

# LEARNER GUIDE

## Unit 7 – Managing Your Participants



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](mailto: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

# Working with Others

## Objectives

The managing your participants unit will guide RSAS workers through several aspects of working with and managing a group of children and their individual needs within the RSAS program context. Participants will be equipped with techniques to understand the needs of those students / families that you support and how to manage a group more effectively as a RSAS worker and as a RSAS team.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- work towards developing key strengths in managing their participants
- understand the principles of how to overcome challenges by working with other services and support personnel
- appreciate how to plan and manage children on a one to one basis and in small and large groups

## 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 7 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 6 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 6 Workbook

## Part 1: The People We Work With

### 1. They are still developing socially

Children and teenagers are still in a period of social development which involves learning the values, knowledge and skills that enable them to relate to others.

Social skills and lessons can be learnt from those who care for them, as well as indirectly through working through their relationships with friends, and through the world around them. School and how they get on at school is an important part of this. If these relationships and experiences are not positive, the impact can affect them in ways we don't realise at the time.

They are also not independent, and more inclined to follow a leader or try to fit in with other kids (even in bad behaviour) because they don't want to be isolated.

Our goal as RSAS workers is for kids to build a positive sense of their own identity. We want them to understand their role in relationship to the people around them, including their community and school.



## 2. They are still learning to manage their emotions

Children and teenagers are developing their ability to recognize and manage their emotions or feelings, and this can be influenced by lots of different things. Kids who have a good relationship with their parents and caregivers, and have good role models, tend to be more stable, but those that don't, often have a lot of emotional problems.

Some kids don't know how to manage their anger and frustration and can lash out at others. Some kids find it hard to express their grief when bad things happen and can close up or act as if it doesn't matter.

As RSAS workers we need to be good role models of how to deal with difficult emotions and help our kids to express their emotions in appropriate ways.



### **3. Boundaries make kids feel safe**

Because kids, particularly teenagers, love to push boundaries we can be mistaken in believing that all they want is freedom. That isn't the case. Boundaries, provided they are just and reasonable, make kids feel safe and protected. Knowing what they can and can't do, gives them a feeling of security.

Often when kids don't have any boundaries at home, they join gangs or clubs where boundaries or rules are very strict and the punishment for breaking them is brutal.

Our role as RSAS workers is to provide some structure and boundaries around school attendance and upholding school rules. To make sure that kids see this framework as serious we have to make sure we don't vary those rules and boundaries. Kids will push back. They will test to see if we are serious. And if we give in, they will ignore the rules in future.

### **4. Kids have a strong sense of right and wrong**

As we become adults we learn to see that there are many shades of grey, and there is often no absolute right or wrong. However kids have a strong sense of justice and can get very upset if they think they or their friends have been treated unjustly.

Our role as a RSAS worker is to empathise with their value system, be strict and fair in the way we treat them, as well as helping to lead them to a better understanding of the many shades of grey.



## 5. Kids like to be part of decision-making

As children reach adolescence or teenage years, they want more independence and want to take part in decisions that affect them. This is a normal and healthy part of preparing to become adults.

As a RSAS worker, we need to be aware of this and respect the rights of kids in taking part in decisions that affect them. That doesn't mean giving in to what they want, but it does mean asking for their opinion and what they think would suit them best, and taking this into account.



## 6. After puberty, kids often become obsessed with body image and how they look

We can probably all remember worrying about what we looked like when we were teenagers and being embarrassed if we weren't wearing what all our friends saw as "cool clothes". What we may have forgotten is the emotional pain we felt that many teenagers go through over these things, and how destructive these emotions can be. Kids might steal so they can have the latest running shoes. Girls might become promiscuous to convince themselves they are attractive. Boys and girls might turn to drugs or grog. Some might deliberately make themselves look ugly if they feel they can't live up to images on the media of what it means to be attractive.

Helping kids feel OK about the way they look is important. Encouraging parents and carers to accept what might seem to adults like a strange dress code is also important.

Fighting against the fashion has never been a winning strategy with teenagers. Even the most conservative adults will probably admit they rebelled as teenagers by wearing their skirts too short; their hair too long, or coloured in some strange way (green and blue comes to mind).

Maybe you would like to share your stories so you can remember and laugh?

## 7. Kids take risks because they often don't see the consequences

Kids are inclined to be experimental, because they are experiencing the world for the first time. This can make them more vulnerable to exploitation and also lead them to doing things that are dangerous.

Our role as RSAS workers is to help them see the possible consequences of their behaviour – good and bad – particularly when it comes to attending school. However “telling” is not the best approach. Helping kids see consequences means leading them to make their own conclusions.



### Activity 1: Discussion

**Time required:** 5 minutes

**Instructions:** Share your ideas

- What do you find most challenging about managing kids?
- How do you deal with it?

## Part 2: Skills we need when dealing with kids

### Core skills

If you are a parent, or an uncle or aunty, you probably already know the challenges of dealing with kids and have learnt many of the skills you need.

Following are some of these skills.



### Communication

Communicating with children has some particular requirements which include the following:

- the ability to feel comfortable with children and to engage with them in whatever style of communication suits them e.g. by sitting on the ground, through play etc.,
- to be able to tolerate expressions of distress and aggression
- the ability to use the right language for the child's age and stage of development, and culture
- an acceptance that children who have had distressing experiences may find it extremely difficult to trust an unfamiliar adult
- an ability to appreciate that kids may view their situation in ways that is different from that of adults: children may fantasise, invent explanations for unfamiliar or frightening events, express themselves in symbolic ways, or emphasise issues which may seem unimportant to adults
- appreciating cultural issues when speaking about some issues
- appreciating non-verbal communication as an important part of communication. (This is dealt with in detail in *Unit 9: Communication*)

### Empathy

This means you need to have an ability to put yourself in their shoes and understand where they are coming from, even if you don't agree with them.

### Patience and a sense of humour

Kids like to "wind up" adults to see how far they can go. Dealing with kids sometimes takes a lot of patience. A sense of humour or the ability to see the funny side, and laugh with the kids is a great help.

### Consistency

This means saying what you mean and doing what you say. Kids will pick up any inconsistency in your behaviour and this may mean you lose their trust.

## Compassion and forgiveness

Sometimes kids can say or do things that are very hurtful. To be able to be compassionate and forgive them is important in teaching them how to accept themselves.

## A sense of proportion

This means keeping what is important in mind and being able to be balanced in your responses. For example being 5 minutes late is not as important as not turning up at all. How you react needs to be different depending on the seriousness of an event.

## Leadership

We are all aware that kids don't listen to you or follow you just because you are an adult. You need to have some leadership skills to do the job of managing your participants effectively. These include having a positive attitude; leading by example; being a good problem solver and managing complex situation.

In *Unit 8: Leadership* you will learn a lot about how to become a leader. Many of the other units in this program will also help you to develop specific skills in leadership.



## Activity 2: Discussion

**Time required:** 10 minutes

**Instructions:** As a class group, discuss the skills outlined above. Can you think of any other skills you need to manage kids? Add them to the list.





## Activity 3: Which skills are you really good at?

**Time required:** 10 minutes

**Instructions:**

- a. Divide into pairs choosing a partner who knows you fairly well.
- b. Discuss with your partner the things that each of you sees as strengths in each other when dealing with kids.
- c. Decide how you might use these strengths, and even improve on them, to help you in your role as a RSAS worker.



## Part 3: Dealing with kids alone and in groups



Source: ABC News Aurukun parents, cleaners chip in to help deliver education to children amid school closure crisis

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-03/heartbroken-aurukun-locals-chip-in-to-keep-school-open/7474256>

### Managing groups of kids

#### Step1: Establish the boundaries

The first step in managing your participants is to set up a few rules or expectations.

Don't make too many rules, or rules about things that don't really matter. The rules you make should be those rules you see as non-negotiable.

An example might be:

“We will respect ourselves and each other.”

However before you make a list of rules, it is best to discuss them with the kids first and get them to agree to them. If they don't have buy-in, they won't necessarily think the rules apply to them and you may hear them say, “I didn't agree to that.”

When setting the rules you also have to decide what you will do when someone breaks them.

If one of the kids speaks disrespectfully to you or one of the other kids, you might decide that you say quietly:

“The way you just spoke to me (or the other kid) is very disrespectful. That is not how we agreed to behave. I suggest you apologise. If you don’t want to do that, then we are going to have to talk about this later.”



## Activity 4: Our Rules

**Time required:** 15 minutes

**Instructions:**

What are the rules, or the rules you are considering, for your participant group? Write them down.

Decide how you will share the rules with your group so they understand them.



## Step 2: Develop a positive environment

Developing a positive environment means developing the sort of group that kids want to belong to. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Providing positive feedback to kids
- Making going to school fun by sharing stories and jokes or playing simple games on the way to school such as having a treasure hunt
- Rewarding kids for doing the right thing
- Getting the school involved in providing recognition for attendance
- Providing or finding assistance for homework help

Can you think of other ways?

## Step 3: Establish a routine

Kids feel comfortable when they have a routine. So do adults – because it means we don't have to make so many decisions.

Establish a routine for your participant group. It might be a set time for school pick-up; how you greet each other and say goodbye etc. What your routine is will depend on your group and what they need.

## Step 4: Establish a support group for when you need it

Even if you are really good at managing groups, there may be times when a situation arises when you need advice or help.

It is best to be prepared for these times.



## Activity 5: My Support Team

**Time required:** 7 minutes

### Instructions:

With the help of your trainer, on the white board or flip chart draw a map or diagram of the people you consider your support team for advice and help in dealing with your

## Dealing with kids one-on-one

It is important to remember your group is made up of individuals and you need to develop a relationship with every kid. This means appreciating their differences and finding things in common that allow you to build and maintain rapport.

The most important things to keep in mind are:

- Using their preferred name and greeting them using their name.
- Remembering important things about them such as their birthday; their favourite food or the name of their favourite singer.
- Treating them respectfully.
- Making eye contact with them when speaking to them and smiling at them.
- Recognising when they have done something good.
- If they tell you something in confidence, respecting that confidence and not sharing the information with anyone else. The only exception to this would be when you believe they are at risk of harm.



We should also be aware that because kids are very sensitive to how their friends see them, they will often react differently when they are in a group to when they are alone. A kid who may seem confident and cheeky in a group may be very quiet and respectful when he or she is spoken to alone.

For this reason correcting kids, or trying to identify a problem is often best done one-on-one rather than when they are in a group and showing off. However this needs to be done carefully.

- Choose a quiet place away from the group to speak with a kid. Make sure it is in open area where you can be seen but not overheard, rather than behind a closed door. Closed doors and private places can be intimidating for kids and you might also be placing yourself at risk of being accused of things you haven't done.
- Bring yourself down to their physical level. For example you might both be sitting.
- Use a quiet calm voice.

- Use their name.
- Let them know why you have taken them aside to speak with them and ask for their permission to do that. The words you might use might be something like: “Julianne, I want to speak with you about missing school last week. Is that OK?”
- Ask open-ended questions such as, “Can you tell me about that?”
- Listen to the answers and keep an open mind
- If you are correcting behaviour, tell them how you saw this behaviour.

For example: “I was worried when I turned up at your house to pick you up for school and you weren’t there. I was thinking if you were sick, why weren’t you home? And if you were well enough to go out, why weren’t you well enough to come to school?”

- If they become emotional or angry, stop the conversation, and suggest another time to talk.



## Activity 6: Role Play

### Instructions:

- a. Consider the following scenario.
- b. Divide into groups and discuss how you might deal with it.
- c. In your group, role play the conversation you will have with Kyle for the whole class.
- d. At the end of the presentations, discuss which role play seemed to work best and why.

Kyle has been missing a lot of school.

Kyle had told you he was staying at home to help look after his little brother while his mum was out. But his mum knew nothing about it. She thought he was going to school. She only learnt the truth when one of his aunties saw him hanging around in town with some other boys, smoking and drinking beer. When Kyle's aunty approached him and asked him why he wasn't at school, he swore at her and told her to mind her own business.

One of the boys Kyle has been hanging out with has been in constant trouble for stealing and is likely to be put in juvenile detention the next time he is caught. This worries his mum as well, because she knows Kyle could get involved.

Kyle's mum is alone and she asks for your help to deal with Kyle and get him back to school before he gets caught up in trouble.

## Part 4: Working with Others

RSAS workers are not alone. You just need to know where to seek support.

In other units in this program, you learn where to go for special help when dealing with complex issues and issues of suspected child abuse. This is important when dealing with specific challenges.

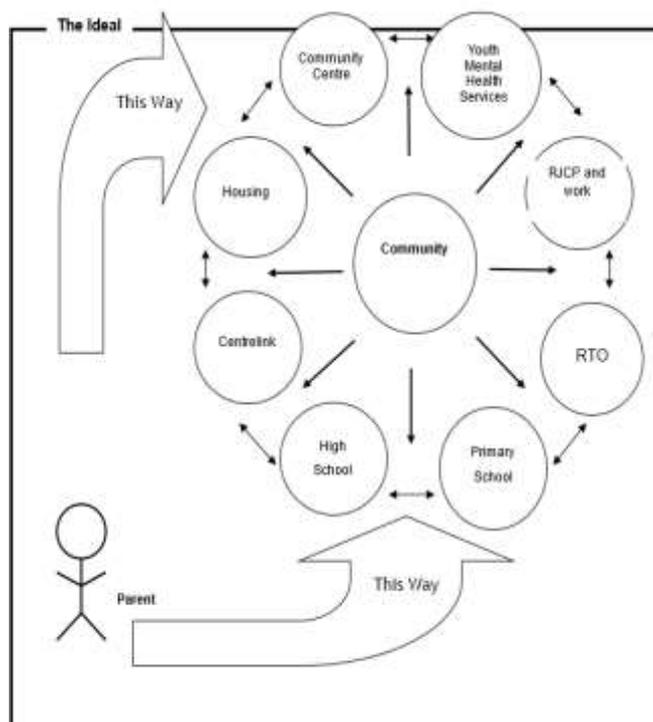
However, if you have not yet studied these units, and you are facing a specific challenge at the moment, now is a good time to discuss it. Your trainer can provide some direction.



### Activity 7: Discussion

#### Instructions:

- What challenges are you currently facing with your participant group?
- Do you need assistance in finding the right person or agency to provide support?



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