

Example teaching approaches for PSHE education

Ground rules

Experienced PSHE teachers know that it is important that discussion takes place in a climate of trust, cooperation and support. A safe learning environment helps students share feelings, explore values and attitudes, express opinions and consider those of others without attracting negative feedback. As well as encouraging more open discussion it also helps to make sure that teachers are not anxious about unexpected disclosures or comments.

Negotiating and establishing ground rules help to minimise inappropriate and unintended disclosures and comments of a negative nature made towards other students whether intentional or not. Such ground rules support broader class rules and the school's behaviour policy.

To be effective, students and teachers need to develop ground rules together and then test them in discussion and group activities, amending them as necessary. Examples of ground rules include not asking personal questions, respecting what people say, listening to others and having the right to 'pass' if you do not wish to comment. Once established ground rules need to be revisited, maintained and if necessary amended as the group evolves.

Starting points

Students will have some existing knowledge, skills, understanding and beliefs relating to many PSHE issues. They will have been exposed to parental, family, peer, school, community and media views on different issues and will be aware of a range of related attitudes and values. They will be developing – or have developed their own ideas and responses and teachers need to be aware of this. Students' existing knowledge, skills, understanding and beliefs can be used as a starting point for discussion and help ensure learning is relevant.

For this reason it is often helpful to start units or topics with activities that establish what is already believed or known, what misconceptions may be held and those areas where students can draw on real life experience (N.B. see guidance on dealing with sensitive issues – not all real life experience is positive and not all students will want to refer to it.)

These starter activities include:

- Group or class brainstorming
- Draw-and-write activities¹
- Responding to and interpreting an incident or story
- 'Graffiti' sheets
- Using photographs or pictures to stimulate discussion – either brought in by the students or provided by the teacher (photopacks or newspapers and magazines may help)

¹ in draw-and-write activities, students are asked to respond spontaneously to an open-ended question by drawing a picture about a particular issue and writing notes explaining the drawing. Drawing and writing could be in relation to – for example - health issues, community matters, careers options or financial situations. Ideas can be collected before and after the activity to provide evidence of change in knowledge, views or perceptions.

- Student-to-student interviews
- A 'round', where each student contributes something they know about a topic.

Group work

The ability to work in different groups is fundamental to PSHE education. When planning it is important to consider the purpose of the group work for specific activities to decide whether students should work in:

- Single sex groups or mixed groups
- Groups of mixed ability or selected by ability
- Groups randomly formed or manipulated to make sure that certain students do or do not work together
- Small groups (of no more than 4 or 6) or larger groups.

Should the students move from pairs to fours to eights as part of the process?

Fun activities can be used to arrange the groups. The ground rules should include a willingness to work together cooperatively. Group members decide who will make notes, who will report back and who will make sure that everyone has had their say. Effective group work gives students who do not normally work together opportunities to do so. (This is important as always working in friendship groups can reinforce a limited or narrow set of values or beliefs.) It also encourages students who may be isolated in the class to participate and provides opportunities for leadership as well as membership.

To help discussion students can develop prompt questions such as:

What do we (think, feel, believe) about...?

How can we/will we/should we...?

What if...? What can...? What will...?

Who can help us with...?

When do we need to...?

In group discussions, students might decide to have a formal process for sharing ideas. For example, they take turns and listen without criticising each other and they agree not to become attached to their own suggestions. When someone puts forward an suggestion the group takes ownership of it. The group decides whether to accept, reject or radically change or reject the idea. Votes may be taken if necessary to determine the majority view.

This process can:

- Make sure that the group maintains unity of purpose
- Prevent stronger personalities from overriding the wishes of the majority
- Reduce the potential for tension arising from a clash of egos
- Allow less confident group members and more confident or popular group members to feel they are being listened to equally.

Jigsaw

A jigsaw activity is when, after a group discussion or activity, students number themselves from 1 to 4 if there are four in the group. Then all the number 1s from each group join together, all the number 2s do the same, and so on. Each person then becomes a spokesperson for their original or 'home' group, sharing the results of their discussion with the new group.

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To help them feed back to the new group they can ask their home group questions for example,

- What are our main points?
- What do we all agree on?
- Where do we differ in our views and ideas?
- Why do our viewpoints differ?
- Could we make up a rule or law to apply to the situation to make it fairer?
- What might be the best outcome for all concerned?

The same approach can be used in reverse for the first stages in the discussion, where each member of the home group is allocated an aspect of the project, problem or investigation to research or clarify. They divide into their number groups to discuss their allocated aspect and to share ideas and information. They then return to their home group with the results of these discussions to put together the whole picture.

Circle time

Circle time approaches provide opportunities to explore pupils' concerns, develop relationships, create a sense of belonging and experience silence and reflection. Within the ground rules, pupils speak in turn in response to prompts or a previously agreed agenda. They listen to each other without comment or making judgements. Circle time encourages pupils to talk positively about themselves and to affirm their achievements. Conducted in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and mutual respect, and in conjunction with group work and role play, circle time develops communication skills and helps raise self-esteem in pupils.

Role play

Role play is not about performance or performing – it is a method through which students are able to explore personal and social experience. It can be very powerful and should be planned with great care. Role play is used to explore:

- how different people behave, in ways that are perceived to be good or bad
- different ways of life
- different beliefs and opinions
- being of different social standing
- a range of feelings and emotions

The real learning comes not from the role but through reflection on the actions of those whose roles they and others are playing. It is very important for the students to think through questions about motives, consequences of actions and effects of circumstances, context and environment. They should consider the attitudes of those whom they are pretending to be, and challenge their own and others' attitudes. Being in role allows pupils to develop empathy and practise skills they will need in real-life situations.

The teacher's role is to help students reflect on what they have learnt, for example about themselves, about others and about being sensitive to the needs of others. This can include individuals or groups within the class for whom the issue explored in the role play may be personal.

The following questions can be used to support role play or drama. They should be adapted according to the students' age and stage of development.

- What could you say to someone in that situation to persuade him or her to act differently?
- How might that action affect other people, family, friends, school or other organisation and community?
- What should happen to people who do that?
- What would happen if everyone behaved like that?
- Who has the power and authority in this situation? Was it used wisely in your opinion?
- Who should decide about that? How? Why?
- How far should these people be treated as equal or different? (for example with regard to their needs or level of responsibility)?
- How would things be different if?
- What are the rights and wrongs of the situation?

Using photographs

Photographs are an important stimulus for classroom discussion and should be used in the context of other classroom activities. Photographs from published teacher resources may be used, or from newspapers and magazines where the event to be considered is current. The photographs may be used in a variety of contexts. The teacher can either give students information to help them understand and interpret what might be happening, or students may be left to develop their own scenarios. Students can develop enquiry questions to help them explore what is happening in the picture for example:

- Who might have taken the photo?
- What was it taken?
- What might have happened before the photo was taken?
- What could have happened afterwards?
- What is the bigger story behind the picture?

To develop empathy, students can explore the links between their own lives and the events and people in the photographs.

Using cameras

Students can take their own photographs using a digital camera. They can begin by discussing in groups what to look for and then take photographs of real situations, for example to represent evidence of rules and laws being followed, or of equal opportunities. They can then edit the images to represent 'respecting others' or 'cooperation'. The results can be used to make displays, illustrate policy and contribute to leaflets or resources.

Micro debating and 'briefings'

Full class debates can offer an opportunity for young people to develop the skills of research, analysis and creating powerful arguments, however they can also use a lot of curriculum time and some learners may be more involved than others. An alternative is a 'micro debate' where two pupils research and debate an issue in front of two other pupils who then have their turn. This can increase the involvement of learners.

'Briefings' offer can offer a more balanced approach inviting young people to brief a fictitious minister on both the pros and cons of an issue in readiness to face questioning from a fictional 'press'.

Storytelling

Storytelling will always have a place in helping students to consider social and moral issues and examine their own responses to situations. In so doing, they will clarify their own attitudes and values, and learn to respect the values of others where they differ from their own.

Storytelling can also be used to develop students' moral reasoning and to develop empathy. Sensitive questioning by the teacher allows students to assess the alternatives, make reasoned choices and develop problem-solving skills. Storytelling can be the basis for role play. The stories should reflect the lesson objectives and different cultures and times, and should explore real and imaginary events. Students should be allowed to make their own choices for stories that cover the themes being explored.

Students could use the following questions to discuss fiction:

- Imagine you are X. what do you think she/he is thinking? What reason would you give for her/his actions?
- Who is affected by that situation? How? How much does it matter?
- What might it feel like to be in that situation?
- Can you think of a similar situation in real life?
- Was X right to do that?
- Why do you think that was right/wrong?
- How far do you think the character's ideas come from her/his religion, culture, family, friends, own thoughts?
- Can you think of other examples from your own experience?
- If the character could ask you for your advice what would you say?
- How far does what we have been thinking about apply to people in general?
- What kind of community do you/we want?

Activity weeks/days

Suspending the timetable for a day or week and focusing the whole class or school on a single theme, for example, health-related activities or personal finance can be an effective approach (providing it is not the only provision) to enriching a PSHE programme. Such events can generate enthusiasm and commitment. They allow students to take part in visits, experience the perspective of external agencies and visitors, and work in partnership with parents and other members of the community.

Activity weeks or days require extensive planning and coordination. However they allow issues to be explored in-depth and they can bring about changes in the culture of the school, whilst developing and reinforcing skills in students.

The outcomes may be recorded on video or digital camera as well as or instead of being formally written up and this provides evidence of student learning as well as providing material for display to the community.

Visitors and outside organisations

Using visitors can be an extremely worthwhile and rewarding experience for students. Visitors can include individuals or representatives from the community or organisations with particular expertise in the issues being discussed. Visitors can also include students from other classes, schools or colleges.

Students should be involved in planning for the visit and in briefing the visitor about the context of the visit and the kind of questions they will be asked. The visitor will also need to know:

- How much time is available
- How many students are involved
- The age and ability of the students
- What equipment and accommodations is available.

Visitors should always be in support of the teacher – who retains responsibility for the overall learning experience and for discipline. The teacher also has responsibility for ensuring that, if the visitor presents a partial view of an issue, the opposing view is presented at some point, to provide a balanced perspective (see [PSHE Association advice document on using visitors](#)).

Answering children's questions

The point about questioning is the skill the teacher will need in recognising the type of question being asked and then respond appropriately: The following examples will help you determine the type of question being asked of the teacher.

Is it a question that demonstrates the pupil's response to something they do not understand?

Is it a question that suggests the pupil has some knowledge of the issue and is seeking clarification?

Is it a question that suggests the pupil knows the answer but wants affirmation?

Is it a question that can be answered of interest to the whole class or does it require an individual response later?

Is it a question that suggests the pupils has inappropriate knowledge/beliefs (a personal disclosure that may need following up) eg racist, sexual, criminal?

Is it a question that is personal, designed to embarrass the teacher, make the class laugh?

Is it a question that is intended to illicit personal information from the teacher? (In which case remind the pupil of the ground rule 'not to ask personal questions' and move the learning on.)

Not all questions require a teacher to offer an immediate answer and teachers should feel able to give themselves some thinking time, if necessary consult with a colleague or school policy before answering. 'That is a really interesting question and I need a little time to give you a really good answer' both respects the pupil's curiosity whilst giving the teacher time to construct an appropriate answer.