

LEARNER GUIDE

Unit 3 – Dealing with Complex Issues



RSAS Training Strategy Project 2018

Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS)



A message from
our CEO, Sally
Sinclair.

Dear colleague

Welcome to the NESAs Remote School Attendance Strategy Training Project. We recognise the importance of the role that you are doing and we are committed to supporting you throughout this role with a range of training offerings.

We appreciate the positive impact of your role within your local community and the opportunities you create every day by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage in school. We also understand that your role will be both rewarding and challenging, and we are confident that the training we are offering will assist you further in your role.

NESAs RSAS Training Strategy Project will involve a blended training approach that includes the following:

- Face-to-face forums with each forum running for three days in your local community
- Online training that will offer short courses that you are able to select
- Individual coaching and mentoring throughout your training
- The option to complete accredited units that will count towards a formal qualification

Our team are here to support you and we are available if you have any questions about this programme or the training you are completing. Our office number is (02) 9119 3090 and our email address is rsas@nesa.com.au. We are available Monday – Friday between 9.00-5.00pm (Sydney time) - please feel free to give us a call or pop us a line; we are more than happy to discuss any questions you may have.

We wish you all the best in this important role and we look forward to working with you throughout this project.

Yours sincerely

Sally Sinclair
CEO

Dealing with Complex Issues

Objectives

Equip RSAS workers with a range of skills and techniques in how to identify and manage complex situations. The unit will explore the value of developing support networks, referral strategies and how to reduce the impact of complex situations.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, learners will be able to:

- Recognise complex situations
- Construct sound ways of dealing with complex situations\Demonstrate a range of strategies to negotiate with Remote School Attendance participants and stakeholders
- Develop a range of connections with the community and other programs that will help reduce the impact of complex situations.

Resources

The resources provided are a Learner Guide, Workbook and Trainer Guide.

This Learner Guide provides a resource to support the activities in the Unit 3 Workbook. It is designed to help trainers, RSAS officers and members of the community better understand how to work effectively with others.



This icon represents action when an individual task needs to be completed. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit 3 Workbook



This icon represents action when a task is to be completed as a group. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit 3 Workbook

Part 1: What is a complex situation?

A complex situation is any situation that is not straightforward.

There is no easy answer to these situations because they may involve a number of different people; different problems; conflicting views around what is right and wrong; and may involve outcomes which may not always be favourable even if they are “right”.



A complex situation is any situation that is not straightforward

These situations can involve a range of issues that impact on your role of getting kids to attend school. Some of them may involve:

- A conflict between family and cultural duties and school attendance
- Grief and loss
- Family separation
- Bullying inside or outside school and threatening behaviour that is hard to prove
- Family violence that may be hidden
- Under-age drinking
- Vandalism
- Bullying
- Negligence or sexual abuse
- Shop lifting, car stealing or other behaviour that could involve the police



Activity 1: Discussion

Consider these three situations:

A. *One of your kids has been doing really well at school this year but he tells you he has to go away with his Uncle on sorry business and he doesn't know when he will be back. He wants you to tell the teacher. You explain it would be better if his Uncle could give you a time when he will be back but he says his Uncle is stressed and he doesn't want to bother him.*

What makes this a complex situation?

B. *One of the girls you are responsible for often has bruises on her arms and legs. Sometimes she misses school. She missed school yesterday and today*

she has a black eye and bruises around her neck. You are worried and want to know what is going on.

You take her aside to speak with her quietly but she says she is OK. She says she got the bruises playing on an old swing with her friends.

What makes this a complex situation?

C. A group of big kids are intimidating some of the littler ones. When you walk them to school it is OK because the big kids stay away. But if you aren't there, the little kids are too afraid to go to school. This is what the big kids want.

You haven't seen the bullying, but you have been told about it. Some of the kids have had their new sports shoes stolen by the big kids who then "sell" them back to them. When you have approached the big kids and tell them to leave the others alone, they just laugh at you.

What makes this a complex situation?



Activity 2: Complex issues we face in our community

Make a list of the complex issues you are currently facing as a RSAS worker in your community.



Part 2: Dealing with complex situations



There is always help if you want it.

Sometimes when we are faced with a complex situation, our first reaction is to feel confused or lost. Sometimes we are tempted to just walk away or ignore it and hope it goes away. Unfortunately, the problem rarely goes away. However, there is always help if we want it.

Consulting, Referring and Reporting

There are three ways of seeking help.

Consulting

Consulting is the first step in asking for help. When we consult with someone, we are simply asking for their advice or ideas about how to approach a situation. You might regularly consult with your RSAS Supervisor. You might consult with parents or guardians. You might consult with the Principal of the school. It depends on the situation.

Referring

Referring is the next stage of asking for help. You would refer the situation to someone else if it is outside your responsibility or you do not have the skills to deal with it. Then the matter becomes the responsibility of someone else who is able to deal with it.

You might refer a situation to your RSAS Supervisor after consulting with him or her. You might refer a matter to the Principal if it is about something happening inside the school that you can't deal with. You might refer a matter to the Kids Helpline or to the Aboriginal Legal Service, or to Child Protection or Child Safety authorities depending on the situation.

Reporting

Sometimes help is not enough and you need to report a situation.

Some situations that you may decide to report are where violence or breaking the law is involved. You may decide the only way to stop it or prevent further harm is to report it to the Police or maybe to Child Protection or Child Safety authorities.

There are also some situations where you do not have a choice. RSAS officers are obliged to report some situations under Mandatory Reporting guidelines. The legal requirements are different in each state and this is covered in *Unit 14: Mandatory Reporting*. If you have not completed this unit or are still unsure about your responsibility in a particular situation, always consult with your RSAS Supervisor.



Activity 3: Consult, refer or report?

Look at the following list of connections that you might use to help you with complex situations. Decide what sorts of situations you might contact them about, and whether you would be consulting, referring or reporting. Use the list you have already made on complex situations to give some examples.



Contact	Consult/Refer/Report?	Example of a Situation
RSAS Supervisor		
Parents/guardian		
School Principal		
Community nurse/doctor		
Police		
Child Protection/Child Safety/Family and Community Services		
Pastor/minister of religion		
Salvation Army/Smith Family or other local charity		
Community Elders		
Others?		

The 5 Step Problem Solving Process

Every complex situation is slightly different so dealing with complex situations requires you to be a good problem solver. You may have already learnt how to solve team problems using the problem solving loop in *Unit 12: Problem Solving*. Another tool is the 5 Step Problem Solving Process. This can help you with most complex situations that you have to work out for yourself.

5 Step Problem Solving Process

Step 1: Unpick the situation.

- What are the parts of this situation?
- Who is involved directly?
- Who else is affected?

Step 2: Decide on the importance of the situation

- What might happen if nothing is done about this?
- What might happen as a result of doing the wrong thing?

Step 3: Decide if you should manage this situation; consult with someone else; or refer it to someone else.

- Is this part of my role?
- Do I have the skills to manage this? If not who can I talk to?
- Is it part of someone else's role? If so, who should I contact?

Step 4: What are the alternatives?

- What action could I take?
- What could be the possible results?

Step 5: Make a decision

- Decide what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.



Activity 4: Analysing a complex situation

As a group analyse the following situation through the 5 Step Analysis process.

The local road house owner asks to see you. He has been helpful with the RSAS program by refusing to serve kids during school hours and stop them hanging around outside when they should be at school.

Today he tells you that he caught one of your kids shop lifting. He had refused to serve him because he should have been at school, and the kid ran off with some of the stuff without paying. He says he won't contact the police until you have a chance to speak with him and his mother and maybe get the kid to come back and pay. However, he says he can't refuse to serve kids during school hours if this happens again.

You speak to the mother. She tells you that she kept him home from school and she sent him to the roadhouse to buy some stuff because she is sick. She needs him home to help with the baby.

The mother doesn't seem very sick and you think she is just covering for her son. This kid has always been a good boy and you are worried that she is not teaching him any respect for the law.

You explain that the roadhouse owner could have called the police, but he didn't, and she should encourage her son to go and see him and say sorry and pay what he owes. You would also like to see him get back to school tomorrow if she is feeling better.

She slams the door on you.

Part 3: Negotiating with stakeholders

Negotiating is an important skill for RSAS workers. In the last activity, you probably realised you were going to have to negotiate with the roadhouse owner. How do you do that?

There are 10 skills that you need.

The 10 Skills of Negotiation

Skill 1: Analysing the Situation is the first skill – and we have already covered that.

Skill 2: The second skill is Planning. Negotiation takes a lot of thinking before you approach anyone. You need to work out what your goal is and the actions to take.

Skill 3: The third skill is Active Listening. It is a skill dealt with across a range of Units in the RSAS program including *Unit 16: Positive Communication*. This skill requires you to listen attentively without interrupting. Then check you have heard correctly.

Skill 4: The fourth skill is Emotional Control. Negotiation needs a cool head. Some suggestions for emotional control are covered in other units, but one good way is to take 4 or 5 deep breaths when you feel upset. If you feel you are becoming too emotionally involved, another way is to distance yourself by taking a walk, or pretending you are watching what happens on a TV screen rather than being part of it.

Skill 5: The fifth skill is Verbal Negotiation. The ability to be able to put your ideas and desired outcomes clearly in words is very important. This sometimes takes practice.

Skill 6: The sixth skill is Collaboration. This skill is about being able to work with people and listen to other ideas. It is a core skill covered in *Unit 6: Working With Others*.

Skill 7: The seventh skill is Creative Problem Solving. Coming up with various solutions rather than just the tried and tested ones will mean you are a better negotiator.

Skill 8: The eighth skill is Decision Making Ability. People who sit on the fence, or put off making a decision, don't make good negotiators. You need to be a bit courageous and be prepared to make a decision and not look back.

Skill 9: The ninth skill is Interpersonal Skills. This means having the ability to maintain a good working with relationship with everyone after the negotiation is completed.

Skill 10: The final skill is Ethics and Reliability. People need to be able to feel they can trust you and that you will honour your promises.



Activity 5: Negotiation Role Play

Following on from Activity 4, divide into groups of four. Role play the negotiation with the roadhouse owner to see if you can persuade him to continue supporting the RSAS project by refusing to serve kids during school hours when they should be in school. One person will play the part of the roadhouse owner, one will play themselves, and two people will be observers who will provide feedback using the 10 skills chart.



Part 4: Develop a range of connections with community and other programs

In other units you have studied, you have been asked to develop a list of the people and programs in your community that could be of help to you in your role. However people change roles and now is the time to update that list.



Activity 6: Community List Update

Share any updates you have about new connections or programs available in your local community.

Also consider services outside your community but available by phone, such as the Kids Helpline and the Aboriginal Legal Service in your state.

Bring your contact list up to date.



MELBOURNE

Level 8, 20 -22 Albert Road
South Melbourne
VIC 3205, Australia

Phone: +61 3 9624 2300
Email: nesa@nesa.com.au

SYDNEY

Level 1, 33-35 Belmont Street
Sutherland
NSW 2232, Australia

Phone: +61 2 9119 3098
Email: rsas@nesa.com.au