

## Effective pedagogical approaches in SPHE

When planning SPHE lessons, it is important to provide opportunities for **awareness, dialogue, reflection and action**.

### ■ Awareness

Awareness is the ability to recognise and understand one's own thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour. It includes understanding how different factors influence our sense of self and how we live our lives, including the influence of family, peers, the internet, gender, culture and social/cultural norms. This also includes an awareness that to be human is to be in relationships and that we all share a common humanity, dignity, rights and responsibilities.

### ■ Dialogue

Through dialogical teaching and learning students are facilitated to engage with a diversity of viewpoints; discuss and reflect on their own perspectives, values, and behaviours and those of others; enlarge their understanding of topics of relevance to their lives; and come to informed, thoughtful decisions based on their personal values, with due regard to their own rights and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of others. Respectful dialogue is aided by presuming a diversity of backgrounds, identities, cultures and experiences in every classroom and seeing this as a resource for learning.

### ■ Reflection and action

This is about students reflecting on what they have learned and coming to their own personal insights and conclusions in response to their learning. It enables students to consider how the learning can inform their choices, behaviour and relationships, and discerning what it means for their lives now or for the future. Learning in SPHE is a 'praxis'; an ongoing process of critical reflection and action, nurtured by dialogue with others.

Participative and dialogical teaching methodologies are an essential part of effective teaching and learning in SPHE. The pedagogies suggested in the following pages will help create an engaging and dialogical learning environment where young people can discuss, reflect, and problem-solve on questions that really matter for their lives now and in the future.



In recommending methodologies, we are not suggesting that every class should be taught in a prescribed or uniform manner. Teachers will exercise professional judgement and flexibility in choosing the teaching and learning strategies best suited to supporting their students in achieving the learning outcomes.

David Kolb's **Experiential Learning Cycle** provides an important framework for planning learning in SPHE. Find out about it [here](#) before going any further. The methodologies below can be used when planning different stages in this cycle.

### Icebreakers and energisers

These are quick activities that can be used to energise a group or to create a relaxed and collaborative atmosphere for working together. Some examples can be found [here](#)

### Relaxation and focusing techniques

Practising relaxation regularly in SPHE can help create a calm space for discussion and personal reflection. This can be challenging in a class context so keep it simple and brief. You might use this at the beginning or end of class –it could be a breathing exercise, a short mindful meditation, a piece of music, a poem, an inspirational quote, etc.

A podcast with relaxation techniques from the National Psychological Support Service (NEPS) can be found [here](#)

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**Note: Mindfulness is one calming tool that can be helpful for some people but it is not suitable for all. Practicing mindfulness in a classroom context needs to be approached with care as sitting quietly and tuning into themselves may trigger upset for some. Students should always be given a choice to participate or not, and provided with alternative activities to help calm emotions. Remember that one size doesn't fit all.**

## Use video clips, music and popular media

There is no limit to the range of video clips, song lyrics, etc that could usefully be incorporated into SPHE lesson planning. Judicious selection is important and a clear sense of purpose about what learning you want to achieve. For example, you might select a video clip because it provides an inspirational message, because it provides information or because it offers guidance on how to manage a specific situation. Clips of TV programmes, songs or advertisements that students are familiar with can provide a stimulus for opening up a discussion too. These can prompt discussion, for example, about depictions of relationships and what's appropriate or not appropriate in healthy relationships. Go to the resources section of this Toolkit for suggestions.

## Use cooperative teaching methodologies

Research on co-operative learning suggests that when students work together - discussing, explaining, negotiating, agreeing, helping and encouraging each other - it has a positive impact on achievement, motivation for learning, thinking skills and self-esteem. It also leads to more positive interpersonal relationships within the classroom and an increased sense of wellbeing. See [Working with Others](#) for a wealth of useful ideas, such as *Jigsaw learning*, *Placemats* and more

## Use creative and arts based active learning methods

Art-based teaching methods can be very helpful in teaching SPHE - especially topics that may trigger an emotional as well as an intellectual response. Arts based methods take us out of our heads and open up more imaginative responses. They also facilitate different

learning styles. Using creative learning-by-doing methods focused on non-verbal interactions rather than talking, reading or writing, can enable enjoyment and participation of all learners and increase group cohesion.

Ideas for creating posters, mood boards, films, storyboards and flashcards as well as suggestions for using drama, movement, dance, poetry and visual art can be found in [Agenda – A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter](#)

## Share research to stimulate discussion or as a means of challenging the 'norm'

The internal desire (recognised or unrecognised) for peer acceptance or approval can often be more powerful for young people than external or overt peer pressure. Opportunities should therefore be planned to challenge any sense of 'everyone of my age does this/thinks this'. Relevant research data can be shared and discussed in class (in accessible format) to inform, stimulate discussion and perhaps challenge perceptions about what's 'the norm'. One useful example is the [Health Behaviour in School-aged Children \(HBSC\) report \(2020\)](#) based on data collected from 10-17 year olds in Ireland.

## Teach the language and skills needed for dialogue and listening

We cannot assume that students have the language or the skills needed for respectful dialogue. Frequently these skills need to be taught and this takes time. Begin by agreeing some helpful phrases that will support classroom dialogue such as the examples on the following page.

*I think....*

*I believe...*

*I feel ...*

*I agree/disagree and this is why...*

*That's an interesting idea!*

*I respect that others think ...but I think differently because...*

*I know some people might say ... although I see things a bit differently ...*

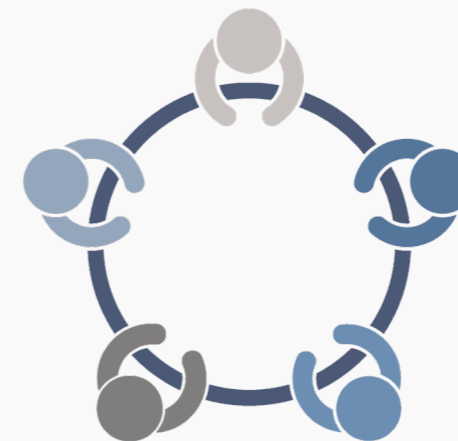
*Do I understand you correctly, are you saying....?*

*I'm not sure what you mean. Can you say a bit more about that?*

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Students can also be invited to come up with additional useful phrases to use when engaging in small group or classroom discussion.

## Create a classroom that facilitates listening



Re-arrange the classroom, if necessary, to ensure that the students are not sitting in rows and always looking to you, the teacher as the 'expert'. Instead arrange the desks so that students can easily move into group work and regularly engage in small discussion groups. Or better still, arrange the chairs so that the class can sit in a circle to talk and listen to each other.

## Techniques to promote listening include:

**Paraphrasing** – An excellent way to promote listening is by asking students to re-state the perspective of others. Invite students to paraphrase what they hear another student saying to build this skill.

**Think, pair, share** – Pose a question and then allow time for reflection and paired discussion before opening up class discussion.

**Wait time** – Make sure all students are given the chance to think before engaging in discussion or responding to a question or stimulus material.

**Effective use of questioning** - A key methodology in the teaching of SPHE is the framing of good questions. Well thought-out questions can challenge assumptions, stimulate critical thinking and prompt reflection. Plan teaching and learning around a small number of thoughtful and open questions. Also elicit the students' own questions and use these to help plan lessons.

## Promote dialogue over debate

Students usually need help in understanding the differences between dialogue and debate. Dialogue aims for understanding, enlargement of view, complicating one's thinking, an openness to change.

The use of debates can be valuable for developing communication skills and presenting opposing points of view. However, within the SPHE class it's important to be aware of the limitations of debate and times when debate might actually reinforce negative or unhealthy attitudes. Students need to feel they can change their mind and this is less likely to happen when students take up an assigned position. Within the SPHE classroom the end goal should be for everyone to move towards a more reflective and informed position rather than for one side to 'win' and for the other side to 'lose'.

## Use fictional scenarios or case studies

Students favour teaching and learning approaches that allow them to discuss real life questions that are relevant to their present and future lives. However, creating some emotional distance is also important. For this reason, framing lessons around scenarios or case studies (either fictional or real) with which students may be able to identify, can be very effective. Students can be encouraged to consider the situation from different characters' perspective, or provide advice to a character in the scenarios, or agree next steps/arrive at a solution in the scenario. Scenarios can also prompt students to empathise with the feelings or situation of others. This exploration of 'something happening to someone else' is very different from talking about their own experiences and helps to depersonalise what is being discussed, thus providing greater safety.

## Other relevant topics

Teacher as facilitator

Reflection in SPHE

Creative approaches to assessment