

Considerations for answering challenging questions

Points to remember when answering young peoples' questions:

- What is the underlying information the young person is asking for?
- What key messages do I need to impart here? Is it:
 - celebration of diversity
 - responsibility for behaviour
 - growth and development messages
 - sexual assault is a crime
 - where young people can go for support
- Answer the question from a global rather than personal perspective
- Answer briefly and accurately
- Refer young people in the direction of further resources and support

Guide and encourage students to access reliable and accurate information services. This may be by providing phone numbers, contacts, fact sheets for young people to help link them into support services.

Family Planning NSW Talkline 1300 658 886 is a confidential telephone service staffed by experts in reproductive and sexual health. Family Planning NSW Talkline is open 8.30am to 5pm weekdays for information and referral advice. Further information is also available at www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline.

Kids Help Line - is Australia's free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25. Further information is found on their website <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/> or call 1800 55 1800.

Young people ask questions for a variety of reasons which include:

- to check if their situation is 'normal' or OK
- to hear what other young people or teachers think about an issue or situation
- to find out about resources available to them
- to gain accurate and reliable information

It is important to give accurate information and resources to young people. Where appropriate, use students' questions as a 'teachable' moment to invite students to reflect on situations from a range of angles and to refer to appropriate resources.

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KEY MESSAGES

- **Child protection**
Duty of care, mandatory reporting
- **Consent**
Legal age of consent, both people must agree, 'yes' feelings can turn into 'no' feelings
- **Personal to global**
Public v private information, distinguish the difference, maintain a professional role
- **Growth and development**
Physical, social and emotional changes
- **Referral/Resources**
Give students support networks, services, organisations, information, websites, hotlines, etc.
- **Discrimination**
Addressing and naming discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, race, gender, culture, age, etc.

DO

- Ensure anonymity – *make cards the same size, colour, shape and everyone hands a paper in whether they have a question or not*
- Set boundaries and expectations – *model language and appropriateness, encourage maturity*
- Listen for the hidden question – *what does the student really want to know and understand?*
- Be honest – *students will test you, if you don't know the answer it is OK 'I am not sure on the answer. Maybe I can find out the answer for next lesson.'*
- Use inclusive language – *partner, same-sex attracted, etc.*
- Use the 'teachable moment' – *sending a clear social justice message*
- Reflect questions back to students – *who could someone in this situation, turn to for information or support? 'who thinks they know the answer to that?'*
- Model ways of answering personal questions – *students are also learning how to appropriately interact within society*
- Answer personal questions from a global perspective – *e.g. 'everyone has the right...'*
- Use the third person – *e.g. 'it is different for different people...'*
- Provide further support or services – *available youth friendly services*
- Use protective interrupting – *avoid confidential disclosures*

DO NOT

- Be too serious – *humour can be useful*
- Take a personal perspective – *e.g. using personal experiences or anecdotes, answer personal questions*
- Use the first person – *e.g. 'when I did...'* or *'you should...'*
- Judge the question – *this may discourage future questions*
- Try to work out who wrote the question – *ensure anonymity*
- React to questions inappropriately – *all answers are valid no matter how silly questions may originally seem*
- Ignore questions – *don't rip them up or throw them out*
- Give advice – *teachers don't have professionally indemnity insurance, teachers/health promotion staff are not clinically trained and unable to give advice*
- Make up answers – *incorrect answers could place a student in risk*

Scaffold for answering challenging questions

Use the following scaffold to plan an answer to the question you have been given.

Question:

Consideration	Answer		How might you respond?
Does this question require you to re-visit your class contract/guidelines? i.e. is it personal?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you able to model how to answer private questions with this question?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Can you rephrase the question from the personal to the global?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there an opportunity to address what the question is really asking and recognise the possible reason for asking the question?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you able to include some of the key messages or create a teachable moment?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you able to refer students to resources/websites/support or use reflective questioning back to the class?	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	

Develop a full response to your question using the space below.
