

Empowering students through **Respectful Relationships**

A tool to support empowering students to take an active and authentic role within the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships

Amplifying student voice, leadership and agency



The best relationships are respectful ones – together we can create real and lasting change to ensure a culture based on respect and equality.

A good education is about more than simply getting good marks. It's also about becoming an active citizen and succeeding in life, whatever path we choose. Knowing how to build respectful relationships (whether that's with friends, families, teachers, peers or later in life) is key to achieving this. Respectful Relationships (RR) supports young Victorians to build resilience, develop a sense of purpose and agency, enhance life skills such as positive coping and problem solving and develop the attitudes and abilities that support healthy relationships.



For more information from the Department of Education and Training (DET) visit:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/
respectfulrelationships](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respectfulrelationships)

What is Respectful Relationships?

The whole school approach to RR recognises that schools are a place of learning, a workplace, and a community hub. RR provides the resources and tools to promote and model positive behaviours, values and inclusivity to embed a culture of respect and gender equality across entire school communities. A whole school approach is the best way to change a school culture and leads to positive impacts on attitudes, behaviour, resilience, relationships and academic outcomes for all students.

Schools are supported to develop an action plan using the RR audit (and other forms of data) to address the following six elements:

- 1. School Leadership and Commitment:** Principal team drives school-wide commitment to RR and students are empowered to take leadership and social action to promote respectful relationships.
- 2. School Culture and Environment:** School values, policies and procedures are reviewed to embed in the school culture, the values of respect and equality and positive bystander intervention
- 3. Professional Learning:** Staff have the skills to deliver respectful relationships education and to respond to support needs effectively
- 4. Teaching and Learning:** Students develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to promote inclusion and develop respectful relationships
- 5. Community Partnerships:** Students, families and the wider community are empowered to promote respect and equality
- 6. Support for staff and students:** A whole school approach to health and wellbeing ensuring a safe and inclusive school community that supports all staff and students

TAKE ACTION!

TIP #1

Use the headings of the six elements of the whole school approach to brainstorm examples of what your school is currently doing to promote inclusion, equality and respectful relationships.



Why is student empowerment important?

When students are actively engaged in meaningful ways at school, it supports the development of skills needed for leadership, problem solving and respectful relationships and works towards school connectedness. These skills not only support students to contribute to a more inclusive school culture, we also know that positive attitudes towards school are related to better learning outcomes, greater attendance and builds school pride. Schools can empower students by ensuring they have a positive climate for learning that amplifies student voice, agency and leadership.



Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership is embedded within the Victorian Education State objectives of building a world class education system which brings equity and excellence to the learning experience of every student (Amplify, 2017).

What does student agency, leadership and voice mean?

Student Agency: is having the power to direct and take responsibility.

Student Leadership: is helping others and to model leadership, school values and respectful relationships

Student Voice: is having the power to influence change

Your school may already have many opportunities for students to lead positive change (e.g. student-led assemblies, student forums, SRC or action groups) or maybe, your school is at the beginning of this journey. We hope this toolkit provides an opportunity for staff and students to have conversations, collaborate and take action to empower students, whatever their current starting points.

How can students be empowered?

Student Empowerment: is when student agency, leadership and voice come together to enable students to be partners in decision making; 'owning' their learning and playing an authentic role in improving their schools and wider communities



TAKE ACTION!

TIP #2

Use the 'How are students currently empowered through voice, agency or leadership at your school?' worksheet to map current opportunities at your school



The Roger Hart Ladder of Youth Participation

Student voice, leadership and agency exist on a continuum. Roger Hart is an academic who has committed his career to promoting youth participation and voice in decision making. The Roger Hart Ladder shows degrees of youth participation for how students at your school can get involved in RR. Use the ladder to increase student voice and student-led decision making by working towards the top of the ladder where activities are student-initiated and decisions are shared with adults.

There are many ways that students can be empowered through RR, here are some ideas to get your started from our local RR schools:

1 **Student-initiated, shared decisions with adults:**

Students have the ideas to set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for young people to consider.

2 **Student-initiated and directed:**

Students have the initial idea and decide how things are carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

3 **Adult-initiated, joint decisions with students:**

Adults have the initial idea but students are involved in every step of planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, students are also involved in making the decisions.

4 **Assigned but informed:**

Adults decide on the project and students volunteer for it. Students understand the project, why it is needed and what it is trying to achieve and adults respect students' views.

5 **Consulted and informed:**

The project is designed and run by adults and students are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

TAKE ACTION!

TIP #3

V

Use the 'steps' on the Roger Hart Ladder to consider how empowered students at your school are. *Where do students currently have a voice? What student leadership opportunities are there? How much agency do students feel they have? Where on the ladder do you think your school would be? How could you support your school community to work towards increasing student voice, agency and leadership in order to truly empower students?*

Eg. Student RR team, student action groups and student-led awareness raising activities.

Eg. Students review curriculum content across all learning areas and extracurricular activities, students help spread the message about RR through newsletter articles and other forms of communication.

Eg. Students are involved in assembly by developing the agenda or hosting, students complete the RR student audit and there is a student representative on the staff RR team.

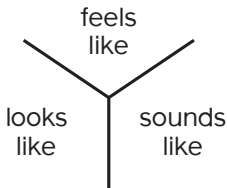
Eg. Students are skilled as positive bystanders, teachers seek input in planning awareness raising events and students complete surveys about wellbeing issues that inform how health and wellbeing issues are addressed.

Eg. Students complete the RR 'hotspots' activity identifying where respect is shown the most and the least which is used to inform yard duty and address areas of concern in the schoolyard and students are informed about RR and are asked to provide input.

How do we get started?

A good place to get started is by engaging students in a conversation about what an ideal Respectful Relationships school would **feel** like, **sound** like, and **look** like. With support from staff, students can then discuss and identify any gaps between your own school and the school just described as an **ideal** RR school.

RR Y CHART



VicSRC's ALTER Model Of Student Led Action

This model was developed by VicSRC to help support students to consider authentic ways to plan, take action and reflect on outcomes. Reflecting on these steps prior to completing an action plan for your chosen activity can ensure that the voices of other students and the processes of your school are followed to create collaborative and sustainable change.



ALTER MODEL



- ASK**
 - Ask lots of students, teachers and staff
 - Ask regularly
 - Ask in different ways
- LISTEN**
 - Listen to understand
 - Listen to everyone
- THINK**
 - Understand the issues
 - Brainstorm challenges and solutions
 - Plan for action!
 - Allocate tasks

- ENACT**
 - Find supporters to help you
 - Collaborate
 - Put your plan in action
- REFLECT**
 - Reflect on results
 - Reflect on next steps
 - Reflect on improvements
 - Report to stakeholders

TAKE ACTION!

TIP #4

Use either the RR Y Chart or the RR Gap Activity to identify any gaps between how you would describe an ideal RR school and your own school. These 'gaps' can be used as goals for students to work towards within their own leadership groups or used to inform your school's RR action plan. There are ways to ensure student voice is a valued aspect of your school's RR implementation regardless of your school's individual context.

TIP #5

Use the VicSRC ALTER Model of Student Led Action to consider authentic ways to plan, take action and reflect on results.

TIP #6

After completing 'Ask' and 'Listen' of the VicSRC Model of Student Led Action to narrow focus and shape conversation, use the VicSRC Action Planner template to support further planning on how to achieve your goals.



What are other schools doing already?

Over the last three years, many schools in the Barwon Area have been empowering students through the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships (RR).

Here are some ideas to support your school:



Lara Secondary College students attended a RR student voice forum which kickstarted three different student action teams

Over forty students attended a RR Student Voice Forum which aimed to empower students to take an active role in building a school culture based on respect and equality. Students developed an understanding of the background of RR, the importance of positive bystander intervention in the prevention of violence and discrimination and ways that students can play an active role in ensuring a positive school culture. Students identified areas of focus that they were personally interested in and then spent the afternoon utilising the ALTER model to support discussion and begin developing an action plan. Following the session, students were supported to consolidate their ideas by being allocated a different staff member to support each of the different identified action teams. So far, students have led a number of activities including a NAIDOC assembly celebration, an awareness raising event for R U OK? Day, provided feedback to teachers around areas of concern for student safety which has informed yard duty as well as reviewing the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) expected behaviours matrix, reward system and providing input into the SWPBS action plan.

The Clifton Springs Primary School's RR Student Ambassadors completed the RR student audit and contributed to their school action plan

The RR Student Ambassadors have been empowered by attending events such as a Barwon Student Voice Forum and the pilot of the Barwon Respect Cup for Primary Schools. Students have presented at school assembly and student voice forums to help their peers build an understanding of respect and equality. They have fundraised to purchase backpacks that were filled with donated items for children at the local family violence refuge. The RR Ambassadors have supported a number of awareness raising days: Careers Day (students were encouraged to challenge restrictive gender stereotypes and dress up as their dream job), Odd Sock Day (led activities in classes about diversity and inclusion) and Walk for Respect (along with families and the wider community, each student made a pledge by tying a white ribbon to their statement eg. 'I pledge to take care of people who are hurt', 'I pledge to accept others who are different to me').

Students at Our Lady Star of the Sea identified 'hotspots' in the playground where respect is shown the most and the least

The feedback collated in the activity provided insight and discussion of solutions to ensure that the playground is a safe and inclusive space for everyone. RR was launched by prep students who did a presentation at a whole school assembly inspired one of the lessons from Resilience, Rights and Respect Relationships (RRRR). The prep class were later invited to St Joseph's College to showcase what they had been learning as a way to engage students at other schools. Our Lady Star of the Sea's regular Respect Days provide an engaging opportunity for students, families and the wider community to come together for a shared purpose. The 'Respect Colours Our World Walk' focused on sharing messages about respect, inclusion and resilience and a commitment to respect and equality and finished in a celebratory colour run for students.

St Joseph's College's Inclusive Communities Student Leadership Group presented to every class at their school on human rights and inclusive language for Diversity Day

The Inclusive Communities co-designed and delivered eight RR Student Voice Forums across the Barwon Area supporting over 300 students to build an understanding of respect and equality. They have also presented at the Victorian School Leaders for Respect and Equality Conference and a conference for Catholic Education Melbourne. The Inclusive Communities student group developed a whole school RR survey to audit respect and inclusion in and out of the classroom, student experiences of bullying and discrimination, and student leadership and bystander intervention. These findings were presented by the Inclusive Communities team to a whole staff briefing where staff were asked to sign a pledge with some key actions identified

by students. The group ran a poster competition and with the help of a graphic designer, created a series of posters based on challenging rigid ideas of masculinity and building a culture of active bystanders.

Birregurra Primary School students have been learning about emotions

Students recently completed the Roller Coaster of a Day activity which helped them cement and reflect upon the concepts they have covered across the duration of the RRRR program. This activity linked wonderfully with literacy, numeracy and the personal and social capabilities. Students were thoroughly engaged in the activity and used the opportunity to realise that everyone can experience a variety of emotions across the course of a single day.

Students from Northern Bay College (Goldsworthy Campus) took a leadership role at the Barwon Respect Cup

The Barwon Respect Cup (hosted by Netball Victoria and a number of local health and community services) brings together Year 9 students across the Barwon Area to participate in workshops exploring healthy relationships, consent and positive bystander intervention followed by a mixed gender netball round robin between local schools. The NBC Sports Empowerment Education and Development (SEED) netball team took the opportunity to take part in a trial of the workshops and provide feedback which was used to make adjustments for the 2018 Barwon Respect Cup. Taking part in the trial prior to the event resulted in the NBC students feeling confident in the content and were able to provide leadership and mentoring on the importance of positive bystander skills to ensure a culture based on respect and equity. These experiences have resulted in the SEED netball team continuing to demonstrate leadership in this space both at school and on the netball court.

Bellbrae Primary School's Respect Ambassadors have been building the capacity of their peers to be positive bystanders

As part of National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, the Bellbrae Respect Ambassadors supported their peers to develop the skills and knowledge to be positive bystanders. The Respect Ambassadors developed an A-Z Respect Walk creating a call to action for each letter of the alphabet to encourage students to develop an understanding of respect and the importance of standing up for others (eg. A - Ask if someone is ok, B - Be a positive bystander, C - Create a kind and caring classroom etc). These were placed across the school and students were given the task to find all 26 letters using a crossword puzzle for students to complete. The Respect Ambassadors continue to support their peers in understanding diversity, building a culture of respect and encouraging students to be positive bystanders.

Elliminyt Primary School have been unpacking gender stereotypes and asking students 'think outside the square' about what future careers

The senior students led sessions with junior students by asking them to draw; a nurse, a scientist, a dentist and a police officer. Next, they analysed the results and were surprised by the extent to which the students reflected gender stereotypes, such as 73% of responses depicted a nurse as being female. The student group then invited family members from the school community, who are working in non stereotypical jobs to a panel at a whole school assembly. We then held a dress up day, in which students were encouraged to dress as 'what they wanted to be when they grew up'. There was a greater diversity of jobs and it was a fun way to encourage students to broaden their horizons and think outside the square about stereotypical career options.

Clonard College's Indigenous students take responsibility on combating racism by screening The Australian Dream.

Bri Apma Hayes, an indigenous FIRE Carrier leader at Clonard College wrote an email after viewing a screening of *The Australian Dream* (a documentary about the issue of casual racism and the story of Adam Goodes). She requested that all teachers and staff watch the documentary to understand the perspective of their Indigenous students, their experiences with racism and their indigenous heritage. Soon after clicking the send button, this email had a snowball effect to the point that a sold out, private screening and a student-led Q&A panel came to fruition. On this panel they discussed their perspectives as indigenous young people, the serious topic of racism and the curriculum's lack of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus. By holding this event, Clonard took into account how important student voice was, and the effect it can have on our school and wider community. By understanding their diverse students and their concerns, Clonard staff and students were able to walk side by side on combating racism, one step at a time.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Amplify (student voice, agency and leadership practice guide for teachers:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/amplify.aspx

Respectful Relationships:

www.education.vic.gov.au/respectfulrelationships

VicSRC:

www.vicsrc.org.au

Promoting mental health and wellbeing through the Victorian Anti-Bullying and Mental Health Initiative:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/promoting-mental-health.aspx

We're getting rid of
"you scream like a girl"
as an insult

Surfside Primary School

We stand up for each other
because everyone is different
and that's OK

Colac Primary School

I think student voice is
important because students
should have a say in what
they learn and why

Portarlington Primary School

We treat others how we
would want to be treated, no-one is
more important than anyone else

Bellbrae Primary School

RR has helped me
be a better friend

Birregurra Primary School

We share the
schoolyard by
playing mixed footy

Our Lady Star Of The Sea

"Kind words,
kind actions"
is our motto

East Geelong
Primary School

We want all students to
feel safe to be themselves
without being judged

Northern Bay College - Goldsworthy Campus
and Newcomb Secondary Colleg

It doesn't matter if you're
a boy or a girl, you can
wear anything, and do
anything you want

Torquay P-6 College

The best relationships are respectful ones



Our school is a
Respectful Relationships
school