

Preparing the Activity Environment

Creating a safe space

In order to share their views, beliefs, experiences and ideas in an open and honest way, it is important that teachers, young people, parents and other members of the community feel comfortable. When participants feel 'safe' i.e. free from anxiety and attack, they are more likely and able to contribute. During discussions around racism and the right to or need for inclusion, problematic attitudes and challenging emotions can often come to the fore. Negative stereotypes and feelings such as anger, frustration, shame and sadness may be shared. It is useful to negotiate and agree ground rules that communicate expected standards of behaviour and ensure safety and respect for all participants.

As you facilitate these discussions, you will need to pay attention to how people respond; allow time for them to process their thoughts and feelings, and provide support when needed.

Here are examples of some useful ground rules:

Respect others: You may hear opinions that may be different or new, or with which you disagree. As you participate and interact, try to take in new information without judgement and to keep an open mind. Make sure that your words and body language reflect a respectful attitude towards others. Learn by listening to others.

Own your own values: Speak using 'I', 'I feel' or in 'in my experience' avoid saying 'you should' or 'you all think that'. If you are going to disagree with something, challenge the opinion or the behaviour, not the person.

Be open and honest: Ask questions without fear of judgement, there is no such thing as a silly question, it is important to try and understand as much as possible. If you are not confident to ask questions publicly then speak to the facilitator privately.

Respect confidentiality: Everything said in the room stays in the room. When sharing personal anecdotes, make sure to avoid using real names, don't disclose any personal information about anyone else. Carefully consider what personal information you choose to share.

Share air time: You are encouraged to express your ideas and opinions, take it in turns to contribute, help create a safe space where everyone is encouraged and feels comfortable to speak, don't monopolise the discussions. You are not obliged to speak, its fine to 'pass'.

It's important to consider how you will respond if participants fail to follow these rules. We advise that you negotiate and agree this with the group in advance and explicitly ask for their support in maintaining the safe space.