

Handling Sensitive Topics And Controversial Issues

Talking about homelessness often involves addressing sensitive or controversial issues. We know that there are many reasons for, and causes of, homelessness. These conversations may evoke strong opinions or raise challenging questions about values and beliefs that have no easy answers. It is important to handle these issues without reinforcing stereotypes, increasing confusion or raising tension between students.



When talking about the issues, interventions and mindsets associated with lived homelessness, it is important to create a safe and positive classroom environment which encourages participation and cooperation. The activities in these lessons help students to make decisions about how they want to be treated by both teachers and their peers.

By helping to create an environment where students are encouraged to act with empathy, students can actively take part in increasing respect and empathy in the classroom and beyond.

When using teaching and learning activities from this resource, be mindful of the different learning abilities, maturity levels and personal backgrounds of your students. Many of the issues, interventions and mindsets explored in this resource are not limited to experiences of people who are homeless. It is important that teachers are aware of students within their class who may have direct or indirect experience with family trauma, addiction, mental illness and/or homelessness.

In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that students feel that they are in a safe learning environment. One of the primary ways of doing this is by setting group rules by establishing a mutually agreed list of sharing guidelines, displaying them in a highly visible place, and encouraging the class to kindly remind each other of the guidelines. These guidelines could include:

- Own your ideas by using “I think” rather than “you should.”
- Respect each other by remembering that each person has their own beliefs and values and their own world views, experiences and opinions.
- Each person has a right to contribute their ideas, so listen politely.
- Be brave in sharing your ideas, experiences and opinions.
- Consider the privacy of your classmates and appreciate that everyone has the right to uphold their privacy; this might mean they don’t want to share their ideas or experiences on an issue.
- Share feedback in a way that is considerate and positive: remember to be kind, helpful and specific when providing feedback.

By helping to create an environment where opinions and perspectives are respected, students are encouraged to actively take part in advancing respect for the rights of others, within the classroom and beyond. In cases where students require counselling or support, refer them to assistance from the school counsellor or from one of the organisations listed on the next page.

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Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is a counselling service for Australian children and young people aged between 5 and 25 years.

Website: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/>

Phone: 1800 551 800

Headspace

The National Youth Mental Health Foundation provides information and advice for young people going through difficulties through their Headspace centres and online and telephone support services.

Website: <https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>

Phone: 1800 650 890

Beyond Blue Youth

Beyond Blue Youth has been established to provide information about anxiety, depression and suicide to young people in Australia aged 12–25.

Website: <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/home>

Phone: 1300 22 4636

Lifeline

Lifeline provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/Home>