Establishing a safe and supportive learning environment

These Education Packs are designed to provide opportunities for children and young people to think about their online lives and the issues that might be affecting themselves or others.

When setting up any lesson that addresses potentially sensitive subjects, it is essential to begin by creating a safe, supportive environment. By helping learners to feel confident and secure, they are more likely to share their ideas and opinions, ask questions, and contribute to discussions without fear of judgment or negative feedback.

Before running an activity

Think about your physical space

Decide beforehand if you would like to change the seating arrangement of your space, e.g. sitting in a circle or changing the seating plan. Learners may feel more comfortable seated in a circle, or in smaller groups.

Encourage inclusivity

Remind learners of your school/setting policy around treating others with respect. It is important to be clear that learners are expected to be mindful of the ways other people work and communicate, and that everyone's opinions are valid.

Take a non-judgmental approach

Although some views or opinions can and should be challenged, it is important for both the educator and other learners not to shame or judge a learner who shares something sensitive.

'No real names' policy

Ask learners to talk in the third person and speak about 'a friend' or 'someone they know' instead of using people's real names if they are recounting a story or an example. If learners do feel they need to share a personal story, signpost them to a time and place where they can do so with an appropriate member of staff.

Creating a set of ground rules

Work with your learners to agree on a set of ground rules/a group contract that clearly states the expectations for behaviour and communication. It is important these are generated by the learners themselves, so that they feel ownership, agency and responsibility over them. An effective set of ground rules will be in language that is age appropriate and, as far as possible, framed as positive behaviours, e.g. 'We will support one another.'

Examples could include:

- We will listen to others and allow each other time to speak.
- We will respond to others without judgement.
- We will ask questions if we are unsure about anything.

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