

Dealing with sensitive and controversial issues

Teaching about drugs may be considered sensitive and controversial. Opportunities should be provided for students to discuss and reflect on drug related issues in a non-threatening environment.

In any effective classroom environment, setting ground rules is important. Agreeing upon ground rules enables both the students and the teacher to have a clear understanding of what behaviour is acceptable and expected. Examples of rules include:

- respect a person's right to privacy by not using their name when talking about experiences. The same discussion can occur without breaching anyone's right to privacy by using third person e.g. "I know someone who...." or "A person I know...."
- respect other people's opinions. Listen to the ideas of others without 'putting them down' or harassing them. All people have the right to private beliefs and the purpose of discussion is often to listen to a range of values and attitudes expressed and to reflect on personal values, attitudes and behaviours
- people have the right not to offer an opinion if they do not wish to
- each individual is responsible for his or her own behaviour.

When discussing drug use there is a possibility of students revealing sensitive information concerning their own or other people's drug use and teachers are reminded of their duty of care regarding students' wellbeing. Teachers must take reasonable care to protect students against risks of harm. Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect abuse or neglect, teachers should inform the principal.



Students may sometimes reveal personal and private details when discussing drug use. To minimise disclosures that may increase the vulnerability of a student and upset others, make it clear that students should avoid revealing personal information, which may include drug use, in the group setting.

The technique of positive interrupting may be used to stop students from saying something they may regret later. Interrupt students before they disclose and inform them that they can talk privately after class if they wish. This should be carried out in a supportive and positive way by indicating you have heard the student but it would be better if the issue was discussed at a later time.