

Student Voice in SPHE

Imagine making student consultation your starting point in planning teaching and learning in SPHE. What would the benefits be? And what would it look like?

As with all subjects, learning in SPHE is enhanced by building in regular opportunities to listen to the voices of young people about their prior knowledge, concerns and interests and asking them what really matters for their learning. Otherwise, we risk planning learning based on our adult assumptions of what young people need, rather than their real and expressed needs.

Consulting with students about the content of SPHE lessons and the methodologies for teaching and learning will produce valuable insights; finding out which topics a particular class or year group feels are most important to them at this moment in time will give you a very current picture of their needs; and the very act of consulting with your students will help foster positive teacher-student relationships and shared responsibility for the learning. Listening to students' views can also be a springboard for bringing parents into the conversation.

Here are some ideas for getting started which can be used as stand-alone activities or can be combined. Where possible it is good to offer students a choice of ways to engage.

- Prepare sets of cards (hard copy or digital) with different topics from the SPHE curriculum written or depicted on each card. Ask students to rank the cards or arrange them with the most important card at the top. Tease out why the cards at the top are important and what exactly they want to learn about these topics. After class, consider how the students' priorities can inform your planning.
- Ask students to reflect on their learning in SPHE. What was good about it? Was anything missing? What would they like to be different? Ask open questions, for example, 'was there anything you found particularly interesting/challenging/helpful?' , 'what would make it better?' what would help you feel more included?' And for students who might find open ended questions difficult, you might ask them to use an emoji or picture to signal how they felt at the end of a lesson or series of lessons and say why.
- Invite your students to form small groups. Explain the aim of SPHE. Ask what they have learnt so far that has helped them to move towards achieving this aim? What else could they learn about in class to help achieve the aim? Are there particular skills they feel they need support in developing?
- At the end of lessons, ask open questions that allow students to give you regular feedback, for example, 'was there anything you found particularly interesting/challenging/helpful?' , 'what would make it better?' what would help you feel more included?' And for students who might find open ended questions difficult, you might ask them to use an emoji to signal how they felt at the end of a lesson or series of lessons and say why.

Young people have a right to have their voices heard and for adults to listen and take them seriously in matters that affect them.

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Student Voice in SPHE/RSE

- Invite students to write a postcard or create an oral recording to their past self about what they wish they had been taught, and another to their future self about what they hope they will be taught. Consider ways of collating the cards and sharing, while taking care that contributions are anonymous.
- Use Entrance Slips as the class begins (post-its or mentimeter) to ask – reflecting on the previous day's lesson, is there something that they are having difficulty with, or a question they would like answered?
- Use Exit Slips at the end of class - students can write a 'take- away' idea or any questions they are left with related to the day's lesson. The exit slips can provide you with insights to help in planning the next lesson.
- Use KWL before introducing a new topic and again when drawing the lesson to a close. Ask students to create three columns and label each column as shown below. To begin, students jot down what they already know. Then they jot down things they wonder about or would like to know related to the topic. At the end of the lesson/s, students record (using words, images, etc) things they learned.

Know	Wonder	Learn



The link between student voice and a safe classroom environment is worth reflecting upon. Invite students to consider the various things that make it possible for them to have a voice and what are the things that prevent students from expressing their opinions, thoughts and feelings in class? These can be collated anonymously and then working in pairs/ small groups, students can explore solutions.

Further useful resources

The *Negotiated Integrated Curriculum* (NIC) approach involves teachers negotiating and enacting the curriculum with their students around student concerns and questions. The ten steps involved in this approach are summarised [here](#).

[Our Voices Our Schools](#) is a resource for schools to support listening to and involving young people in decision making about matters that affect them in school.

For further practical suggestions on how to enable young people's voices in your classroom, click [here](#).

Other relevant topics

What makes a safe SPHE classroom?
 Supporting student reflection in SPHE
 Creative approaches to assessment
 Effective pedagogical approaches