



# Guidance on learning in a safe environment

This guidance has been developed with the help of the PSHE Association and includes ideas from the PSHE Association’s Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing, March 2015.



## Rise Above and effective PSHE provision

Public Health England recognises the important role that teachers play in supporting and guiding young people to make positive and healthy choices. To that end we have developed [Rise Above for Schools](#): a set of PSHE lesson plans to support teachers of 11 to 16 year olds in delivering key health messages and learning outcomes. The lesson plans aim to help teachers to engage young people in a variety of issues, including digital topics and mental health, and have been developed in conjunction with the PSHE Association.

Before you plan and deliver the Rise Above for Schools lessons it is recommended that you read through the [Put safeguarding at the heart of your classroom practice](#) section, which provides advice and guidance around handling sensitive topics, best practice in PSHE, safeguarding and involving students with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

The lesson plans feature Rise Above videos and other online resources, as well as including time for students to browse the website independently in pairs or small groups using either their mobile phones or class devices. For guidance on using mobile phones in class and how to deliver the lessons without online access, read through the [Accessing Rise Above](#) section, below.

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## Using the Rise Above for Schools lesson plans

Rise Above deals with important issues that affect all your students. Delivering lessons using Rise Above resources and learning activities can make a positive contribution to effective PSHE provision in your school.

Every school in England has a statutory obligation to promote and develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and to promote their personal development and wellbeing. These are now core elements of school inspections, and the written assessment that OFSTED inspectors will make on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare' will directly affect a school's overall inspection grade. PSHE can be a key vehicle for this. Look also for where you may be able to link to learning in other subjects including English, Science, Media and IT.

Before you plan and deliver the Rise Above lessons, it is crucial that you read and understand the key principles of effective PSHE provision listed below and that you also read through [Put safeguarding at the heart of your classroom practice](#) before teaching the lesson.

- Draw up and establish simple ground rules with students. Refer to [Put safeguarding at the heart of your classroom practice](#) to help you.
- Use the baseline assessment activities and evaluation suggestions to help students identify and share their knowledge, understanding and feelings at each stage and at the end of the lesson. Baseline assessments will also help to evaluate students' progress against the lesson's intended learning outcomes.
- Support students in using the Rise Above film clips so that they have access to accurate, unbiased information that helps them make effective decisions that improve their wellbeing.
- Allow time during lessons for activities that help students discuss, practice and share ideas. This will help them to apply newly learnt skills and strategies in their own lives.
- Rise Above uses a positive approach to each topic – shock tactics don't work. Instead, help students to model examples of the thoughts and behaviours they would like to adopt. Encourage students to identify positive goals ('who they want to be'), so each lesson supports this aspect of personal development.
- Effective PSHE provision can play a unique role in fostering a positive learning culture in your school. As you plan your delivery, think about how you can use references to your ethos, values and vision or mission to help students make links between the behaviours they learn in your lessons and the behaviours you wish to cultivate across your wider school community.
- Look for opportunities to integrate your teaching with whole-school approaches to developing students' personal wellbeing. The optional extension activities provide a range of ideas, but you should also review how you might link to your school's unique pastoral system and any personal development programmes you offer to students.

## Put safeguarding at the heart of your classroom practice

Always follow your school's safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures which should deliver the Department for Education's guidance on 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', which states:

*"Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families and carers has a role to play in safeguarding children. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all professionals should make sure their approach is child-centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child."*

(Source: Keeping children safe in education - Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, September 2016, p5)

Make sure students understand their responsibilities, and yours. Know who your safeguarding lead is and remember that if you suspect a student is at risk, you are legally bound to share this information in line with your school's safeguarding policy. Don't encourage students to disclose sensitive information in the classroom. Students should only share sensitive information in a suitable, one-to-one setting with an appropriate member of staff. Ensure your practice is in line with other relevant policies, such as those for e-safety and anti-bullying. Remember to highlight to students the links between what they explore in Rise Above lessons, whole-school values and your school's expectations of behaviour.

Provide students with up-to-date contact details for where they can obtain confidential help and support both in school or in the wider community, through local or national support agencies (including phone, email, websites and/or social media feeds such as Twitter).

## Create a physical space that promotes safe learning

A less formal classroom environment can help pupils be more open and make the most of collaborative, small group working when discussing a sensitive topic with one another. Agree with students how you might remove physical barriers between them by rearranging the furniture, using small group and flexible seating arrangements, or even using your floor space. You may wish to consider moving to a room with more comfortable furniture. Think about how each small group can have their own private space, and when choosing a room remember that students will need internet access in their groups.

## Before you begin, develop effective ground rules

Clear ground rules help students express their ideas and feelings while showing respect for others. Ensure students understand that what they say in the lesson shouldn't be discussed outside the lesson and how this creates a safe learning environment. Be clear that, for safeguarding reasons, there are some things you can't keep confidential and remind students of the safeguarding protocols that operate in school. Ground rules will be most effective when students can explain their purpose and express them in their own words. We suggest you display them in the room and review them at the start of each lesson and, where appropriate, during a lesson if agreed boundaries are being crossed. The PSHE Association suggests that ground rules include:

### >> Openness

We will be open and honest, but not discuss directly our own or others' personal/private lives. We will discuss general situations as examples but will not use names or descriptions which could identify anyone. We will not put anyone 'on the spot'.

### >> Keep the conversation in the room

We feel safe discussing general issues relating to mental health within this space, and we know that our teacher will not repeat what is said in the classroom unless they are concerned we are at risk, in which case they will follow the school's safeguarding policy.

### >> Non-judgmental approach

It is okay for us to disagree with another person's point of view but we will not judge, make fun of, or put anybody down. We will 'challenge the opinion, not the person'.

### >> Right to pass

Taking part is important. However, we have the right to pass on answering a question or participating in an activity.

### >> Make no assumptions

We will not make assumptions about people's values, attitudes, behaviours, life experiences or feelings.

### >> Listen to others

We will listen to the other person's point of view and expect to be listened to.

### >> Using language

We will use the correct terms for the things we will be discussing rather than the slang terms, as they can be offensive. If we are not sure what the correct term is, we will ask our teacher.

### >> Asking questions

We know that there are no stupid questions. We do not ask questions to deliberately try to embarrass anyone else. There is a question box for anonymous questions.

### >> Seeking help and advice

If we need further help or advice, we know how and where to seek it confidentially, both in school and in the community. We will encourage friends to seek help if we think they need it.

(Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing, March 2015, p16)

If you intend to allow students to use their mobile phones in the lesson, include ground rules for responsible phone use (you may need to develop these with your Head of PSHE and a member of your Senior Leadership Team). See [Introduction to Rise Above: Accessing Rise Above](#) in each lesson plan for more details and some suggested rules.

## Include negotiation and cooperation

A 'one size fits all' approach will not help young people deal effectively with personal questions and concerns about a sensitive topic. Each lesson includes an activity where students can engage with Rise Above website content (stories, videos, games and advice) in a way that's not directed or mediated by an adult. Students may also have their own suggestions, for example how to:

- focus the lesson on what's most important to them – the questions that are most urgent or pressing (the initial baseline assessment in the lesson will help you gauge this)
- measure their confidence levels
- share or record their thoughts and feelings
- share their findings with their peers.

Look for opportunities to gather ideas from students and ways of maximising the positive changes the lesson can create.

## Peer-to-peer learning

- Peer-to-peer activities, such as those included in Rise Above, act as conduits for starting conversations about issues that affect young peoples' lives. These kinds of activities ensure that students are publicly acknowledged as being a source of credible information.
- Students will be encouraged to share similar social norms (the rules of behaviour that are acceptable or expected in their groups), cultural reference points and experiences. This enables students to appreciate the difference between their perceptions and social norms data which may suggest a different picture, e.g. '90% students in our school know how to access support if they are worried about bullying online'. It recognises that their ideas are meaningful and fulfils their need for information they can trust.
- Peer-to-peer learning engages young people more because they can identify both with the content and how it's delivered. This reflects Rise Above's approach, in which co-created content, made by young people for young people, has been shown to be a proven route to engage young people in learning outcomes about issues that affect them. This kind of collaborative working is also proven to build positive relationships between students and can help some students avoid the feelings of intimidation or pressure that some large group or class activities can generate.

## Be prepared

It's likely that for any topic, several 'live' issues or recent events may have occurred at your school. Before you deliver the lesson:

- Ensure you don't use a real event, or student's name, from the group you are working with as an example. This may be emotionally upsetting for some students and create a barrier to learning and change.
- Check with relevant colleagues to see if they are aware of any incidents or current issues that relate to the topic being discussed in the lesson, and if any students in the group were involved.
- Think about how you might address these issues, for example by developing example scenarios that are sufficiently different to real events. Test these with colleagues to identify and remove any potential problems.
- Consider how you can include more vulnerable students in the teacher-led and independent activities (see below).

## Include and protect vulnerable students

Consider the needs of vulnerable young people in the class or those who may more easily become distressed. You may for example, wish to share the activities and online content with these students in advance. Remember to do this discretely and in confidence in a safe environment, away from other students, for example in a pre-lesson session a day or so in advance. Ask if they have a trusted friend with whom they could visit Rise Above to explore the site together before the lesson. Consider how you will pair and group them with trusted students during each activity and if there are any specific questions or issues they would like to explore but may not wish to share in public.

As a safeguard, you may wish to have another member of staff on standby, ready to provide one-to-one support for students who may become distressed. Consider how you will respond to these students in the lesson and discreetly guide this member of staff to them if necessary.

Other effective strategies include giving vulnerable students a 'pass' or 'exit' option: agree how these students may signal to you that they don't feel comfortable taking part in an activity (a 'pass' signal), or if they feel they need to leave the room altogether (an 'exit' signal). Consider what these students will do instead, if they choose to exercise these options.

## Using distancing techniques in the classroom

Distancing means thinking and talking about sensitive issues as an observer or in the third person, rather than in the first person and using personal examples. When students can distance themselves from a sensitive issue, they can think more clearly about it and without their thoughts being affected by strong emotions. This can help them more easily derive meaning and insight from the example.

- When discussing examples, help students think about what someone 'like them' might experience, feel, think, say or do. 'Can you imagine a young person about your age, who lives and goes to school around here and who...?' Using photos or illustrations of a scenario can help with this.
- When thinking about how best to act or respond to a scenario in a lesson, ask questions that help students explore how they might help a friend, younger student or sibling or act as an 'agony aunt' or 'uncle'.

## Provide effective responses to sensitive questions

A student may ask a question that's sensitive, hard to answer, embarrassing, or inappropriate for their age and the setting. If this happens you may want to:

- Remind the student, and the group, of your ground rules and ask them what the right thing to do may be in response to a question like this.
- 'Park' the question: explain that you will answer it later, if necessary in private, once you have researched an appropriate response. This is vital for questions that are inappropriate or which may raise potential child protection issues, where you should also involve your school's lead person for child protection. Liaise with your Head of PSHE, your school's pastoral head or a member of your Senior Leadership Team (SLT) before responding. Remember your legal safeguarding duty to share information if you suspect a student is at risk.
- Rehearse an answer with a colleague before presenting it back to the individual, group or whole class.

- Pause the lesson and discuss as a class, or in small groups who can report back.
- Use distancing techniques (see above) to desensitise the issue by turning it into a more general example.
- Have an anonymous question box and encourage all students to use it by asking everyone to write a response, even if they don't have a question so that no-one feels embarrassed about asking a question in this way (you may want to ask students to write 'urgent' on a question that's particularly pressing, so you can identify and prioritise this). Make clear at the start of each lesson that students can place questions in the box at any time during the lesson and that they will be addressed at a later time e.g. follow-up lesson.

In all cases make sure your answers are factually correct, non-judgemental and in line with school policies. They should be appropriately sensitive and age-appropriate for the issue and the individual(s) concerned. It's important to take the questions away and reflect on them before responding, rather than answering them immediately in class.

## Involve students with SEND

The topics covered are relevant for all students. Plan how you can differentiate your teaching to include and support pupils who may be less able, have specific or additional learning needs, or who have English as an additional language.

When lesson planning to support these learners you may wish to include some of the following activities:

- create Top Five or Top Ten tips for a friend
- create pictures or posters to share an idea, strategy, tip or emotion
- categorise a series of examples as same/different
- structured role plays (include frequent 'stop and discuss' moments)
- use objects, photos, or symbols to help students identify emotions, options or strategies
- create photos or pictures to explain example scenarios
- use storytelling to share scenarios and to bring different responses or strategies, and their outcomes, to life
- games
- draw, indicate or choose (for example creating hazard and options cards for a scenario, to identify the risk and provide choices)
- model and practise, scenarios
- share well known or traditional stories or create 'story maps'
- identify the characteristics of a good friend / adult / relationship / safe situation / boyfriend / girlfriend
- explain key words with vocabulary cards
- deploy a teaching assistant to provide support and scaffolding, for example to facilitate discussion
- pair these learners with a trusted learning partner
- prepare sheets of emojis for students to use to express their feelings.

Adjustments will need to be made to lesson plans to ensure differentiated learning outcomes and appropriate assessment strategies are included to support students with SEND (the above suggested activities may provide useful ways of evidencing progress).

Remember to refer to your school's SEND policy and any specific learning or support plans for students with SEND in your Rise Above lesson plans.

## Accessing Rise Above

All the lessons recommend allowing time for students to use Rise Above independently, so they can explore issues that they may not feel comfortable discussing with the whole class. Therefore, it would be beneficial for students to have access to the internet, so that they can work in pairs using:

- their own phones (most preferable)
- school tablets or laptops
- desktop computers in an IT suite or library space (least preferable)

Remember to book appropriate space and equipment in advance. You may need to have the Rise Above website approved by your IT administrator for student use.

## Using mobile phones

Mobile phones are suggested so that students can bookmark the content for viewing in their own time, as there is evidence that young people are most likely to share content on PSHE-related topics with peers via their social media accounts.

If students are allowed to use mobile phones:

- discuss with colleagues how to manage their use during the lesson (this may need to include your Head of PSHE and a member of your SLT)
- establish together some simple **ground rules** for mobile phone use (see below), which you can then agree with the class.

Example ground rules:

- Understand that your phone is a useful tool for learning, not just socialising – using it to its full potential can help you reach your full potential, too.
- Only get your phone out when your teacher asks you to, and put it away when asked.
- Your phone is your responsibility.
- Only use your phone to explore Rise Above or other helpful content, and not to use social media or other apps.
- Don't message other students during the activity.
- Don't make negative comments about each other's phone.
- Don't handle someone else's phone without their permission. If someone else lets you use their phone in an activity, treat it with care, like you would your own phone.

## If the school's mobile phone policy prohibits using phones in class

- It's best to use school tablets or laptops in your chosen setting. These, like mobile phones, allow small groups of students to explore Rise Above in privacy during this part of each lesson.
- Suggest to students that they remember or write down any videos they find particularly useful, so they can return to them on their mobiles at another time.
- If you can only access Rise Above using desktop computers, help groups to position themselves for maximum privacy, and encourage groups to focus only on what they are exploring together, not what another group may be watching or discussing.

## If you are unable to provide internet access for paired activities

If you can't provide access to Rise Above during the lesson, then carry out the following before the lesson:

- Invite one or two representative pairs of students to find and select relevant Rise Above content to view.
- Review this content yourself.
- Adapt or amend your delivery to consider the needs of vulnerable students who may be affected by the content, and the learning needs of students with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and differentiation requirements. (Read [Put safeguarding at the heart of your classroom practice](#) for more information on supporting and including these students.)

During the lesson, adapt the Rise Above independent browsing activity as follows:

- Explain that before the lesson you invited some students to select some more Rise Above content to view. You're going to watch this as a class, and then discuss the ideas it contains in pairs.
- Watch students' selection(s) from Rise Above as a whole class.
- Split the class into pairs for a think, pair, share activity.
- Ask students to think for a minute about how the peer-selected Rise Above content they have just viewed reinforces, changes or challenges what they currently know or feel about the issue you're exploring. They can identify any new questions this generates, or what they would like to find out by visiting Rise Above in their own time.
- Students share their thoughts with their partner and explore the similarities and differences in their views and ideas.
- Each pair should then join with another to share their thoughts and questions. Pairs can give constructive feedback to one another and build positively on the ideas they found and shared, and should encourage one another to visit Rise Above after the lesson and share what they find out.

If groups appear to drift off task, remind them of what they should be doing and then if necessary, shorten this activity and move on to the next one.