

## Debunking the Myths – The Science Behind Our Sexual Health

### CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

#### About Debunking the Myths- The Science Behind Our Sexual Health:

Debunking the Myths - The Science behind Our Sexual Health is an expert-led sexual health education programme for Irish teenagers, parents, and teachers. Through a multifaceted approach that includes expert-led events, curated educational resources, and targeted social media campaigns, we discuss sexual health with teenagers and debunk associated myths in a safe and unbiased environment.

The programme has been developed by the RCSI (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland) Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in collaboration with the Rotunda Hospital to supplement the Relationship Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum.

The aim of the project is to provide clear and factual information in relation to sexual health in an Irish context and stimulate open discussion and curiosity around the topic.

Delivered by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare experts from the RCSI University and Hospital group including consultants, junior doctors, community GPs, health psychologists, and researchers, the workshops explore a range of topics, including gender and sexuality, contraception, anatomy, puberty, menstruation, fertility, consent, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and sexual assault services provided in Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATU). We aim to help teenagers learn more about these subjects in a non-biased and non-judgmental way.

In this context, the team at *Debunking The Myths* aims to create a safe, creative and fun environment where children can engage with our staff, where their welfare is paramount.

*Debunking The Myths* is committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of children while they are participating in our events. *Debunking The Myths* adheres to the requirements of the Children First Act 2015 ("CFA") and the National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017 ("Children First Guidance, 2017") developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. *Debunking the Myths* is also committed to protecting the data rights of children and is in compliance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR").

Debunking The Myths has specific legal responsibilities under the CFA, including to prepare a risk assessment of any potential for harm to a child while availing of their services, to prepare a 'child safeguarding statement' and to appoint a person to be a first point of contact in respect of *Debunking The Myths's* child safeguarding statement (a 'relevant person'). *Debunking The Myths* has appointed a Designated Liaison Person for child safeguarding in accordance with the Children First Guidance, 2017 who is also the relevant person for the purposes of the CFA.

## List of services being provided:

*Debunking The Myths* provides a range of workshops and online campaigns that engage children.

- I. **Events:** Primarily, the team organises sexual health education events led by a panel of experts from RCSI University and Hospital group. The events, delivered either online or in-person, are primarily designed for students from 4<sup>th</sup> year to 6<sup>th</sup> year or 15-19year olds in Youthreach settings. In addition, we offer topic-specific workshops that focus in depth on a single area of sexual health. These sessions may be tailored for younger year groups, including 1st and 2nd year students. We ensure content is age-appropriate and developmentally suitable. All event registrations are coordinated through teachers, and the team at *Debunking The Myths* does not directly engage with registered participants outside of the scheduled sessions. In-person events require support from departmental staff (which comprise of RCSI employees from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology) to assist during the two-hour session. This involves directing people to seats, speaking to children and their teachers about contraceptive options, periods products or STIs testing kit while showing props. During events, teachers remain present at all times and are responsible for student supervision, in line with school safeguarding policies. An evaluation study is in place to assess the event's impact on students' sexual health knowledge and attitudes. Participation in the evaluation involves completing two surveys. Only students with both a signed Parental Consent Form and a signed Child Assent Form are eligible to take part in the evaluation. This study has been reviewed and approved by the RCSI Research Ethics Committee, including an assessment of data protection and storage protocols. A Participant Information Leaflet is distributed to teachers, who are asked to share it with both students and parents. The team is available to answer any questions related to participation, ethics, or data handling. Surveys are collected anonymously and contain no identifiable personal data. Survey responses cannot be linked back to individual participants. The information does not make the subject identifiable. All staff with access to the data have completed GDPR training organised annually by RCSI. In cases in which a disclosure is made anonymously - for example, through an anonymous feedback form or through Mentimeter (a tool we use during our presentations to gather anonymous questions from the audience)- the school is notified, to enable them to address those who were present as a group and further highlight the support and resources available in the school, encouraging students to seek support. Even when no disclosure is made, each participating school receives a follow-up email before and after the session with details of relevant support services and resources, to ensure ongoing access to help where needed.
- II. **Social Media Campaigns:** We utilise social media platforms to disseminate information regarding recent legislative advancements in sexual health, such as the introduction of the contraception scheme or SH:24. Additionally, we conduct campaigns tailored to addressing inquiries submitted anonymously by students during our workshops. All social media content is reviewed by trained staff prior to publication. Comments and

messages are monitored, and inappropriate content is removed or reported.

- III. **Public Events:** *Debunking The Myths* participates in a range of public events throughout the year. At these events *Debunking The Myths* typically attend with a group of team members, which comprise of RCSI employees from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. This involves raising awareness of our workshops, handing over leaflets and answering questions from attendees.
- IV. **Online Queries and Photos:** Queries from our website [www.debunkingthemyths.ie](http://www.debunkingthemyths.ie) are linked to general email [debunkingthemyths@rcsi.ie](mailto:debunkingthemyths@rcsi.ie) Most queries are from teachers and guardians. Some may be received from children. Typical queries from children could be enquiries to have their classroom participating in one of our workshops. Where further contact is required, a standardised reply is issued requesting that the child ask their teacher or guardian to contact *Debunking The Myths* on their behalf. This procedure is in place to safeguard against the risk of inappropriate contact, and to ensure all communication involving children is mediated by a responsible adult. Staff responsible for managing online communications have completed child safeguarding and GDPR training. As part of the promotion of *Debunking The Myths* in the media and across other associated social media channels, photographs/video footage of children are used only when explicit written parental consent has been obtained. All media content is stored securely and reviewed prior to publication to prevent unauthorised or inappropriate use.

## Risk assessment

We have carried out an assessment of any potential for harm to a child while availing of our services, including the area of online safety when accessing the internet. Below is a list of the areas of risk identified and the list of procedures for managing these risks.

	<b>Risk identified</b>	<b>Procedure in place to manage risk identified</b>
1.	Child is harmed by a staff member, while availing of our services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. All RCSI staff completes the induction briefing on the Child Safeguarding Statement, which is informed by the Children First e-learning training and incorporates training on the recognition of harm;</li> <li>B. RCSI staff is vetted in accordance with the Rotunda Hospital Garda Vetting Policy.</li> <li>C. The Team has appointed a Designated Liaison Person.</li> <li>D. Where competitions are run, we never ask for the child's home address without parental consent previously obtained.</li> <li>E. The team at <i>Debunking The Myths</i> obtains parental consent to take photographs and/or video footage of children. Individual or group photographs/ or video footage of children is not permitted without this consent.</li> </ul>
2.	The activity, or other material a child is exposed to, may be inappropriate and potentially harmful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. All material used within the workshops or on social media undergoes revision from a healthcare expert who is going to deliver the talk to ensure the information is clear, appropriate, and science-based.</li> <li>B. Debunking iPads/other IT devices at public events are pin-coded and used under supervision</li> </ul>
3.	A child discloses to a staff member that they are being harmed by persons either within or outside <i>Debunking The Myths</i> and this disclosure is not appropriately reported to the Designated Liaison Person or Tusla.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. "An introduction to ChildrenFirst" mandatory eLearning training for all staff.</li> <li>B. The team follows the RCSI guidelines of the RCSI Child Safeguarding Policy for reporting child welfare and protection concerns;</li> <li>C. If any disclosures of harm are made to a staff member, they should contact the Designated Liaison Person as a matter of urgency to seek</li> </ul>

		advice on any necessary steps to take.
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## Procedures:

Our Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017), and Tusla's *Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice*. In addition to the procedures listed in our risk assessment, the following procedures support our intention to safeguard children while they are availing of our service (all procedures listed follow the RCSI Child Safeguarding Policy:

- Procedure for the management of allegations of abuse or misconduct against workers/volunteers of a child availing of our service;
- Procedure for the safe recruitment and selection of workers and volunteers to work with children;
- Procedure for provision of and access to child safeguarding training and information, including the identification of the occurrence of harm;
- Procedure for the reporting of child protection or welfare concerns to Tusla;
- Procedure for maintaining a list of the persons (if any) in the relevant service who are mandated persons;
- Procedure for appointing a relevant person.

All procedures listed follow the RCSI Child Safeguarding Policy are available upon request.

## Implementation

We recognise that implementation is an on-going process. Our service is committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures that support our intention to keep children safe from harm while availing of our service.

This Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed on January 2026, or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

## Relevant Person

**Elisa Belmonte | Project Manager**

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