

Establishing a safe environment for a high quality PSHE lesson

- \ **1 Set up clear ground rules:** Create ground rules through a class contract or working agreement with students which will clearly state the agreed basis on which all discussions/ participation will take place. Examples could include: taking care when divulging information about ourselves or listening to each other without judgement each other without judgement. An effective set of ground rules will be in language that is age appropriate and, as far as possible, devised as positive behaviours, e.g. 'We will listen to each other', 'We will be sensitive to the needs of other people'.
- \ **2 Non-judgemental approach:** A good PSHE lesson generates discussion, and although some views or opinions can and should be challenged, it is important not to shame or judge a student who shares something sensitive or controversial with the class. Instead, educators should praise students who keep to the ground rules and appropriately challenge those who do not.
- \ **3 'No real names' policy:** It is important that students feel that their learning is taking place in a safe environment and a PSHE lesson should be a safe place for them to speak about their feelings, thoughts and opinions, if they so wish. To protect themselves, and others, students should always talk in the third person and speak about 'a friend' or 'someone they know' instead of using people's real names.
- \ **4 Listening to others:** It is important that all students feel they can share their thoughts and opinions freely and that they will be listened to by both the other students and teacher. Students should feel that any comment or question can be asked no matter how small.
- \ **5 No obligation to participate:** It is important to reassure students that they do not have to participate in anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or answer any question which they feel is too personal. If at any point a student wishes not to participate in a certain activity it is better not to insist on it as it may be the case that they have direct personal experience of some of the issues being discussed, and therefore taking part may feel overwhelming.
- \ **6 Handling questions:** Given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed in PSHE lessons it may be that you are asked something which you are unsure of or not comfortable answering. It is important to check you've understood their question clearly and explain that you might not know the answer, but that you will find out more and get back to them later. You might need to consult a more senior colleague or check the school policy if it is a safeguarding issue. Try to always ask the students themselves what they think before giving your opinion.

Be aware that how you answer a question may depend on the situation in which it was asked. Consider different responses such as: short, simple answer to the class, answer them privately after the lesson or value the question but explain it goes beyond the lesson's learning objectives and that you can talk about it another time. You may also wish to have an anonymous question box available for students to ask more sensitive questions. For more ideas on how to handle sensitive and controversial issues see **page 8**.
- \ **7 Seating plans:** As PSHE is a diverse curriculum area where discussion plays a large part in the learning, it may be worth considering an ideal or an alternative seating arrangement that encourages discussion and involvement. Some activities may also require the students to move around so a more open space may be preferable.
- \ **8 Expectations around disclosures:** It is important for young people to understand that while the session provides a space to be open and honest, the school has a duty of care to protect young people. Any disclosures made that are considered by an educator to be a safeguarding issue cannot be kept a secret and must be followed up. This should be reported in line with your school's safeguarding policy.

For more guidance on how to approach a high quality PSHE lesson you can read the **PSHE Association's guidelines**¹³.

13. www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/curriculum