what other relationship goals a young person could have in that relationship. So I think student engagement and really talking more about what the young people need at each level of their education is really important. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Affirming a central tenet of sexual ethics, stakeholders also advocated that young people should play a key role in determining the content of consent education:

*Because it's very well adults deciding, "This is what's in the curriculum, this is what's good for you", but is it really still meeting the needs of young people? So that is really important, to still get that input from young people and have them, as part of their education, you know, nothing about them without them. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

#### **The need to expand consent education**

Several stakeholders said that there is a clear need for more engaging and relevant education on consent in schools. For example, discussing deficiencies in current consent education one stakeholder said:

*One thing I find really interesting in working with young people in this space, is that for young people, why consent was so hard for them to understand was because they have very little times in their lives for actually practising consent. They're forced to go to school, they're forced what to eat, they're forced to do homework. Having their choice and negotiating choice and having skills and space to practise that is really, really minimal for young people. So I think where RRE has to sit really differently is it has to, ... allows a safe space to explore that but also is really based in skill-building. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Young people who participated in the consultations were clear that they require concrete examples of what consent is and is not. For instance, one young person commented that:

*Everything I've heard from a lot of teachers has been that the sex ed curriculum has long been confusing and ambiguous. So, being really clear with our language I think is incredibly important. Being really direct with it, because we don't want it to be misinterpreted. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

#### **Ethics versus moral or rights-based discourses**

While there was broad support for a sexual ethics approach, a very small number of stakeholders were concerned about the conflation of ethics with morality and the potential opportunity for individuals to enforce their own moral system when delivering RRE. As one stakeholder commented:

*I just get concerned around the way that ethics is really tied into ideas around morality, and morality is really being used against queer sexualities and used as an excuse to regulate queer sexualities. So I just think that that ethics word can be a bit of a vexed word, and really open to interpretation. So I think if that was going to be used, it would have to have a pretty clear definition of how you're approaching ethical sex or sexual ethics ... Anything that is creating principles around what sex is and should look like can be really exclusionary and work to make people feel guilty about particular sexual desires. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Similarly, another stakeholder noted the different educational experiences students can receive because educators often bring their own morals to consent and broader RRE:

*I went to a religious school, and I had some fantastic teachers that were able to give non-biased, queer positive information, and I had others that had very interesting belief points. (Workshops with youth representatives, October 2023)*

In addition, a few stakeholders questioned the lack of inclusion of a human rights-based approach:

*I think what stood out for me was that idea of potentially embedding some language of rights within the framework—and I think that's something that I noticed was potentially missing, was how are we addressing the various lived experience and biases and assumptions that the people who are potentially teaching or reinforcing or engaging with this kind of education are bringing from their own background and general experience? I think the two go hand-in-hand in a lot of ways. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

These stakeholder discussions show that ethics and morality are often used interchangeably in the context of respectful relationships and consent education, and demonstrate the importance of clearly defining a sexual ethics approach within a national framework to ensure that the approach is interpreted and used as intended. In conversations about respectful relationships, consideration must be given to more than one individual at any point in time and an ethical approach is able to deeply interrogate the question of whose rights are being considered (or not). This has been recognised to improve many aspects of student health including both emotional and sexual wellbeing, communication skills, knowledge and understanding of rights, and improved attitudes supporting gender equity (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021; Ketting et al., 2016; Carmody, 2015; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2015).

### **Respectful relationships - language and meaning**

In a consultation context where multiple stakeholders called for student agency and voice, the youth stakeholders had serious concerns with naming the framework “Respectful Relationships”. For instance, some youth representatives were more attuned to the language of “reciprocal” or “healthy” relationships, as “respectful” can carry particular connotations of power and hierarchy:

*The immediate reaction I have to the word respectful, in my mind it's [ranks], like hierarchical. And so I wondered, if we were looking at a framing lens and how we were framing this, if we looked at reciprocal relationships as opposed to respectful relationships? Because in all human interactions and relationships, reciprocity is there at some level. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*



*The term respectful is so subjective to so many different cultures. For me, when I think of respectful, I think of things like manners and being polite but it also means maintaining healthy relationships. I think that's where the term healthy and reciprocal relationships really comes in hand, because I know from people I've met and people I've talked to, when they're talking about being respectful in relationships, sometimes that can come off as you have to be nice, or you actually shouldn't talk about that because it's not respectful or it's not polite. (Workshops with youth representatives, October 2023)*

*In my culture, respect looks like listening to your elders, it looks like keeping quiet—especially if you're a woman, keeping quiet. So respectful does have some negative connotations to it, speaking to certain individuals. (Workshops with youth representatives, October 2023)*

However, one youth stakeholder felt that the use of “reciprocal” could also be unhelpful and potentially harmful terminology. They explained that:

*Respect can be really weaponised by different groups of people. And I think my only thing with reciprocal, and probably why I would prefer healthy is that, I don't know, I feel like when I heard the word reciprocal I thought of sexual relationships first, and I thought about the potential danger there. And obviously you probably wouldn't teach in sexual relationships everything has to be reciprocal but I think maybe having an education framework called reciprocal might create some miscommunication there. Because my concern would be that people would hear reciprocal and then be coerced into doing something where they don't want to, but because they're under the impression that it's reciprocal because you want to treat someone the same way that they treat you, which I don't think applies really to sex. I think in everyday life I think it's great that we want to treat people with kindness and want to expect the same in return, but I think in sexual relationships in particular, I think that's a really dangerous zone that could easily be blurred. (Workshops with youth representatives, October 2023)*

Another youth stakeholder gave a personal story to illustrate their concerns about the use of “reciprocal relationships” terminology:

*Or even like, in my personal experience I met a new potential partner last week, and he paid for the first few dates, so I'm figuring out what is fair, what is respectful, and figuring out how to set mutual, reciprocal, safe, healthy boundaries in a new romantic situation, while still being on the lookout for red flag behaviour. I feel like if I was younger and being taught about reciprocity, it could be confusing and feeling as I should pay or “put out” to keep things even. (Workshops with youth representatives, October 2023)*

A handful of stakeholders in other consultation groups echoed youth representatives' concerns about the language of “respectful relationships”:

*The thing that comes to mind for me is that the word respect can be and is often weaponised in abusive dynamics. Abusive parents often use respect as a reason and an entitlement to be violent towards their children, and then I think you see that in relationships as well where a partner will say, “You should show me more respect and then I wouldn't be needing to discipline you in X, Y, Z ways”. So, I think that the word respectful can be a little bit confusing for young people when they've had that word be used as an excuse for abuse so many times in their lives potentially. We use healthy relationships [in our work]. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Clearly, appropriate language was a core design issue for young people consulted about the national RRE framework, as they were conscious that some language can be limiting or misconstrued. Despite these language considerations, there was widespread support for including a sexual ethics approach as a key principle for a national RRE framework.

### 9.3.4 Student participation, self-determination and leadership

In the consultations stakeholders advocated a strengths-based approach to working with children and young people. This was seen as particularly important for the development of RRE curriculum and teaching and learning resources.

*We need this co-designed with young people ... How are we strengths-based if it's not person-centred for the people we're trying to do it for in the first place? (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

*I'm all about strengths-based practice and youth empowerment ... like the whole point of this program, it's for young people ... We don't have any work or business or anything to do with it unless the young people are working with us. Then of course, we've got the community and the parents and the teachers around them ... Trying to see young people as, they're decision-making and they're being the ones choosing the topics and working in partnership with us. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

Some stakeholders noted that students already hold significant knowledge in this space. They said it was important to recognise young people as experts in their own lives and value their abilities, knowledge and skills in RRE:

*Young people ... very often they come with a lot of understandings about what consent is [or] isn't. And so, increasingly what we are finding when we get feedback from young people is, "We've already kind of done this in Year 8 or Year 9", or, "We know about this". So, I feel like getting young people involved in the development of the curriculum is really, really important. And finding out who they want to have deliver the information as well is really important, and how they would like it, what's the most palatable ways of having it. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Student engagement and leadership [are core components of RRE] because every time I talk to a kid, I am blown away by the knowledge that they have, and that they are our knowledge holders going forward for how we can best do this. So, bringing their voice in and learning from them is always so important. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Several stakeholders highlighted the importance of working *with* rather than *on* students.

*I also really like the student engagement [component]. I think that's often missing from a lot of education sector stuff. There's a lot of initiatives done I think for students ... at students or to students, not necessarily with students. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I think we really need to highlight voice in the whole process, like, listening to or being able to hear voice and having agency. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Other stakeholders talked particularly about the need for RRE to be student-led.

*My perspective is that this type of work, if we want young people to ... actually learn stuff that they can take into their relationships, it needs to be stuff that they lead and they explore. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

There was extensive discussion among stakeholders in the consultations about the most appropriate language to capture this dimension of RRE, including student engagement, participation, leadership, self-determination and voice. For example, stakeholders commented:

*I think that it's really important for people to feel empowered and so engagement can be not quite as strong in terms of being empowered and really having agency and voice. Student engagement, sometimes it needs to be unpacked or explained because sometimes it can mean as long as people are involved or consulted or they know about it, can be a definition of being engaged. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*Student voice, that's another term that's used quite often in schools now with students. And the students know that when it's student voice, it's their opportunity to have their say and they feel empowered because when see that, they know that's been built in and considered. I think that is really valuable in moving students to actually be motivated to pick up the curriculum and run with it. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*I'm really hearing a link between this idea of decision-making and self-determination—and we know how important self-determination is. I think there's something here around, how does that reflect with young people within it as well, outside of just mob-specific lens? (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

Across the consultations stakeholders made a range of different suggestions about engaging, empowering, working with and/or centring students in RRE. The primary message was that when it comes to working with children and young people, the language in any national RRE framework must be strengths-based and youth-focused.

### **9.3.5 Inclusive and accessible**

Across the stakeholder consultations there was wide support for the inclusion of a guiding principle or component focused on inclusion and accessibility within a national RRE framework. For example, one stakeholder described how the language of inclusion and accessibility is useful because it is already embedded in education policy:

*I was looking at this from the lens of, if I am delivering this to my staff, to [then] deliver this to students, I think it would be really useful to actually have those terms of accessible and inclusive in the guiding principles, because they're terms that are used really quite consistently now through all of our policies—particularly in Queensland, like, it's really common language now. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Youth representatives also emphasised the importance of inclusion and disability for RRE:

*One thing that I didn't really see there as well, it might fall under the intersectional perspective, but definitely making sure that information is accessible and inclusive in terms of the way that it is delivered, the method. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

*I think [inclusion and accessibility are] really important because in terms of relationships, just in establishing positive relationships from a young age, I think that could really help in a wide area improving awareness around people who have additional needs ... But also the fact that a lot of these things affect them disproportionately, so I think it incorporates a sense of allyship from a very young age as well which could be really ... a great thing to add. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

Stakeholders felt these terms were important to emphasise in addition to intersectionality with specific considerations for best practice design and implementation of RRE in schools. For example, stakeholders in the thematic workshop on people with disability called for clear language on inclusion and accessibility in any national RRE framework to address everyone's needs:

*Including something like inclusive I think is good because then that supports making sure that people feel included if they are a person with disability or if they were an EAL [English as an additional language] background or any of those things, and to making that language really clear. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

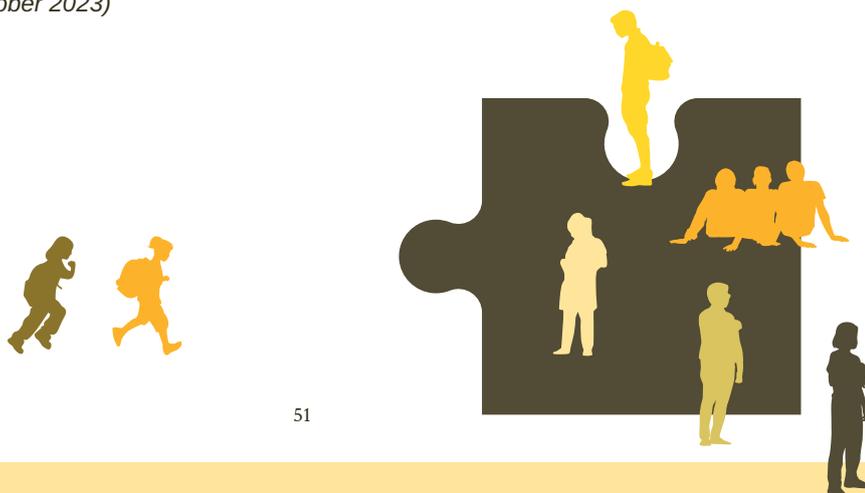
Similarly, other stakeholders emphasised that a national RRE framework should adopt inclusive language that reflects the complexities of intersecting identities and lived experiences. For example:

*The words that come to mind are around lived experience and amplifying our young people's voices, including our Sistergirls, Brotherboys, being very inclusive and yeah, with our language. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

*In every school, regardless of whether it's a faith-based school or not, there's queer kids in the room, and trans kids, and intersex kids in those spaces. So, their needs need to be met, while also navigating that cultural safety and faith-based safety. So it's tricky and it's nuanced. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Expanding on the role of language in the framework, one stakeholder added:

*Language is discourse and language is what tells us what is important to people and what—it's an act of omission but it's also an act of commission. So if we actively erase, the absence of that language is a big form of communication in and of itself. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*



However, there were mixed perspectives among stakeholders as to what inclusion and accessibility can mean in practice:

*They're such broad terms, like, what do they actually look like in practice, right? But I think that could be incorporated in some of the existing, maybe principles I would say. I think that accessibility and inclusion are words that, for me, encapsulate different types of bodies, different types of identities, different types of background and ethnicities and cultures and religions, as well as abilities, and body types and shapes ... They're certainly terms that I would feel reflects the work that we do in this space. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Inclusion and accessibility were understood by stakeholders to incorporate and require representation across ability, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and other identities and social groups. That is, RRE (and by extension a national RRE framework) should be inclusive and accessible by design for everyone, regardless of ability, language, location or lived experience. This principle is the foundation of UDL for inclusive education, described in the rapid literature review at Section 8.6.

While there was broad support for a focus on inclusion and accessibility within a national RRE framework, stakeholders also emphasised the need for explicit references to specific student and community groups. For example, one stakeholder commented that:

*I think the only thing that's really missing at first glance of that framework is that specific mention of disability in there and ensuring that disabled students are in fact catered for in this framework—which is something that parents look for, especially in the inclusion space. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Some stakeholders expressed concern about access to RRE for young people who are disengaged from the school system. While recognising that the proposed national RRE framework is intended to guide RRE in primary and secondary schools, these stakeholders felt it was critical for RRE to be inclusive of and available to young people through other community services, such as out-of-home care providers and organisations that work with at-risk youth.

*The other thing I think is missing a bit, is the accessibility. We've got a huge cohort of kids in regional Vic that aren't engaged in school. And how are these messages and this education, how is that being delivered to them? So, that's a big one for me. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

*How are you capturing young people who are disengaged from the system who may not be in a traditional schooling environment? How are their voices being captured and amplified so that they are also having the right to education and having the right to this pivotal education? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Stakeholders who participated in the thematic consultation workshop on migrant, refugee and faith-based communities were wary that inclusion and accessibility are not strong enough concepts on their own. They called for clear attention to anti-racism within a national RRE framework, as discussed earlier, and for future RRE policies in Australia to be better informed by the lived experiences of marginalised communities. These stakeholders said these concerns are not unique to RRE and reflect broader practice gaps in Australian primary prevention initiatives. As one stakeholder commented:

*It almost needs to be tipped on its head rather than just a little bit more inclusive, in order to be that national [RRE] framework to represent everybody ... I think in the national [prevention] framework, everyone's still very Othered who doesn't fit the White Change the story video, and I understand why that is as it is. But it's about then again finding that language which is not Othering ... I don't think we're there yet in terms of how we can have a conversation that does respect everyone's different experiences. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Across the consultations, stakeholders stressed that respect for difference should be an underlying principle for the development of RRE policy and practice in Australia that is meaningfully inclusive and accessible.

When discussing inclusion and accessibility as components of a national RRE framework, stakeholders stressed the importance of creating accessible learning environments and catering for the diverse learning needs and preferences of all students. There are key links between these concerns and the importance of tailoring RRE for context (discussed later). Stakeholders in the thematic consultation workshop on disability highlighted the different adaptations needed for the inclusive engagement of all students in RRE. Stakeholders provided examples of accessibility measures that schools have taken in other learning areas, like easy readers, and said similar practices should be used for RRE. However, they also raised concerns about the resourcing and capacity of schools to put these measures in place, and the potential implications for implementing a national RRE framework:

*Of course if there isn't, in the budget, to be able to do an audio file and a video, and easy read and everything else, it's just about actually also providing the links to how to create this content to really break it down and give autonomy to teachers and students to do it the way they want to do—but still being mindful of keeping to the topic and its values. I think that's the thing that can sometimes stunt a lot of the educational system, is if they're made to do it a specific way that doesn't actually work for everyone. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

The need to cater for different learning preferences and needs was echoed by youth representatives.

*I work with a lot of neurodiverse young people in my job and ... a core component is making sure that the information that I'm giving is accessible for neurodiverse people. So I think in the past, especially with a lot of this education that's been given in a way that's like the tea video, "What is consent? It's as simple as tea". But say if you aren't neurotypical and you can't understand that, that is really detrimental because you're missing a whole range of people there. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

Stakeholders in the thematic consultation workshop on migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, said that language adaptations are central for ensuring RRE under the framework is inclusive and accessible to students and their families. As these participants discussed, for students and communities from non-English speaking backgrounds, language differences can contribute to inequality and discrimination, and should therefore be recognised in a national RRE framework:



*I guess it's going back to, what do those guiding principles look like for cultural diversity? For me it would be language is one. The fact that a child will not speak the same language as their parent is really important. So in schools whenever I do respectful relationships education or sexuality education I always say the flyer for the parents has to be in language, and the flyer for the young people has to be in English, because I never believe that a young person should go home and translate to their parents what the education that is being provided around sexual health is. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Another stakeholder cautioned that written documents can still be inaccessible for families from English as an Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds:

*We always talk about having documents translated into a language, but we also need to actually acknowledge that not every ethnic group is literate in the language that they speak at home. Often they're a lot stronger verbally in expressive and receptive language rather than they are in a written language. And so maybe the creation of videos or podcasts or recordings or something like that might assist in this space, rather than directly translating documents. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Representation was a pressing concern for stakeholders in the thematic workshops on LGBTQIA+ communities, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and migrant, refugee and faith-based communities. They noted the invisibility of many young peoples' experiences in mainstream Australian education. For example, stakeholders reflected:

*A child goes to school and spends their whole day at school experiencing everything that is Australian including the stereotypes, innuendos, the silent micro-aggressions and all that ... But when you look at even the curriculum, the books the kids are reading, they don't say anything about them ... It's really, really simple to do, to just make sure when a kid walks into a school they have an array of literature from their own background. That alone, seeing themselves in a classroom says a lot. It means "We see you, we know how you feel, we know what you experience". (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

*[Often] you only get pickup when it's like, "Oh, we've got a trans student now. What do we do? Can you talk really about this?". And that's really uncomfortable for the student sitting there getting the trans lesson because they know it's about them, and that's why the school's sort of set off the alarm bells. Rather than that being normalised content across what they're delivering all the time. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Similarly, other stakeholders said that inclusion and accessibility are interrelated with cultural safety and emphasised the need for a national RRE framework to move beyond a dominant Western and White lens:

*I think also having examples from wider cultures just than a Western, colonised White lens is also really important. I think there are adjustments that are then made but they're made in design with the community. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*



Stakeholders flagged the absence of religion within the draft national RRE framework and related national policies more broadly:

*I have to acknowledge and respect the core guiding principle that religion is a big part of who we are. And because it's not a big part of what the national strategy is, we're erasing a whole population, we're erasing young people ... All of this has already erased you: "We don't see your colour, we don't see your religion". (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Throughout the consultations, there was a clear emphasis on inclusion and accessibility as a key principle for a national RRE framework. Inclusion and accessibility were significant in terms of complementing and extending intersectional lenses by supporting students of all abilities and engaging communities of all backgrounds. Inclusion and accessibility were also seen to intersect with critical and transformative approaches to RRE to ensure representation across diverse genders, sexualities, abilities, cultures and languages.

### **9.3.6 Culturally safe and responsive**

Across the consultations stakeholders shared the firm view that culture must be carefully embedded into a national RRE framework for Australian primary and secondary schools. There was shared agreement that such a lens would only "add to rather than subtract [from the framework]" (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023). However, there were different views about the most useful and appropriate way to frame culture and context within a national RRE framework (see Section 9.3.9 below for a discussion of "Tailored for context"). For example, in the consultation workshops with education and DFSV experts, there was strong support for the inclusion of "culturally relevant and context appropriate" as a component in a national RRE framework:

*Being culturally relevant and context appropriate, I think that's absolutely important. Particularly with the schools that I'm working with that are very diverse, there are values and beliefs that maybe some of this content is challenged by, and so I think that definitely needs to be taken into consideration. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Other stakeholders felt there was a need for stronger language in a national RRE framework to reflect the deep work required:

*With particular CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] populations, you're going to have to be doing community development work, which is usually outreach type work with families, communities, religious leaders, whatever you need to do to make sure that the young person is safe as they go back talking about what they've learned or integrating that into their lives ... I just feel like that bit around culturally relevant needs to be a little bit stronger in some way. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Culturally appropriate, designed by community but we're more leaning towards working with community, from their point of view, when you're talking about the cultural aspect ... It takes a lot of work with the local community when we go and deliver our program ... It's not a check box that we're trying to just tick off. It's about being real and being a part of the community that you're living and working in. Giving them that opportunity to know that yes, we've given you a written-out program with step-by-step instructions, but those are guidelines ... and you are able to change and adapt as needed. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders also called for the integration of language on diversity and intersectionality throughout a national RRE framework to ensure clear respect for and inclusion of different cultural groups, values and experiences. For example, two stakeholders commented that:

*I'm really interested to see how we can support culturally diverse learners around certainly discussing the gender stereotypes and the gendered drivers of domestic and family violence while being respectful of others' cultures. I think that's a really important component. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

*The core themes of intersectionality, I think that's really important. Coming with my background, I'm a queer woman of colour, I think it's really important that in terms of teaching respectful relationship education, definitely incorporating queerness ... especially with multicultural communities, [it can be] a big taboo ... So I think it's really interesting to see how that could be taught, not in necessarily an explicit way but in a way that would be inclusive of multicultural communities. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

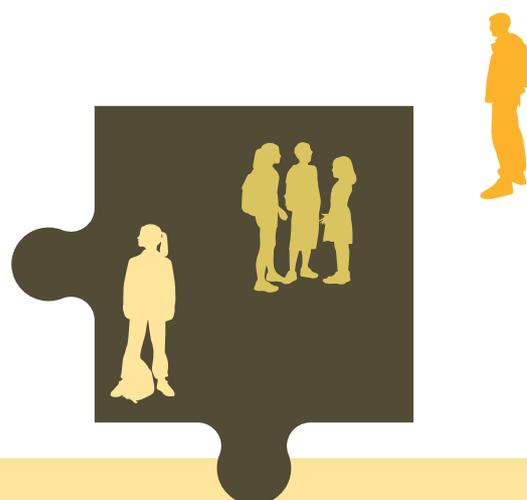
Several stakeholders said that respect for cultural differences should be embedded into a national RRE framework noting the opportunity for inclusive leadership by the broader education system:

*In a national framework we need to reflect all identity. So we need to see the respect to our diversity and just consider that the last data shows that half of population have at least one parent born overseas. That leaves at least half of us are from CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] background. So it needs to be reflected in the framework, and I think the education system needs to be the leader of this evolution. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Some stakeholders cautioned against assumptions that multicultural communities would necessarily hold conservative views or otherwise express resistance to RRE. As one participant noted, “not every culture is patriarchal” (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023). Other participants similarly commented:

*When we're talking about stereotypes, we also need to work on the stereotypes that are created in Western societies about other societies. So we know how women from different backgrounds and countries are taken as having a different role in families and relationships, and sometimes there's a lot of discrimination of these. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

*[We] talked about sometimes the religion and the culture can be almost perceived as a threat to respectful relationships education—I think there's a lot of educator training that needs to be done. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*



Managing these assumptions and engaging respectfully with communities was positioned by stakeholders as an important part of a strengths-based approach within a national RRE framework (see also Section 11.3.8). For example:

*This idea that we're trying to do something to keep children safe, and that's what the parents essentially want; they want their children to be safe. So, it's how can we meet them in the middle and show that what we are doing isn't meant to be culturally insensitive, it's not meant to be challenging their values or beliefs ... We're both trying to achieve a level of safety for their young person, and a level of wellbeing that means they are going to have healthy relationships. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

When discussing cultural relevance and working with multicultural and faith-based communities, stakeholders often referred to overarching values like safety, respect and cultural sensitivity. Reflections like these indicate a need for the resulting RRE framework to incorporate an explicit focus on cultural safety, alongside the related principles of intersectionality, inclusion and accessibility.

Stakeholders in the thematic consultation workshops on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities and First Nations communities strongly advocated that a national RRE framework must extend beyond cultural awareness and incorporate cultural safety and cultural responsiveness. This was particularly stressed by stakeholders during the consultation for RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and was closely linked to embedding decolonisation within the framework (refer also to the discussion in Section 9.3.2):

*I would love to see a core component looking at the vocabulary of safety ... Then, a guiding principle I think would have to be that decolonial process. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

As a principle in healthcare and related policy spaces like education, cultural safety is distinguished from other conceptualisations of cultural awareness by its explicit focus on examining colonisation and racism as dynamics of mainstream culture and social structures (IAHA, 2019; Mackean et al., 2020). In the context of RRE, cultural safety requires considerations of, and responsibility for, whole-school and whole-community safety:

*I think maybe there's a little bit of a link of when we talk about whole-of-school, whole-community ... It's not just safety of the individual—and I'm very aware that when we look at, you know, First Nations, Indigenous perspectives verse Western perspectives, Western perspectives can be real individual. You're an individual student in a classroom and yes, you're all together, but it's an individual and you're learning. When we look at, actually, how do we look at it from a community perspective? Safety as a group, safety as a community. It's not just upholding your individual safety and a teacher's individual safety, but how is the person who's facilitating holding community safety? (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

*I don't think we can be creating psychologically and culturally safe spaces for kids if there are adults in the community ... who are not [also being] challenged ... How do we talk as a community about the right to be safe, full stop? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Stakeholders said including cultural safety as a component would align a national RRE framework with other key policies. For example, one stakeholder explained that cultural safety is embedded in the Victorian Child Safe Standards:

*In Victoria, we've had the Child Safe Standards now since 2016 and Standard 5 now speaks to cultural safety ... And I think when we're doing this work, we have to look at, where are the other places where these policies [can be linked?] Because it's so much easier for us to go in and say, "Child Safe Standards says that you have to do this" ... So I think when we look at those policies, it's marrying the policies up with the other spaces where the work has been done. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Cultural safety was seen by stakeholders across the consultations as a meaningful, relevant and instructive principle to incorporate into a national RRE framework in the Australian context.

Alongside cultural safety, stakeholders also called for cultural responsiveness to be embedded into a national RRE framework. As one participant commented, the inclusion of cultural responsiveness is seen as critical:

*I'm still looking for keywords on that page that shout at me that this is actually going to be culturally responsive or encourage people or say to people, "You must be culturally responsive", because that is an absolute priority. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

There was agreement among stakeholders, particularly those who participated in the workshop on RRE for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, that cultural responsiveness should be one of the guiding principles in a national RRE framework:

*I think it should be a guiding principle, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education ... I also think though that this is a framework for Australia and we are going to be looking at other cultural groups. So therefore, that culturally responsiveness comes in there as well ... You would need to be making sure that you are contextualising that curriculum and so therefore, it would be a guiding principle to feed into saying that "This has to happen". (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders felt that cultural responsiveness is closely linked to embedding decolonisation into a national RRE framework:

*Cultural responsiveness is an outcome of decolonial practice. Because once we become decolonised, once we've gone on that journey, once we are doing that in our practice, we become inclusive, we become responsive, we become safe, we become aware of all of the ways that these things manifest to cause violence against others. Then, we have the capacity to call that out and do something about it. That would be something that I think should be a guiding principle. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

The stakeholder discussions on cultural safety and cultural responsiveness reflected the interconnectedness of the different components and principles that they identified as important across the RRE framework, like inclusion, cultural safety and responsiveness, and critical, transformative approaches to power, violence and inequality.

In addition, stakeholders highlighted the need for PLD to help embed cultural awareness, safety and responsiveness in whole-school approaches to RRE:

*If you've got a really culturally diverse school and a culturally diverse staff body, or other forms of diversity, kids who are hearing stuff may seek out a particular teacher who is not necessarily the RRE expert but comes from a similar community or background to them. So making sure that there's some level of PD [professional development] and confidence across staff, that there's kind of a "no wrong door" approach and that people can seek out different contact points or supports, and they all have some literacy in the area, as well. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Stakeholders noted that cultural responsiveness requires schools and educators to reflect on community beliefs and values, and to balance these alongside the key knowledge and skills of RRE curriculum. For example:

*One of the key questions I always use in all of my education sessions is, "This is what we've talked about, but what does that look like for your community?". (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

*You're going to need to consider cultural and religious imperatives, and how those might impact how respectful relationships education is discussed. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Families can overlay their own values but we know the young people then are getting the skills in some of that critical inquiry around gender and power, and they're getting the skills around agency and managing rights and responsibilities as a baseline. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Throughout the consultations stakeholders frequently identified careful engagement with families and communities as a critical process for culturally safe, relevant and responsive RRE that is also tailored for context. This included identifying the existing beliefs and values that can be leveraged for supporting greater buy-in from across the school community, and for ensuring RRE is inclusive and respectful of Australia's cultural diversity.

Stakeholders said that the proposed national RRE framework needs to be designed to facilitate engagement with families and communities, and to enable flexibility for ensuring cultural safety and responsiveness based on local community needs. Some stakeholders suggested that engaging community leaders and community-led organisations or networks, like faith leaders and Aboriginal community-controlled services, were useful strategies for developing culturally responsive RRE. As two stakeholders commented:

*If we look at what sometimes Aboriginal communities or Aboriginal schools will tell us what they need in terms of the model of delivery, yes, there's a whole-of-school approach, but it's a different kind of approach. So theirs might actually be a gendered guest speaker, [from an] Aboriginal health, community-controlled health service because of those close relationships in that community. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I think community is important, it can help students connect more to the topic. If it's someone from outside of school, I think it also, in some ways, does promote that sensitivity ... I think involving community members, whether it be elders, whether it be—in my case, being a Catholic school—members of the local parish or anything like that, it does make it, I guess, adaptive to all—however it's relevant in the school for the students. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

While the need for inclusivity and culturally responsiveness to be embedded in a national RRE framework emerged across the consultations, some stakeholders questioned whether a single framework would work for the diverse peoples and communities in Australian schools:

*I think there definitely does need to be consultation with communities, and I just can't see a one-size-fits-all fitting. I understand your challenges, you're trying to develop a national framework here, and there's just such diversity in Australia. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*If it's a framework that is actually going to be talking about 340-something cultures in Australia, multiple languages, multiple religions, multiple genders, fluid experiences, then it'll be interesting to see how that is reflected ... because these are going to be conversations that are incredibly complex and incredibly nuanced. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

A number of stakeholders in the consultation workshops on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities and First Nations peoples suggested that further community consultation focused on cultural responsiveness may facilitate buy-in and mitigate any potential resistance to a national RRE framework. For example:

*I think that to have people of different communities and different faith communities to be able to support how that wording could work for everybody, and still meet the aims, is I think doable and a really worthy pursuit. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Overall, stakeholders endorsed the inclusion of principles like cultural safety and cultural responsiveness in tandem with inclusion and accessibility in a national RRE framework that aims to be intersectional by design. The stakeholder consultations illustrate the complex and nuanced considerations involved in embedding culture into a national RRE framework. Language, religion, values and identity were often raised as parallel concerns. There were different perspectives raised as to how culture and cultural diversity could best be framed, including being relevant, respectful, appropriate, sensitive, safe and responsive. There was consensus by participants in the thematic consultation workshops on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities that cultural safety and cultural responsiveness should be components of a national RRE framework. Importantly, intersectionality remained at the centre of these discussions illustrating its relevance in multiple contexts. Stakeholders were careful to emphasise how different identities and lived experiences make up school communities and that this has implications for a national RRE framework.

### **9.3.7 Trauma-informed**

Across the stakeholder consultations there was clear consensus that a national RRE framework must be trauma-informed. As two stakeholders stated:

*I think a trauma-informed approach is, to me, a priority, given that young people exist in little communities called schools, which are part of the wider community they come from, and they're all experiencing various forms of trauma. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*



*I think these [trauma-informed practices] are the kind of core fundamentals of any sort of education program—and I think that's something that we have an opportunity to see [in this framework]. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

The prioritisation of trauma-informed practice in a national RRE framework was echoed by stakeholders in all of the thematic workshops. For example:

*The assumption that all students have experienced trauma is probably the best way forward. And I think that applies to this kind of learning and teaching as well. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

*Trauma-informed is absolutely essential. We're seeing some really good stuff happening with trauma-informed practice in a lot of our New South Wales schools at the moment, and it really does change the way people actually view how they approach a lot of things and challenges, there's a lot of assumptions. (Workshop on RRR and people with disability, October 2023)*

These stakeholders stressed that centring trauma-informed approaches within a national RRE framework is particularly critical for working with marginalised communities. As one consultation participant explained:

*We're doing this because we want to create change particularly for our vulnerable and intersectional populations, that I think how this is done in a trauma-informed way, right down to the students and the teachers and the parents and communities as a whole, that's going to really significant because we're trying to create positive change here and we need to make sure we're doing that in a safe trauma-informed way. To me, that's the one [framework component] that really stands out. (Workshop on RRR and people with disability, October 2023)*

This sentiment was echoed by a stakeholder in the youth consultation, who felt that RRE should equip young people with skills to safely manage trauma:

*And also how to process our trauma, not trauma dumping on your friends and having tools within you to help deal and navigate when you're going through a rough patch mentally would be very useful and very helpful. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

Stakeholders positioned trauma-informed practice as critical for both students and staff in delivering best-practice RRE. They explained that trauma-informed practice is essential to help students process challenging RRE content and for teachers to feel confident to manage student disclosures:

*The trauma informed approach is something that I really value. And just on that, I think sometimes for young people who are maybe hearing this information about respectful relationships, what is domestic violence, what is sexual violence, sometimes sitting in that space, that might be the first time that they're realising, "Actually, that's happening to me", or "That's what's happening in my home". And so, I think that trauma-informed approach to then have support for those young people after participating in these education sessions, and for the teachers or for the facilitators to feel confident and comfortable in responding to those disclosures, I think is so important. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*



Further, stakeholders emphasised the importance of engaging with families and communities for determining what trauma-informed approaches to RRE look like in practice:

*I think maybe some consultative work with parents and communities and families around what the issues are, are there certain triggers that affect a certain child? Is there potential for disclosures? How are disclosures handled? (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Many stakeholders held the view that including a trauma-informed approach in a national RRE framework would help limit the potential traumatisation of students in Australian schools. Aligning with this view, one stakeholder from the workshop on RRE with First Nations communities cautioned that there is a risk of students “*being traumatised by the education rather than empowered and feeling safe*” (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023). Likewise, another participant in this workshop called for a national RRE framework that is “*not even just trauma-informed but that is actually safe for everyone to get into this conversation*” (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023).

Several stakeholders stressed that trauma-informed practice within a national RRE framework must be implemented as part of a whole-school approach:

*I think really linking that trauma-informed approach with a whole-of-school approach, and making sure there are minimum standard responses—and teachers feel confident and equipped to deliver that—is really important. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I also think, to me it's really important that trauma-informed approach is also a part of a whole-of-school approach. And so, that there is actually a minimum standard response for teachers when students do talk about violence that occurs within that school community. I think something that we've seen a lot with survivors that we organise with, is that schools aren't really equipped to respond appropriately when reports are made. A lot of teachers do their best but right now all they really have is mandatory reporting, and that means that we've had survivors have to go to class with perpetrators—even when there are AVOs [Apprehended Violence Orders] in place—and not necessarily be able to access the correct academic adjustments for them, or things require a lot of paperwork. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

These comments illustrate that stakeholders expressed concerns about the existing skills and capacity of schools to embed trauma-informed approaches into RRE under a national framework. As discussed in Section 10.5, stakeholders also emphasised the importance of strengthening cross-sector collaboration for delivering RRE in partnership with DFSV specialist services and community-led organisations.

While stakeholders described a trauma-informed approach as a “priority”, “essential” and “incredibly important” for a national RRE framework, they also noted that there is a lack of clarity regarding trauma-informed practice in the context of RRE and more broadly. For instance, one stakeholder cautioned against the assumption of a collective understanding of trauma-informed practice: “*My fear when we throw around terms like ‘trauma-informed’, sometimes it just does more harm than good*” (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023). Another stakeholder remarked that it is much easier to state that RRE uses a trauma-informed approach than to deeply embed trauma-informed practice into a national RRE framework. They said:

*Being trauma-informed in this work, that's a deep piece I think. And it's easy to say it but I think it's a whole other experience to have that as practice and deliver in that way. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Reflective of these concerns and the reported skills gap within schools, one stakeholder commented that the inclusion of a trauma-informed principle or component in a national RRE framework would necessitate associated PLD for teachers:

*I note that you have based on a trauma-informed approach which strikes me as being really an important part of the framework as well, but it's also one where there's a risk, just simply because of the possibility of, shall I say, lack of widespread appropriate professional learning in that space and knowing how that kind of approach operates, but also how it operates within the context that the school is located or the teacher may be working. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Similarly, another stakeholder added that any PLD for RRE must itself be trauma-informed. They remarked that:

*I also wonder how trauma-informed that actual training is, because I had a room of 12 people and I ended up with four disclosures. Now luckily, I am able to deal with that, but again, that involves the person that's teaching it having the skills to then deal with that because we don't want to be going in doing harm. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

There was broad support from stakeholders for the inclusion of trauma-informed practice in a national RRE framework. Many stakeholders held the strong view that embedding a trauma-informed approach in a national RRE framework will require targeted PLD to equip schools to deliver RRE in safe learning environments.

### **9.3.8 Strengths-based**

There was broad support for the inclusion of a strengths-based approach in any national RRE framework, particularly from stakeholders who participated in the thematic workshop on First Nations peoples. Many stakeholders highlighted the effectiveness of strengths-based approaches to RRE, commenting for example:

*I think that the focus on it being strengths-based as a guiding principle is really important. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability October 2023)*

*[RRE is] that foundational learning that builds on and strengthens young people to make healthy and helpful choices. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I think that's the way that we've really seen success when this is strengths-based is, actually, how do you talk about things around respectful relationships, education, diversity within culture, faith, religion, sexuality, gender from a strengths model? (Workshop on migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*



Several stakeholders from the consultation workshops on RRE with First Nations communities also noted the importance of a strengths-based component in a national RRE framework, linking to trauma-informed approaches. As one stakeholder commented:

*Just the same as trauma-informed has to happen ... when we're looking at the impacts of colonisation, strengths-based, yes, that has to happen, because we're not looking at a deficit model. Yeah, I would say that it should be a guiding principle, overall. (Workshop on RRE with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities, October 2023)*

A few stakeholders made connections between strengths-based approaches and ensuring culturally safe and responsive principles for RRE. For example, one stakeholder said that “for me, the culturally relevant and context-appropriate is really critical, linked with strengths-based” (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023).

One stakeholder felt that the inclusion of a strengths-based component in a national RRE framework should be “non-negotiable” because it is important that students should learn about positive aspects of relationships as well as negative elements. They commented:

*The strengths-based approach I think is really important, and particularly that sex positive approach as well where it is talking about sexual relationships. I think it's really important because that's what young people need to learn about, want to learn about. It can be empowering and can help make it more interesting and engaging and lighten it as well, so it doesn't become too heavy, and as someone else was saying all about toxic relationships and all about the negatives. So, I think making sure that's embedded that it's like, “Hey, relationships are –, that is part of what it is to be human, and there's lots of great things about them”. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Notably, one stakeholder cautioned that the incorporation of a strengths-based component in a national RRE framework cannot come at the expense of not discussing critical relationship issues with students. They said:

*We take a strengths-based approach and we talk about what respectful relationships should look like, but we don't talk about what they look like when they're not good. And lots of young people talk to me about how they wish that they had known what the red flags were, that they'd wished that they'd known how bad it could get, and that they wished that there was space to talk about that. And to kind of seek support, and to learn that maybe it wasn't just them that it was happening to. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Discussing the inclusion of a strengths-based element in a national RRE framework, a few stakeholders warned that strengths-based approaches would need to be well defined:

*My other point around the strengths-based approaches that is obviously incredibly valuable to consent in sexuality education, but when we say strengths-based are we talking, like, making sure that young people are aware and able to participate in respectful relationships in terms of not experiencing sexual violence, or in terms of enjoying relationships and experiencing pleasure and joy? So, that difference between harm reduction and averting sexual violence, and then that flip side of actually enjoying pleasurable, joyful relationships, free from shame, free from stigma, sex positive education. So, I think the clarity around what we mean by strengths-based [is important]. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Likewise, another stakeholder stressed the nuances of strengths-based RRE when working with young queer people:

*Very much all for a strengths-based approach, depending upon how you define it. Because I think that can often be taken to mean individual strengths, therefore you negotiate safe sex. If you didn't have the strength to negotiate safe sex, it's your fault. So that kind of like individualisation of ... [a] strengths-based approach, can be really dangerous. And is something that I would kind of, in my research, it definitely came out in the way young people kind of unpacked situations, unsafe situations. And ... the way the media unpacks some of these too. And I think in schools, often strengths-based approach does lead to kind of looking at resilience, particularly for queer young people. You know, "It'll get better when you leave", or those kinds of conversations. And it shouldn't be that way. It also runs the risk of suggesting that these violences may occur later, rather than what's occurring right now. So, I think that it's really important to kind of unpack what you mean by strengths-based approach. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Overall, there was collective agreement amongst stakeholders for the need to shift away from deficit-based approaches to RRE. Aligning with the AC-HPE, most stakeholders advocated for the integration of strengths-based practices in a national RRE framework.

### **9.3.9 Tailored for context**

As stakeholders' earlier reflections have illustrated, the diversity of Australian school communities and systems can cause complications for the design and implementation of national education frameworks. Every stakeholder group said that any national RRE framework must have capacity to be tailored for the multiple and diverse needs of the Australian population, including location, language, culture and resources:

*It's so important that it's flexible, that different towns, different regions, different areas ... I think it needs to be able to be tailored to some of that. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

*I'm also a really big fan of the "evidence-based, tailored teaching and learning resources" [principle] because every school community is so different. I think they're best placed to support their community in terms of resourcing. Whilst we can give universal supports, that's not necessarily going to be a good fit. So, having that as an upfront core component and whilst there's a lot available, it's about tailoring that to support the community better. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

One stakeholder provided an example that highlighted the need for very specific knowledge and understandings of local communities to ensure safety of students:

*When we were working with new migrant and refugee young people who had been in Australia for a week, the idea of them doing a consent classroom with everyone all together was not safe practice ... So it had to be adjusted to the community we were working with but we still needed to adhere to evidence-based practice. So it's that thing of making your adjustments when they're practicable and are able to engage the community and coming from a strengths approach. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

It was widely recognised by stakeholders that although tailoring RRE for context is difficult to do, it is necessary for best-practice:

*You want it to be accessible to everyone, and you want everyone to be excited and engaged and feel empowered by the framework to make the best decisions. But I think the entry points is probably a tricky one, because you've got such wide context and obviously it's a national framework as well. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

*It's recognising that we can actually have really different approaches to RRE education that works for the whole community. I think the one-size-fits-all and tailoring tiny bits is one way of approaching it. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

At the same time, some stakeholders expressed concern that enabling tailoring for context and communities should not compromise the fundamental tenets of RRE:

*I think often in an attempt to create space for schools to tailor, and particularly around the culturally relevant and context appropriate ... sometimes the curriculum documents are so vague and there's so much leeway for interpretation that as soon as there's a little bit of hesitancy amongst the teachers or the school itself, it's very easy for what is actually crucial content to just get sidelined and get skipped over. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I understand we have contextualised factors there, but we don't want a complete choose-your-own adventure. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

A few stakeholders were firm that a national RRE framework needs to provide a clear approach for schools and educators in how to effectively tailor RRE curriculum. In the words of one participant, "It's really about making it clear that these are ways that you can tailor to your community" (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023). Likewise, another stakeholder suggested the creation of a shared resource hub to enable schools and educators to tailor RRE for different communities:

*For example, I always use stories in starting all of my sessions. So even engaging with different religions, and I've worked with a variety of religions, I always start from the basis of the principles that guide people's lifestyles ... I work with people from refugee background, "You've left your country because you were persecuted. Today I'm here to talk about family violence. So we've left persecution, war at a greater level, but what happens when there's persecution in the home?". So I think when I go back to core components, we need a directory of social stories ... I have social stories around how I talk about sexuality with highly religious communities. You might find my colleague who's got social stories around how they talk about family violence with other communities. But if we had a directory of social stories, it gives educators across the nation the tools that they need to be able to enter different communities and respectfully use the story as a guide. (Workshop on RRE for migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Another stakeholder noted the challenges of doing this work in geographically isolated locations in Australia and the need for considering tailored supports to address these contexts:

*If we're also thinking about the context of remote and regional ... how do we make sure a framework is actually also part of the educated process, that [it] is giving breadcrumbs? Because when you are out there, sometimes literally in the middle of the desert, and core business is so crucial, these things are really easy to be optional, nice-to-haves ... Being an ally is really hard in isolation, and it's isolated work out in many of these contexts that we're thinking about, in many, many ways. And risky work ... I've been followed home and had all sorts of things happen because of what I shared yesterday in a class or a learning space or a circle, even with lots of community support. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders were clear that PLD is required to support implementation of a national RRE framework and RRE initiatives more broadly to facilitate tailored, contextually-allied responses:

*We really need to acknowledge that teachers are professionals and they've had extensive training, and they're incredibly passionate people who know their communities and know their children. And they are very used to adapting resources to suit the needs. What they perhaps don't have is that content knowledge where sometimes where they're adapting might become problematic because this is a tricky space. The training in how to recognise evidence-informed resources and how to adapt them to suit their context is where perhaps the Framework needs to speak to ... If you've got a resource, how do you adapt it for your context? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

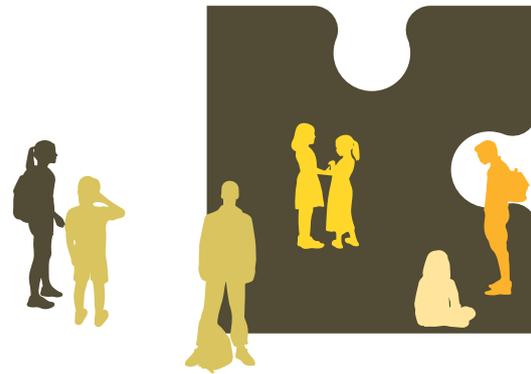
Overall, stakeholders agreed that a national RRE framework should enable contextual tailoring while at the same time provide minimum standards for teaching all students and communities. There was collective recognition that this is challenging work, and that educators and schools must be adequately supported through this process.

## 9.4 NEXT STEPS IN THE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The RRE principles developed through the national stakeholder consultation process formed the draft Framework. The DoE, NRREEWG and other policy stakeholders including the School Policy Group then provided feedback and this informed the second iteration of the draft Framework. The DoE will finalise the Framework in consultation with the NRREEWG.



# 10 Implementation



Through the national consultation process, stakeholders were asked what was needed to support the implementation of a national RRE framework for Australian primary and secondary schools. Stakeholders discussed a range of actions including capacity building and support measures. Some ideas were specific to supporting implementation of the proposed national RRE framework and others related to enhancing RRE generally. The stakeholders' suggestions include:

- PLD for all school staff.
- Actively engaging families and communities in RRE.
- Preparing for backlash and managing resistance to RRE.
- RRE quality assurance and evaluation.
- Greater cross-sectorial collaboration.
- Resourcing schools and educators to provide high-quality RRE.

The implementation strategies put forward by the stakeholders are discussed below.

## 10.1 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL SCHOOL STAFF

There was clear consensus that PLD is a threshold issue for the implementation of a national RRE framework and for the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based RRE. In discussions with stakeholders about what is needed to support the implementation of a national RRE framework, nearly every consultation participant identified a need for additional PLD.

*It's teacher training, teacher training, teacher training ... Pre-service teacher training is vital but you also need that continued support once they're in the classroom. I was trained. I was very lucky to be trained as a pre-service teacher with an amazing sexologist lecturer and I'm still learning 23 years later ... how to put this into schools. It's a moving beast. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*[The] immediate thought that comes to my mind is professional development for educators and school staff ... Evidence shows—and surveys show—young people want [CRRE]. They're crying out for it, but at the same time educators don't feel like they have the confidence and capability to effectively provide that education at their school ... Because it's not like other key learning areas, where you can pick up a theory book ... This is a really nuanced, sensitive, ethical, values-based curriculum area, which a lot of adults are kind of struggling with themselves, personally, never mind to walk into a classroom of young people and start to deliver that in a safe and inclusive way. So I think training and support is a huge gap. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Many stakeholders mentioned that teachers lack the skills and support needed to safely deliver RRE in schools. Others said that teachers are able to deliver RRE education but lack the knowledge and skills to manage nuanced and sensitive questions and comments from students related to RRE.

*We've done fairly comprehensive professional learning down there with teachers but the focus has very much been on delivering the curriculum as it's written. And the challenge for a lot of teachers, particularly some young teachers, is how to manage conversations in classrooms, where they may steer off course, or there may be some gendered assumptions that are made, or some of those narrow stereotypes are being proposed in class. And how they manage that without it becoming a really conflicted scenario for them in the classroom. So, that's some of the stuff that I don't think is out there in a lot of the professional learning we've got already. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*PD [professional development] is absolutely needed more than anything. Like I know at our school anything to do with body parts, like people find that very difficult to just talk about body parts in a primary school, and how do they say that? (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders said there are two priority areas for PLD related to RRE. The first is PLD to upskill the existing workforce:

*I feel like we almost need to take a step back and really look at how it is we're preparing staff ... I think there needs to be a whole load of pre-work, way before we actually get into teaching students. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

*In a primary school setting, we have limited specialist teachers. So it would be every class teacher would be expected to teach respectful relationships education—and every class teacher is ... at a different entry point. So PD [professional development] would be required for people to unpack their bias and be aware ... [and] I believe that would be every school's responsibility to do that. But I can tell you now, unless it is ... [the school's] focus, it will get limited traction. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

The second priority is embedding RRE in initial teacher education to prepare teachers to support the framework when they enter the workforce and ensure they are classroom ready to deliver RRE:

*We do need to be targeting the respectful relationships at university level so that it then flows on and makes it easier. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*I think what we need is a set of minimum standards for teacher training ... Because I'm sure, even within states and even within universities, the quality of the pre-service teacher training or the PD [professional development] varies so greatly and you can have amazing teachers who are really well trained, and you can have ones that have absolutely no idea about any of this. Perhaps a minimum standards or some sort of accreditation would be something to look at. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

In addition, many stakeholders said that school systems, sectors and individual schools need to create an authorising environment that prioritises PLD for RRE. For example:

*The push needs to come from above principals. So the school can do it but it actually needs to be a push higher to say, "This is what needs to happen". Like you do for reading, like you do for maths, like you do for the Australian Curriculum, "It's part of the Australian Curriculum. This is what needs to happen. Everyone's going to get PD on this". (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

*It comes down to education of staff to feel confident to do it. And unless that push comes from higher above, it's going to be very difficult. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

A few stakeholders noted that RRE is unique in that it requires both students and school staff to critically reflect on their own personal values and biases. They said that critical reflection skills should be a crucial part of PLD for teachers:

*One of the gaps we've identified is that there needs to be more support for teachers, recognising that for some teachers this is quite confronting, and it's really asking them to actually examine their own identity and their own beliefs. And I think that's quite challenging for them, to then come and teach something that they're not quite sure of, or perhaps in some aspects, don't even actually fully believe it either. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

One stakeholder suggested that appropriate supervision should be provided to support staff delivering RRE in schools:

*Why is there not a proper authorised supervision support network for any of this work? I just don't get it. I do this all the time ad hoc because of contacts and people reaching out but there should be a built-in supervision support network around this. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders also raised several challenges regarding participation in existing PLD offerings including geographical accessibility of training, costs and inadequate funding allocations, teacher workloads, and inconsistencies between available PLD programs. As one stakeholder commented:

*I was just going to go back to the training or PD [professional development] or whatever we talked about before, because one of the other issues is that (1) sometimes it's really hard to get training, especially up here; and (2) often teachers aren't released for training because it costs money. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Other stakeholders mentioned the need for specific capability building to support the implementation of a national RRE framework. For example, the importance of aligning all teacher PLD to AITSL teaching standards, and incorporating cultural awareness training and ways of communicating with different families and communities for teachers.

*So I would propose a lot of professional development, and perhaps just a very strong component of cultural awareness in teacher training. (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

As discussed under Section 9.3.2, several stakeholders in the thematic workshop for RRE and people with disability similarly emphasised the general lack of PLD and teaching standards for working with students with disability. For example:

*So, what foundational steering can you provide to teachers to do that internal work for themselves around their mindsets, their values around disability, around how that connects with the respectful relationships, because of their attitudes around disability and sexuality? (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

The need for improved education workforce capabilities and PLD was also highlighted by the recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) (Australian of Australia, 2023). Recommendation 7.8 of the Disability Royal Commission calls for revisions to teaching standards and capabilities to embed skills and expertise for inclusive education across Australian schools, including targeted pre-service training and ongoing PLD for principals, educators and other school staff to meet the learning needs of students with disability.

The stakeholders' prioritisation of PLD as a critical action reflects previous research showing that targeted training can increase awareness, knowledge, commitment, confidence, comfort and willingness to teach RRE amongst teachers and school communities (Cahill et al., 2023; Kearney et al., 2016; Our Watch, 2021a; Joyce et al., 2018; Harrison and Ollis, 2015; Ollis, 2013, 2014). Recent Australian research has highlighted that quality RRE depends on support from school leaders, including facilitating access to PLD, as well as on teachers' professional confidence and capacity to discuss sensitive issues (Cahill et al., 2023). These researchers identified PLD as a critical gap in RRE in Australian schools (Cahill et al., 2023; Pfitzner et al., 2022). It is unsurprising that stakeholders emphasised that PLD is essential to supporting school systems and sectors to implement a national RRE framework.

## 10.2 ACTIVELY ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN RRE

*[My] point is around parent and community ... That translation from respect and gender equality within the classroom, and even outside in the playground, but how is that translated to parents and communities? There are some challenges in that space, and we know that this is cultural change. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Across all the stakeholder consultations, engaging families and communities—particularly parents/carers—in RRE was seen as integral to a whole-school approach. As two youth representatives commented:

*I think that there is a real space to engage parents, be like, "Hey, we're doing the best job we can on our end but this is why it's important for you to also understand". (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

*[Parents] need to know what is being taught in schools so they can support what is being taught in schools. (Workshop with youth representatives, October 2023)*

For decades now, research on parental engagement in relationships, consent and sexuality education has consistently been found to be an underdeveloped area. As Stonehouse (2023) and others (e.g., Ferfolja and Ullman, 2020; Ollis and Watson, 1999) have argued, parents/carers are the 'missing link' in RRE.

Stakeholders in the current study frequently nominated work with parents and carers as a priority area for successful implementation of a national RRE framework and effective RRE. Multiple stakeholders said that in their experience successful parental engagement requires a multi-staged process. This includes informing parents about what is being taught; delivering parent education/information to allow parents to experience the curriculum; keeping them informed about the program; and inviting them to continue the education within the context of their own beliefs and understandings. These concerns are closely linked with the need for schools and school systems to prepare for backlash and resistance to RRE, discussed below.

Many stakeholders felt that work with parents and carers would help correct misconceptions about the topics covered in RRE, particularly among faith-based communities.

*Ensuring that they [parents/carers] understand that it's exploring difference and intersections in relationships rather than converting people and trying to force one belief down your throat. (Workshop on RRE for students with disability, October 2023)*

*I think too, even with the parents, a lot of that pushback from parents often comes from, "I don't want you to teach my child values", and the kind of retort to that is, "Well, we're teaching the facts and you get to overlay your own values over that in a way that's right for your family or your community". (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Common parental fears were raised by many stakeholders:

*What are you talking to my child about? I don't want them to attend RRE because I don't want you to be discussing, say, sex before marriage when that's not a part of my culture. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

They also described the work being put in to overcome these fears among families and communities:

*[We] try and couch it in terms that make parents feel like their cultural and religious beliefs are being respected and we're not trying to tell their children or sell a different set of norms for their children. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

The stakeholder consultations indicate that substantial work needs to be done with parents, carers and families to provide a truly whole-school approach to RRE. Stakeholders who participated in the national consultations said it is important to acknowledge that parents/carers are children's first educators and argued that they should be better utilised as change agents as part of whole-school approaches to RRE in the future (Jaccard et al. 2002). The engagement of parents and carers was seen as fundamental to the effectiveness of RRE in Australian schools and achieving the social change required to end gender-based violence.

### **10.3 PREPARING FOR BACKLASH AND MANAGING RESISTANCE TO RRE**

Stakeholders repeatedly identified supporting schools, school leaders and teachers to prepare for and manage resistance and backlash as a priority area for implementing a national RRE framework. Resistance and backlash are common responses to social change initiatives, particularly those aimed at achieving gender equality and

anti-violence work (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016; Faludi, 1991; Mansbridge and Shames, 2008; Moosa et al., 2012; VicHealth, 2018). A well-documented body of research shows that discomfort is often a necessary part of achieving social transformation to prevent gender-based violence and other social justice pedagogies (Cullen and Whelan, 2021; Keddie, 2021; Keddie et al., 2023; Marson, 2021; Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas and McGlynn, 2013). RRE requires teachers and RRE facilitators to undertake continuous self-reflection on difficult and confronting issues to support young people to critically examine gendered power relations and inequities (Harrison and Ollis, 2015; Ollis, Coll et al., 2022). These complexities mean that school leaders and teachers must prepare and plan for resistance and backlash as part of whole-school approaches to RRE.

During every consultation workshop, stakeholders talked about schools and teachers feeling “concerned” and “uncomfortable” that RRE is “a really challenging issue”. In the words of one participant, “The fear of doing the wrong thing and saying the wrong thing is just so high” (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023). Many said teachers and schools were fearful of RRE:

*Managing difficult parental responses is a significant fear for schools. Even when they're not getting a lot of it, they're really worried about getting that and it feels easier somehow to not address the difficult, sensitive, challenging issues than to address them and risk it being hard. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*What often happens is there are schools that go, “We don't want to”, there's an assumption that community will be against this work or that there will be issues, or there's a fear of community being defensive. So the response has been, “We won't do anything”, or, “We don't want to engage at all”, because of fear ... I think there needs to be something addressing that, how do schools, teachers, principals, how do the people making the decisions actually engage meaningfully with community to work out how to move forward from a strengths-based approach? (Workshop on RRE with migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, October 2023)*

Some stakeholders said that schools will skip content that is perceived to be “controversial”:

*I know anecdotally ... topics seven and eight in the Victorian curriculum, a lot of schools just don't even touch that. They're just like, “Too controversial, we're not doing it” but still say that they're doing RRE because they're doing topics one through six. And it's like, yeah, that's the SEL [social and emotional learning] part of it but not the RRE part of it exactly. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Discussing the proposed components of a national RRE framework, one stakeholder flagged potential resistance to including gender and sexuality transformative approaches and the need for messaging to support schools and school staff to respond:

*I know that there are definitely some people and some communities that will look at gender and sexually transformative, for example, just one example that comes to mind, and they're immediately going to have an instinctive response to that ... I would, from my humble narrow mind say, I'd want to have a response prepared to that, and a discourse around that prepared because there's going to be some that would see that and immediately, they're not going to look at anything else. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*



Stakeholders highlighted the need to “empower” and build capacity among teachers and other school staff to respond to resistance or backlash.

*The ability to communicate with parents and community is a huge thing some schools really struggle with and a lot of teachers feel really ill-equipped to be able to advocate or sadly, defend some of their practices that are inclusive ... It's managing hostility from the community at times. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

*Empowering educators and the need for that professional learning. Not just around what is the content and making sure that our educators are equipped to teach that content but also equipped to respond to community needs, community pushback. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Several stakeholders said that preparing for and managing resistance is integral to sustainable, whole-school approaches to RRE. They explained that support from school leadership is central to the effectiveness of RRE:

*I like the idea that it's a whole-of-school approach and it's sustainable, that there's this top-down driver from school leadership ... Having that leadership driving this means that there's support if there's parent or carer resistance or backlash or negativity. That it's supported by the school and whether the school's doing it themselves or whether they're outsourcing, there's a pathway for dealing with complaints. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

Again, stakeholders highlighted that proactively engaging parents, carers and families in school communities is crucial to managing any resistance to RRE:

*Actually supporting the parents and carers to understand ... So just having conversations, meeting parents where they're at, investigating where the pushback is coming from, and then bringing them along to the conversation. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*

There was a collective call from the stakeholders for practical resources, such as conversation guides and information sheets, for parents, carers and families in school communities:

*I think in terms of resources, it would be really helpful to have an example of a letter to send home to parents explaining what the program is actually about. That way all staff who are delivering the program can just do a simple email out at the start of the year, "Here is a quick understanding of what's involved in this program, some misbeliefs about the program are X, Y, Z but in fact, the program actually teaches A, B, C". (Workshop on RRE and students with disability, October 2023)*

Work on responding to resistance and backlash in violence prevention and gender equity is already underway in Australia, and there are some existing resources available (Fairchild et al., 2021; Our Watch, 2022c; Safe and Equal, n.d.; VicHealth, 2018, 2021). However, the national stakeholder consultations undertaken for this project reiterate the need to support schools and school staff to plan and prepare for resistance specifically in the context of RRE. The development and sharing of responses across school systems and sectors, particularly messaging for school families and communities, would be a valuable next step in supporting implementation of a national RRE framework.

## 10.4 RRE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

Stakeholders frequently raised quality assurance and evaluation in discussions about what is needed to support the implementation of a national RRE framework. They expressed concerns about the varied quality of RRE in Australian schools, including differing resources, teaching practices, PLD and leadership. Many stakeholders noted the current lack of accountability for schools to follow research-driven, best-practice RRE.

*How do we know schools are doing what they're asked to do and doing it effectively? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

In parallel with introducing a national framework to guide RRE in Australian primary and secondary schools, stakeholders said it was also important to monitor the quality (quality assurance) and assess the effectiveness (evaluation) of RRE delivered in schools.

*My mind was just going to that point around quality assurance and ... how do you make sure people are doing it [the RRE Framework] ... not cherry picking? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*I know that schools are often bombarded with both resources from external agencies but also resources in general, and they need the confidence to actually know that it ticks all the boxes as far as being a quality resource. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders called for the establishment of a quality compliance process to ensure delivery of RRE adheres to the proposed national framework. Stakeholders said it would be useful for state, territory and non-government education departments and authorities to assess the alignment of existing RRE resources against the proposed national RRE framework. They felt this could enable teachers to identify and address gaps in schools' approaches to RRE.

*Having that framework aligned to the resources ... so that teachers can then also sort of backwards map, and see how, "We've got these best practice principles, how does this resource and what I'm teaching, in this particular context, support me to address principles A, B, C? But then I can see a gap, so where do I need to then pick up what's missing?"... So having that alignment and being able to support teachers in that way, as well. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Verifying the quality of services delivered by external providers was also front of mind for many stakeholders:

*Could it be some sort of framework or almost like a verification system for respectful relationships education providers or programs to get essentially verified as working within that [national RRE] framework? ... I guess I'm thinking about almost like a verification or approval system so that schools can have a list of RRE programs they can use that ... we know meet the [national] framework. (Workshop on RRE with LGBTQIA+ communities, October 2023)*



Establishing a quality assurance system for RRE was seen by the stakeholders as a pragmatic strategy for facilitating the support and buy-in of families and communities. Participants noted, for instance, that parents may be more readily supportive of RRE materials and topics they know are high quality and evidence-based:

*There may be questions, perhaps, from the community to say, “Well, what resources are our schools using that are quality assured?”. So then those resources and materials are freely available, and parents can see, “What are my children learning about?”, as part of that quality assurance process. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Stakeholders said that quality assurance must extend to the PLD available for teachers, particularly regarding pre-service teacher training:

*Certainly with the ITE [initial teacher education] space and really high-quality professional learning for staff and for teachers in schools, to be able to get something that’s ... not just doing lip service, that it’s generally really high-quality induction—that should be a massive focus. (Workshop on RRE and people with disability, October 2023)*

This stakeholder call echoes the findings and recommendations of the previous [National Stocktake and Gap Analysis](#) (Pfitzner et al., 2022). In that project, consultation participants similarly emphasised the lack of consistent evaluation and quality assessment practices for RRE in Australia. Taken together, these perceptions demonstrate there is a clear need for improved accountability and monitoring across the education system including decision-makers, schools, educators, and external RRE providers, to ensure that all RRE is high quality, evidence-based and aligns with the resulting national RRE framework.

## **10.5 GREATER CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT A WHOLE-COMMUNITY APPROACH**

Community engagement is a central component of a whole-school approach to RRE (DEECD, 2014; Kearney et al., 2016; Our Watch, 2022b; UNESCO, 2018), including strong linkages with specialist services for violence response, mental health and wellbeing, youth, disability, LGBTQIA+ and multicultural organisations. As one stakeholder said, “*We really need to be conscious of connecting in with our community partnerships*” (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023). This sentiment was shared by stakeholders throughout the consultations as integral to supporting implementation of a national RRE framework. For example:

*Looking at that community consultation, I guess being for schools maybe to be well-connected in with the local domestic and family violence organisations, and the sexual assault organisations ... [so] when someone does disclose, they know who they can refer to. Or being able to have some of that communication and consultation with what is maybe locally happening in that area ... with the DFV [domestic and family violence] sector, and the sexual assault sector as well might be really useful. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Stakeholders explained that strong partnerships and collaboration with community organisations and specialist support services are particularly important for ensuring young people have adequate support within a trauma-informed approach to RRE:

*The other bit I think that was kind of invisible, or feels invisible in some of this work is, if you're a young person who is using violence or abuse, what are your options, who can you talk to, and what's there for you? ... If you're not someone who's got people around you to support you to do things differently, that can kind of be further ostracising and really difficult for kids too. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Making sure that there's links back into the community for young people, so they know where to go to for support. Because they may be part of a cultural group, or ... just in their family situation, not getting the supports that they need ... to maintain their health and wellbeing in this area. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Community and specialist service organisations are important partners for RRE given their proximity to and understandings of the specific experiences and needs of local social groups. Additionally, these services may support RRE access for young people who are excluded from or unable to access mainstream education. Stakeholders advocated for schools to engage more proactively with their communities, particularly with external support and health services. As two participants commented:

*I was just reflecting on some of our very regional and remote schools and I think where I've seen a couple of times work really effectively is where our schools have partnered closely with those external agencies ... It might be health services... The importance for those communities in particular about partnering externally, I think is key. (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of recognising the significant, ongoing contributions and leadership of violence sector organisations and women's health services for RRE in their communities. As one representative of a violence response organisation explained, "We still every day or every week, get phone calls from schools asking us to guide them through that [responding to disclosures]" (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023). Other participants from violence sector and women's health organisations shared similar experiences of partnering with schools to deliver RRE:

*We are finding ourselves being asked to step into that space quite a lot and we really don't have sufficient funding to do that for the region. We're four local government areas and I work one day a week in the respectful relationship space. God knows how many schools there are. But I just think that's something that we have to [do]. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Comments like these indicate a desire among stakeholders for cross-sector collaboration with schools, community organisations and specialist services to be clearly and formally recognised in a national approach to RRE. Consultation participants emphasised that this collaboration also needs to be adequately resourced to address the pressures felt by schools and their external partners:

*It would be good for that to be formalised and resourced in terms of support from community services because we're all under the pump in terms of financial strain and go over and above. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*If you are going to do this well and you are going to make significant changes to violence against women and children, then you have to put the resources in. And for me it's a respectful relationship coordinator in every school. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

While stakeholders were widely supportive of strong partnerships between schools and specialist support and community-based organisations, there were mixed sentiments about external RRE providers. Several stakeholders discussed the tensions between the research evidence that supports whole-school, trauma-informed approaches to RRE and the use of external providers to deliver short term programs. For example:

*One of the challenges that I have—I guess personally and professionally—with external people coming in, is if somebody comes in and delivers this, and then they go away, who supports those ongoing conversations when a young person has a question the next day? (Workshop on RRE with regional, rural and remote communities, October 2023)*

Existing evidence demonstrates that one-off sessions or discrete programs are not effective for achieving the long-term, transformative objectives of RRE (Dyson, 2009; Kearney et al., 2016; Our Watch, 2021b; UNESCO, 2018). As with other community and specialist organisations, stakeholders' concerns about external RRE providers were closely linked to calls for adequately resourcing schools and the broader education system—including external community partners.

Across the consultations, stakeholders frequently positioned community-based response services as central to effective roll-out of a national approach to RRE. Their view aligns with the [National Plan 2022–2032](#) which calls for the integration of response services in schools and education institutions to meet the diverse needs of children and young people experiencing DFSV (DSS, 2022). Increased cross-sector collaboration, such as formalised recognition and resourcing of partnerships between schools and community organisations, was seen as an important strategy to support the implementation of a national RRE framework. In addition, stakeholders indicated that schools and decision-makers need further guidance around effective ways to engage external RRE providers whose engagement was viewed as a pragmatic way to support RRE in parallel with increasing schools' and educators' capacity for internal delivery. There are overlaps here with stakeholders' earlier comments on the need for quality assurance processes and evaluation to aid implementation of best practice and evidence-based RRE across Australian schools (see also Pfitzner et al., 2022).

## **10.6 RESOURCE SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY RRE**

Stakeholders from all consultation groups mentioned the importance of allocating greater resources to schools and staff delivering RRE. They explained that this requires both financial and tangible resources. While stakeholders praised the more explicit focus on respectful relationships and consent education in the [Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0](#), they were cognisant that the national curriculum provides a shared blueprint for student learning but not the actual teaching and learning materials, such as sequenced lesson plans and assessment activities. Stakeholders spoke often about teachers being time-poor and managing intense workloads. In addition to the Framework, the stakeholders said that the provision of practical, evidence-based teaching and learning materials would enhance classroom practice nationally:

*So, it's all about doing the work for the teacher in a way that they want you to do that work for them, so they've got the lesson plans, the games, the resources, the books, the posters. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Lesson plans, or just really tangible resources that teachers can use, I imagine would be incredibly helpful. I think these principles or these components are great to underpin but if you don't know much about this area, how do you actually put that into a lesson plan? So yeah, I think tangible resources for teachers to be able to implement this, like a lesson plan or a checklist that they can ask themselves questions around have they addressed each of these components in the lesson plans that they've already got? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Specific examples suggested by stakeholders included resources to support whole-community and whole-school approaches and resources to support respectful relationships within and external to school settings (e.g., community settings, online settings). As discussed above, the importance of creating resources to support parent/carer and family engagement was repeatedly mentioned:

*So, I would probably want to give more weight to the need to really well resource, equipping staff to do the work and to do it within a whole-school approach and a whole-of-community approach so that ... staff and young people and the community are getting multiple reinforcing messages that address the gender drivers and promote respectful, safe, consenting sex. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*So, looking at the community settings and online spaces, are we providing great videos or resources there as well? I don't think we're providing a lot of options for people that are necessarily very reputable. So, we need to look outside of the school space as well. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Ensuring teaching and learning materials are suitable for different student groups, such as neurodiverse young people, First Nations young people, and migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, was also highlighted. For example, stakeholders suggested that resources should include videos, podcasts or records to assist comprehension, and to promote RRE that is inclusive, accessible, culturally safe and culturally responsive. Stakeholders encouraged partnering with young people to co-design resources:

*I wonder if there's resources being pumped into this, and we've got the opportunity to write something really great, is there then the space to bring young people in as part of a co-design process in terms of the curriculum and what they want covered? (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

The challenges of using teaching and learning materials created externally to schools, including lack of alignment with curriculum and operations of classrooms, was also reported by some stakeholders.

*We strongly advocate that if schools are utilising external resources, be it a program or whatever it might be, that is connected to what is happening in the classroom, not instead of. Because unfortunately we hear the, "Yes, we do this on Friday Week 9 in Term 3", and, "because we get all these people come in". That's not discounting that that's really important but that needs to happen alongside, as a – to reinforce, to value-add is often the language we use. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

This comment reflects broader concerns held by stakeholders regarding the compatibility of external providers with whole-school approaches and the ability to achieve sustainable change.

The importance of sharing teaching and learning materials between different jurisdictions and having nationally available resources was also noted by stakeholders:

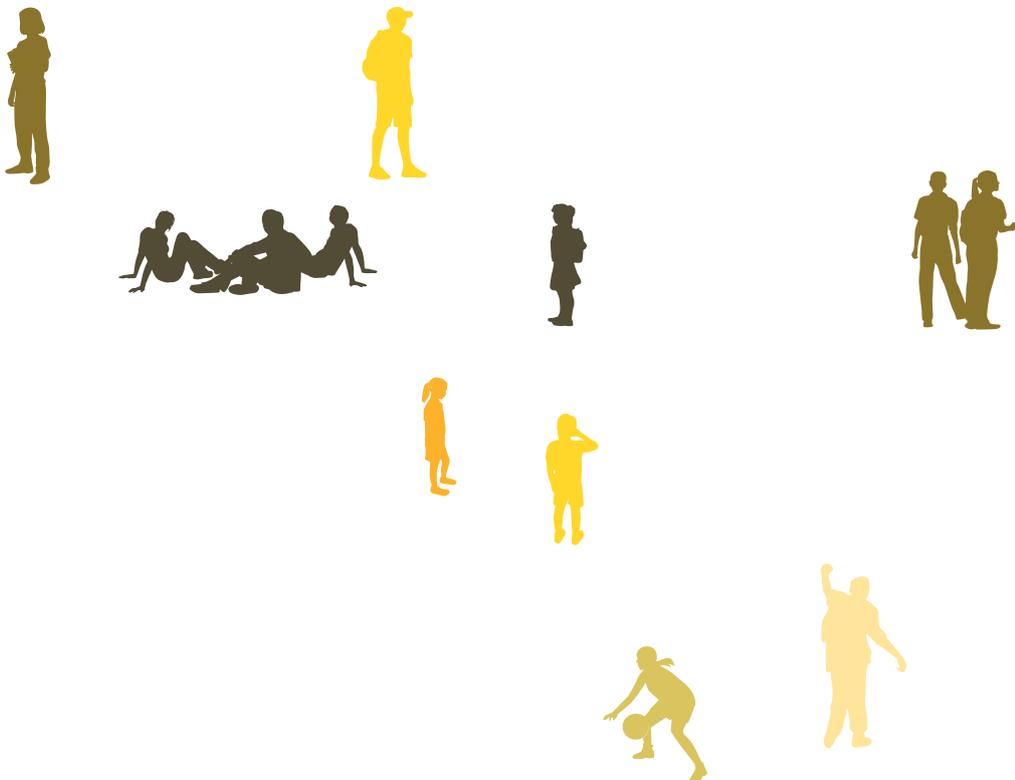
*I think breaking down those silos and seeing it as a national thing that we need to share resources and knowledge and insights across the whole nation. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

*Like, I know here in the [Northern] Territory it's pretty ad hoc dependent on who you've, what teachers you've got, what resources you've got ... We certainly don't have the resources to do a lot of the work, so sharing of resources and work [nationally is important]. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

Some stakeholders recommended a national repository of teaching and learning materials accessible to parents/carers, principals, teachers and students. For example:

*I'm a big fan of the one-stop-shop where there's a national platform that parents, carers, principals, teachers, everyone, and students can go to perhaps as well, where they can access really quality, evidence-based resources. (Workshop with education and DFSV experts, September 2023)*

It was clear from the national stakeholder consultations that effective implementation of a national RRE framework will depend on the quality of teaching and learning materials used in schools. Echoing previous reviews (Pfitzner et al., 2022), stakeholders proposed a national resource repository stressing that these resources must be quality assured to give confidence to teachers and schools.





# 11 Key Actions For The Future

Each of the suggested key actions listed below is drawn from the national stakeholder consultations, which informed this report. Each action is underpinned by collective stakeholder recognition that gender-based violence is a whole-of-society issue and prevention requires a whole-of-society approach.

## 11.1 STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE

- The Australian Government and higher education providers should support the implementation of the recommendations from the Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel report where relevant to RRE.
- The Australian Government should explore opportunities with states and territories to pursue embedding RRE in the Initial Teacher Education core content, which may include referencing RRE in the responsive teaching component.

## 11.2 ADVANCE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

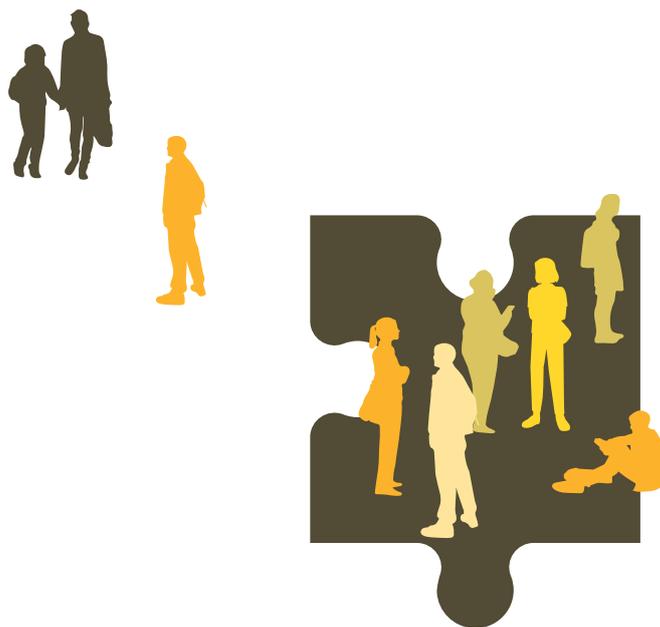
- The Australian Government should review the RRE Framework within four years to accommodate the rapidly growing international evidence base for RRE.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should work towards greater collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, people from migrant, refugee and faith-based communities, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and people in remote and rural communities to ensure that RRE is informed by, and tailored for, local school communities.





### 11.3 A WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY APPROACH

- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should convene a national Community of Practice to support the development of guiding principles for greater collaboration between education institutions, domestic, family and sexual violence services, and health services. These guiding principles could include real life case studies to illustrate successful collaborative partnerships in different school contexts and communities. Membership of the Community of Practice should include teachers, school leaders, ACARA curriculum experts as well as representatives from education sectors and jurisdictions, and domestic, family and sexual violence peak bodies.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should support the development of practical resources, such as conversation guides, factsheets, briefings and information nights, to engage parents, carers, guardians and families in RRE that can be adapted for different school contexts and communities.
- The Australian Government in partnership with states, territories and non-government school sectors should support the development of practical resources, such as conversations guides, fact sheets and briefings, to help schools manage resistance and to respond to backlash against RRE.



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# 13 Appendices

## **13.1 APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANISATIONS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE RRE FRAMEWORK**

### **Individual participants<sup>4</sup>**

Adel Salman, President, Islamic Council of Victoria  
Angela Falkenberg, President, Australian Primary Principals Association  
Anne Atcheson, Acting Schools and Community Manager, Sexual Health Victoria  
Antoinette Hulsen  
Ariel Liddicut, Gender Inclusion Consulting  
Armann Kumruyan, Classroom Teacher, Old Orchard Primary School  
Bec Mitchell, Brisbane Youth Service  
Belle Owen, JFA Purple Orange  
Bianca Johnston  
Dr Carmel Hobbs, Research Fellow - Trauma informed practice lab, University of Tasmania  
Catherine Londos, LGBTIQ+ Health Australia  
Charlotte Dirou, Women's Health and Equality Queensland  
Chiedza Malunga  
Dani Villafaña, Youth Against Sexual Violence Australia  
Dr Dave Evans, Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health - University of Melbourne  
Deanne Carson, Chief Executive Officer, Body Safety Australia  
Elizabeth Sleeth, Health Promotion Officer, DPV Health  
Flis Marlowe, Rainbow Families Manager Switchboard Victoria  
Heather Clarke, Secretary, National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV)  
Commissioner Helen Connolly, South Australia Commissioner for Children & Young People  
Helga Scott  
Dr Jacqui Hendriks, Senior Research Fellow, Curtin University  
Janice Atkin  
Jay Jones, Senior Educator, Body Safety Australia  
Judy Connell, Manager - Education Programs and Sport, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)  
Katrina Marson  
Kerrin Bradfield  
Laura Vines, Manager - Prevention Policy and Influence, Respect Victoria  
Lauren French, Head of Education & Community Development, Body Safety Australia  
Lucy Forwood, Gender Equity & Prevention of Gender-based Violence Program Lead, DPV Health  
Madeleine Clarke, Senior Youth Programs Coordinator, Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)  
Maggie Hamilton, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)  
Maree Crabbe, Director, It's time we talked  
Megan Johnson, NATSIWA Policy Officer, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance

<sup>4</sup> There were 91 additional stakeholders who did not wish to be individually named and they have not been included in the list of consultation participants.

(NATSIWA)

Nicole Lambert, Chair, National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV)

Dr Samantha Mannix, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Swinburne University

Sarah Lorrimar, GenWest

Sharon O'Mara, Policy Officer and Project Coordinator Child Safe Organisations, Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

Sheena Callaghan, True Relationships & Reproductive Health

Sheldon Boland, Principal, Caboolture Special School

Shelley Hewson-Munro, Manager - Prevention, Masculinities & Learning (RMIT Prevention of GBV)

Dr Shireen Bernstein, Head: Programming, Evidence and Evaluation, NAPCAN

Sienna Willmet, First Nations Youth Advisory Representative

Tracey Hutt, Chief Executive Officer, Family Planning Alliance Australia

Tracey Taylor, Director Education Policy, Independent Schools Australia

Truphena Mahindu

Victoria Cooke, Advanced Skills Teacher (Quality Teaching Coach, Safeguarding Lead), Glenorchy Primary School

Yihan Li, Prevention of Violence Against Women Health Promotion Officer, Women's Health in the South East

Yvonne Kranixfeld, Diversity and Inclusion, Department for Education South Australia

Rabbi Zachary Gomo

## **Participating organisations**

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER), Northern Territory Branch  
Centre Against Violence

National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN)

National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)

Office of the eSafety Commissioner

Queensland Department of Education

Queensland Family and Child Commission

R4Respect

Relationships Australia Victoria

Sexuality, Education, Counselling and Consultancy Agency (SECCA)

Sexual Health Victoria

SHINE SA

Department for Education, Children and Young People, Tasmania

Teaching and Learning Services, Department of Education, Northern Territory Government

True Relationships & Reproductive Health

WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention (SVP) Association

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE)

Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)

## 13.2 APPENDIX B: ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE RRE FRAMEWORK

The development of the draft Framework through the national stakeholder consultations was based on an iterative design process in which the draft Framework was refined after each wave of stakeholder consultations. The eleven domains of RRE practice identified in the rapid literature review (see Section 8) were used as a provisional start list of framework principles for the stakeholder consultation workshops. Importantly, the provisional principles identified in the literature review were not forced on consultation participants and were revised or disregarded where they did not align with stakeholders' views and experiences.

Following the testing and analysis of the initial draft Framework in the first wave of stakeholder consultations, the draft RRE Framework was reconfigured into a multi-level structure to reflect stakeholders' views about the need to distinguish between foundational, supporting and overarching principles for RRE delivery. Some of the components were also reconceptualised as a result of the first wave of stakeholder consultations. In some instances, this involved the merging of components into a broader grouping. In other cases, this comprised of the rearticulation of individual components to better reflect stakeholders' views on the components should be reflected in the framework.

### Wave 1 consultations: Core components of RRE based on the research evidence

CORE COMPONENTS	
Gender and sexuality transformative	Based on an intersectional approach
Based on a sexual ethics informed approach	Based on a trauma-informed approach
A whole-school approach	Based on a strengths-based approach
Student engagement	Culturally relevant and context appropriate
Age- and developmentally-appropriate	A documented curriculum
Sustainable	Evidence-based
Based on a critical-pedagogical approach	

### Wave 2 consultations: Draft Framework for RRE

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES				
Addresses the gendered drivers	Gender and sexuality transformative	Sexual ethics approach	Whole-school and sustainable	Evidence-based, documented and tailored teaching and learning resources

SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES					
Intersectional	Trauma-informed	Strengths-based	Critical inquiry	Student engagement and leadership	Evidence-building

The RRE principles developed through the national stakeholder consultation process formed the draft Framework. The DoE, NRREEWG and other policy stakeholders including the Schools Policy Group then provided feedback and this informed the second iteration of the draft Framework. The DoE will finalise the Framework in consultation with the NRREEWG.



