Education staff guidance

Let's talk about healthy relationships: friendships and conflict

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What is this resource and how do I use it?

This guidance supports the *Let's talk about healthy relationships: friendships and conflict* lesson series. It provides an overview of the resource's aims, along with some practical suggestions to help education staff feel more confident when delivering the lessons and supporting pupils.

You may find it helpful to read this short guidance before delivering the sessions, particularly if you're supporting pupils who are experiencing difficulties in their peer relationships.

About the lesson series

The focus of the lesson series is to teach children about friendships and how they link to mental wellbeing. It provides cross-curricular opportunities through creative and reflective activities that aim to support pupils to build resilience, express themselves and develop emotional literacy through everyday interactions.

The lesson content supports delivery of national curriculum outcomes related to healthy relationships and wellbeing and forms a key component of the 'Relationships' unit of work in PSHE. More information can be found in the curriculum guidance included in this toolkit.

The sessions explore key components of healthy relationships including respect, empathy, kindness and equality. Pupils are supported to consider how these values are reflected in their own friendships and to share their experiences through discussion and pupil voice.

These conversations offer a helpful starting point for exploring some of the wider influences that shape how children and young people relate to one another. This might include things they've seen online or views they've picked up about gender roles and social expectations.

Please note that these topics may arise naturally during the sessions. If they do, it can be helpful to approach them with curiosity and care, creating space for pupils to feel heard and encouraging reflection on what respectful behaviour looks like in their everyday lives.

Working together with parents and carers

Supporting children and young people to build healthy friendships and navigate peer relationships is most effective when schools and families work together. Alongside this teacher guidance, we've developed a resource for parents and carers to help them explore these topics at home.

You may wish to share this with families before delivering the sessions, or signpost it during any conversations with parents and carers about peer relationships.

Creating a supportive school environment

Most children who experience friendship issues do not require specialist intervention. Schools can be a space to facilitate both prevention and support.

Creating a sense of belonging is a key part of this. Pupils should feel valued within their school community and know they can trust the adults around them. Positive, consistent relationships between pupils and staff, based on mutual respect, can make a significant difference.

Settings can also support children and young people build healthy peer relationships through a whole-school approach to mental wellbeing. This includes high quality relationship education, an effective whole-school anti-bullying policy, and opportunities for pupil voice. Staff can also help pupils to name and manage their feelings through friendship experiences.

This lesson series supports a whole-school approach to mental wellbeing. It links to our **5 Steps Framework**, which offers free, evidence-based guidance for embedding an inclusive approach throughout your setting.

How can I support my pupils?

There are several ways that education staff can support children and young people who may be struggling with peer pressure or challenges in their friendships:

Provide a safe environment of open communication

This can either be in the classroom or with a designated member of staff elsewhere in the school. Let pupils know when you are available to talk and help them if they need it, and signpost any additional support available in your setting.

Plan ahead together

Co-create strategies with pupils for managing difficult social situations including 'exit plans' they can use if they feel unsure or uncomfortable. Reassure them that it's okay to step away or to make an excuse if something doesn't feel right.

Foster independence

Encourage pupils to tune into their instincts and reflect on what feels right to them.

Listen to understand

Approach conversations with curiosity and openness. Try to avoid making assumptions, minimising their feelings, rushing to reassure them, or telling them to 'not worry about it' or 'relax'.

Model healthy communication

Where appropriate, share your own school experience of peer pressure and have how you handled it.

Help pupils practise assertiveness

Create opportunities for pupils to explore boundary-setting through discussion or role play and help them develop phrases to say no in different ways. Encourage them to understand that it's not possible to please everyone and that it's okay to make choices that feel right for them.

If you are at all concerned about a child or young person, speak to your designated safeguarding lead or senior mental health lead as a matter of priority. They will be able to advise on suitable next steps. Speaking to them about any concerns should always be the first action you take, ahead of any of the suggestions on this page.

Managing your own wellbeing

It's crucial to consider your own wellbeing when working with and supporting others.

Be mindful of your own boundaries and triggers, especially when supporting pupils through emotionally complex situations. If you have concerns, speak with your school leadership team, or contact Education Support for confidential advice.

If you continue to feel affected, you may find it helpful to speak to your GP.

Further information:

- Let's talk about healthy relationships: friendships and conflict resources (add hyperlink when live)
- Mentally healthy schools – Relationships and belonging
- Mentally healthy schools – Peer pressure
- Mentally healthy schools – Bullying and cyberbullying
- Mentally healthy schools – Vulnerable children
- NHS Maintaining healthy relationships and mental wellbeing

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