

Teaching about mental health

Teaching pupils about mental health and emotional wellbeing as part of a developmental PSHE Education programme can support them in developing the skills, language and knowledge they need to keep themselves and others healthy and safe.

These guidelines are designed to help you ensure the safety of your pupils when addressing these topics. Members are welcome to contact us for further advice.

Familiarise yourself with school policies

Your lessons may result in disclosures from pupils concerned about their own wellbeing, or the wellbeing of a friend. Make sure you are fully aware of the policies and procedures you should follow if a pupil confides in you (of course it is important not to promise confidentiality if information is disclosed which suggests a child is at risk). If policies are not fit for purpose or procedures are unclear, this should be highlighted with the relevant member of staff.

Set specific aims and objectives

You wouldn't plan a maths lesson without clear aims in mind and the same should be true of a PSHE lesson. Think carefully about the ways in which you want pupils to advance their:

- Knowledge
- Language
- Understanding &
- Skills

You should have a clear plan for achieving this.

Consider vulnerable pupils

Plan every lesson based on the assumption that at least one pupil – and possibly many more – will have been personally affected by the issues the lesson draws on. This will ensure you keep every pupil safe.

Distance the learning

Use distancing techniques to prevent the lesson feeling too personal for pupils. Ideas that work well include:

- Case studies
- Role play
- Puppets

Negotiate ground rules

Either reinforce or introduce ground rules for the lesson. These work best when negotiated with pupils, though you may need to steer the conversation – e.g. discussing confidentiality is essential. (note: it is important not to promise confidentiality if information is disclosed which suggests a child is at risk)

Ground rules to consider:

Openness	Keep the conversation in the room	Non-judgmental approach
Right to pass	Make no assumptions	Listen to others
Use of respectful language	Ask questions	Seeking help and advice

Consider likely questions / misconceptions

You'll feel more confident leading a lesson on a difficult topic if you've prepared yourself for the different scenarios that might arise and the questions you may face. You can do this both by reading around the topic and by thinking about misconceptions you have heard in the playground or the media recently.

Invite questions before and after the lesson

Allow pupils to anonymously submit questions before and after the lesson. This will allow you to prepare answers and will allow pupils to ask questions they feel unable to raise in front of peers.

Signpost support

Locate sources of school, local and national support. Highlight these with pupils and explain how they can be accessed. Be sure also to explain what is likely to happen if a pupil seeks support as this can be a great cause of uncertainty.

Inform staff and parents

Pupils are far more likely to seek support for their mental health concerns following a lesson on the topic. Therefore, it's important that you make staff and parents aware of the fact the topic is being covered and ensure they know how to provide appropriate support.

First do no harm

When you think your lesson is ready, review it with critical eyes and share it with a trusted colleague and make sure you are confident that you can teach the topic confidently and safely. You must assure yourself that you are not going to do any harm by teaching the lesson.

Teaching Checklist Recap

- ✓ Familiarise yourself with school policies
- ✓ Set specific aims and objectives
- ✓ Consider vulnerable pupils
- ✓ Distance the learning
- ✓ Negotiate ground rules
- ✓ Consider likely questions / misconceptions
- ✓ Invite questions before and after the lesson
- ✓ Signpost support
- ✓ Inform staff and parents
- ✓ First do no harm

Further Support

PSHE Association resources:

- [Dos and Don'ts when teaching about eating disorders](#)
- [Common Misconceptions about Eating Disorders](#)
- [Talking to Pupils when they make Mental Health Disclosures](#)
- [Ground rules for teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing](#)
- [Handling sensitive or controversial issues through PSHE education](#)

Quality Assured Teaching Resources:

- [STOP Stigma by Cornwall Healthy Schools](#)
- DEAL Resources – Samaritans – coming soon – email k.harvey@samaritans.org for info
- [DfE Mental Health in Schools Guidance](#)

Please also [visit YoungMinds](#), a charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

Contact our mental health and emotional wellbeing advisor, Dr Pooky Knightsmith:

pooky@pshe-association.org.uk

020 7922 7950