

Engaging external providers to deliver respectful relationships and consent education in schools: A scoping review of best practice principles.

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Background:

Schools commonly engage external providers to deliver respectful relationships and consent education (RRCE) content. Such engagement may be ad-hoc and reactive, and may not consider an integrated whole-school approach to RRCE. As part of a broader scoping review, focused on best-practice RRCE delivery within schools, this sub-analysis sought to identify key quality assurance parameters for schools to consider when engaging external providers.

Methods:

A formalised six-stage scoping review process identified and synthesised current criteria (actual or aspirational) related to the engagement of external providers. Peer-review publications (n = 3,879) and grey literature (n = 167) were identified. After screening, 228 articles were included in the broader review; and 24 articles addressed the use of external providers.

Results:

Findings were collated and recurrent themes identified. Both parties have a reciprocal duty-of-care and should work in partnership. External providers require relevant qualifications, with specialised training related to RRCE and schools. External programs should align with school ethos and complement other teaching and learning or pastoral programs offered by the school. Content should be tailored for specific sub-populations as required (e.g., culturally and linguistically diverse schools, students with disabilities). In turn, schools should reimburse lived-experience speakers, seek input from students about relevant topics, ensure adequate facilitation time is scheduled, and brief external providers appropriately. External programs should be well introduced, and a range of follow-up activities should be offered.

Conclusion:

External providers of RRCE should enhance current school programs, and particular quality assurance parameters should be considered prior to engaging their services. Critically, external parties should not be the sole providers of this content in a school context, as evidence-based guidelines indicate the importance of an entire school community (leadership, teaching staff, pastoral care, families, community groups, etc.) to deliver and reinforce key messages for young people.

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