

## How can I model positive relationships with my students?

At the heart of all learning and teaching is the relationship. Here are some ways you can create and model positive and supportive relationship when teaching SPHE.

### Show you care.

Get to know students' names as quickly as possible and show interest and concern for them both in and beyond the classroom.

### Be a good listener.

Think about yourself as a young adult. Did anyone make you feel truly listened to? If so, what did they do? Copy this! Imagine what life is like for young people in many different circumstances. Show empathy but avoid intensely questioning or probing personal stories. Don't put anyone on the spot. Just be open, be interested, listen attentively and show you care.

### Validate their feelings.

Voice the feelings you sense without targeting a specific student (e.g. 'It sounds like a number of you are worried about that.'). Remind students that experiencing negative emotions and worrying is normal. Indeed some stress may even help to motivate us to seek support or take action to care for ourselves or others.

### Focus on their strengths and capabilities.

Encourage students to reflect on their personal strengths and how these can help in challenging situations. Remind them of times when they have coped and ways they show resilience in the face of challenge.

### Support students find solutions and ways of coping together with peers.

Create opportunities for students to engage in problem solving and find solutions together. Let them brainstorm ideas together, and resist the urge to jump in or interrupt with prescribed solutions. Encourage students to pick the best solution that might work for them. Allowing them to identify coping mechanisms individually or with peers will build the efficacy to draw on these mechanisms in future.

### Assume diversity as the norm within every classroom.

Assume that there are a diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities, and religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in every classroom. When planning for teaching and learning it can be useful, for example, to ask yourself 'how would a young person who identifies as LGBT (or has family members who identify as LGBT) experience this lesson? Would they feel included?'

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### Show respect and understanding for diverse views.

Young people bring different life experiences to the classroom and have a range of values, attitudes, beliefs and opinions. As they grow in their awareness of these different life experiences, they often want to talk about them. It is important to plan for and allow these conversations to happen and to be prepared for possible strong views and responses.

### Help students to understand feelings.

Remind students that feelings are neither good nor bad. And all emotions, pleasant and unpleasant, come and go like waves. They are not a permanent state. Being able to acknowledge our emotions and talk to someone about them can make it easier to cope. Encourage students to talk to their parents or other trusted adults.

### Show empathy when dealing with upset.

If a student is upset, let them know that this is very normal and understandable. Check in with them about what they need at this time. For example, they may need a private space to avoid feeling embarrassed in front of their peers. They may choose to stay in the class or in their small group. By handling these occasions in a supportive but enabling way, not only are you building a safe and inclusive classroom environment, you are also enabling the young person to learn self-care.

As always, if you have ongoing concerns about a student, seek support from the school's structures such as the Student Support Team. If you have child protection concerns, report to the designated liaison person (usually the principal) in the school.

### Other relevant guidance on this toolkit

- Teacher as facilitator
- What makes a safe SPHE classroom?
- What makes an inclusive SPHE classroom?
- Dealing with sensitive/challenging conversations
- Dealing with disclosure about sexual abuse