

NSW Public School requirements

Child Protection Education is required to be taught in every Stage of learning from Kindergarten to Year 10 as part of Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

PDHPE is mandatory for all students in Kindergarten through to Year 10. The K-6 and 7-10 PDHPE syllabuses outline the age appropriate content to meet the learning and support needs of students.

Children are most vulnerable when young. It is important to develop in students as early as possible understandings and skills in the area of child protection.

Even young children can be taught ways to protect themselves from abuse. They can be 'enlightened without being frightened'. They can be taught to network with trusted adults and to be aware that there are people and services to help them within their community.

Research suggests that, if children can recognise abuse and abusive situations and use protective strategies from their early years, then they will have a greater capacity to take appropriate action if they are in uncomfortable or unsafe situations and keep themselves safe.

It is also important students learn about power in relationships and develop the skills to build and maintain relationships that are caring and positive.

Child protection education aims to assist students to develop skills to:

- recognise and respond to unsafe situations
- seek assistance effectively
- establish and maintain non-coercive relationships and strengthen attitudes and values related to equality, respect and responsibility.

Through Child Protection Education in NSW schools students learn:

- about feeling safe and their right to be safe
- to recognise appropriate touching and inappropriate touching
- that appropriate touching is an important part of positive relationships
- that they have a right to say NO to a person who touches them inappropriately or threatens their safety
- that it is important to tell trusted adults about such situations
- that they may have to keep on telling people until they are believed
- that help is available to them within their communities.

Three themes of Child Protection Education

Balanced child protection education incorporates teaching and learning in three broad themes.

- Recognising abuse

Protective skills cannot be used unless children and young people recognise situations of potential abuse or when abuse is occurring. It is important that students develop knowledge and skills, appropriate to their age and stage, about what constitutes abuse.

- Power in relationships

When discussing power in relationships, particular attention is given to building confidence in relationships which are positive and caring. Skills in establishing and maintaining positive relationships, including accepted cultural practices related to caring touch, are reinforced.

- Protective strategies

With knowledge about positive relationships and about child abuse, children and young people can take appropriate actions if they are in threatening situations. When learning about protective strategies, students are given the opportunity to analyse situations, to identify feelings, and to explore alternative courses of action and their consequences.

Inform parents and carers

Some members of the community can consider aspects of PDHPE, such as child protection education sensitive or controversial.

The Department's [Controversial Issues in School Policy](#) and [Implementation Procedures](#) provide direction for the management of controversial issues in schools.

The school has a responsibility to inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the program, so that parents and carers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session on certain controversial issues. In this regard, a parent's or carer's wish must be respected.

This statement should be applied to the introduction of external speakers on controversial issues and the study of controversial material to supplement curriculum programs.

Active consent and permission notes are not required for involvement in aspects of child protection education or other components of the PDHPE syllabus.

Parents and carers must provide passive consent and can be informed via information letters, newsletters and information sessions. When parents and carers have been informed on the details of the program and have not taken action to withdraw their child, this is passive consent.

Evaluation of school programs indicates that, where parents and carers have an understanding of the program, students' learning is improved.

Where parents and carers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the program they are concerned about.

Schools should implement a consultative process to ensure parents and carers have opportunity to participate in discussions on both curriculum content and teaching and learning materials where appropriate to ascertain whether parts of the program need to be modified.

There are many misconceptions about what students learn about and how students learn in child protection education. Communication with parents and carers assists the community to better understand the content and aims of the programs.

Create a supportive learning environment

Staff employed by the NSW Department of Education are expected to plan for a safe environment for all student activities. The safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people or students are paramount.

Student's needs and welfare are the primary concern and the primary focus of professional practice.

When planning programs, teachers should review the content of sensitive or controversial material to ensure it is appropriate to the development, experiences and cultural values of their students.

It is recommended that sensitive subjects be planned for a time in the school year when respect and trust has been developed between students and with the teacher.

Child Protection Education can be confronting and sensitive for some children and young people. Teachers need to create a supportive learning environment so students feel safe to learn and ask questions.

There are number of steps teachers can take to ensure their classroom environment is a safe place for all students when talking about abuse, power and respect.

Students should be made aware at the beginning of educational programs that disclosures that indicate they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.

It is important to enable students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting and to protect them from making harmful disclosures.

Equally, it is important that teachers are prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a disclosure.

Create clear and consistent expectations

Establish and maintain guidelines and boundaries for students to encourage mutual respect and allow for positive relationships to develop in the classroom.

Engage students in the development of these expectations. Below are some examples of expectations you could use for discussion:

- listen to different ideas without 'put downs'
- no interruptions while someone is talking
- everyone has the right to speak
- each person is responsible for his or her own behaviour
- never refer to someone by name when giving an example
- always support each other
- respect other's cultural traditions, beliefs, values and languages
- everyone has the right not to offer an opinion.

Teaching strategies to prevent public disclosures of information and enable respectful discussion

Use global language

Keep discussions global rather than personal, as this will enable all students to discuss issues more freely. Distinguish the difference between public and private information. Encourage students to talk in third person, for example, "If a person... what if someone..." Maintain a professional role, including answering questions and responding to

statements globally without personalising it, e.g. "everyone..." or 'some people...". One step removed

One step removed

Use the one step removed strategy to allow students to explore a range of sensitive issues without confrontation or personal threat. This strategy includes using fictitious case studies, moral dilemmas or any techniques that dissuade students from talking in the first person in class discussions. Instead of the direct "what would you do if...?" approach, substitute: "Suppose X happened to someone. What advice would you give them? What could they do?" "Imagine someone was feeling..., what advice would you give to help them in their situation?"

When exploring possible outcomes of case studies or moral dilemmas, use conditional language: such as "...this might happen" or "...this could happen", never use "this will happen".

Protective interrupting

Protective interrupting involves interrupting students who begin to disclose private information, e.g. "It sounds as though you want to talk about this. Why don't we talk about it after class?" After protective interrupting, guide the discussion back to one step removed.

If staff have reasonable grounds to suspect risk of significant harm to a child or young person, they are required to tell their principal or workplace manager.

If a student discloses information it is important to:

- tell the child or young person you believe them
- be aware of your own emotions in relation to what the child or young person is telling you, and keep those emotions under control

- be prepared to listen and support a child or young person when he or she tells you about an event or behaviours that indicate risk of harm
- use a calm reassuring tone and talk at the child or young person's level
- listen to the child or young person and acknowledge that it may be difficult to talk about what is happening to him or her
- not make promises you cannot keep - especially that you won't tell anyone
- offer support to the child or young person
- avoid expressing doubt, judgment or shock
- be aware of the child or young person's cultural and linguistic background and how this might impact on disclosure.

Following up suspicion or belief that harm or risk to a child or young person has occurred can be the first important step in stopping the harm and preventing further harm from occurring.

- Allow for anonymity

Some students may find it difficult to contribute to class discussion and may say little in group activities. Don't assume they are not engaged in the activities but rather provide all students with the opportunity to contribute in less public ways.

- Promote key messages

Be clear about the clear purpose of the lesson and the key messages you want students to take away from each lesson. Communicate this with students through learning intentions and goals. When students see the relevance of learning, they are more able to connect with education and are more likely to engage with it. Think critically and plan lessons so that students have a take away message. The purpose of a lesson should not always be solely about knowledge of content but rather, students should practise and develop skills that

will allow them to participate as a positive member of the community.

- Be inclusive of diversity

Appreciate and celebrate the diversity of all students within the classroom. Provide opportunities for students to reflect on situations and issues in the context of their own life experiences. Keep in mind that those students who do not feel included or valued will most often disengage from learning.

- Challenge negative attitudes and behaviours

Maintain a classroom environment free from bullying and harassment to promote respect and provide a safe learning environment. Most importantly, lead by example by modelling and reinforcing the language, attitudes and behaviours expected of students.

Activities to promote cooperation

Teaching PDHPE may evoke different feelings and emotions in students. Use activities that promote the development of group trust, build communication skills and enhance cooperation before sensitive topics or units begin.

Develop an atmosphere of trust and respect for students to feel comfortable when discussing feelings, values and personal experiences where appropriate. Partner and team games that require cooperation and elements of problem solving are examples of activities that encourage the development of trust and cooperation.



Generate purposeful and respectful discussion

Students need to feel positive about themselves and the activities in which they are participating. Generate purposeful, respectful discussion and promote positive classroom experiences by:

- expecting and reinforcing positive behaviours
- being consistent when dealing with students
- modelling expected behaviours, for example, active listening
- using and reinforcing inclusive and appropriate language
- affirming the diversity in the responses of individual students.

Empower students through skill development

The development of life skills and capabilities will empower children and young people to take positive action to protect themselves and promote positive and respectful relationships.

Effective PDHPE should provide structured opportunities for children and young people to explore their attitudes and values, and to develop and practise the skills of empowerment which assist student to make informed choices about health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity.

NSW policy, legislation and frameworks in NSW government schools

Code of conduct

Teachers continually use their professional judgement to decide on the best strategies, resources and teaching and learning methods for any given situation.

In making these judgements, teachers must take into account the age, maturity, health and other characteristics of children and young people. They must also be aware that their own conduct at all times, must be keeping with that specified in the Department's [Code of Conduct](#) and of their role and responsibilities pursuant to it.

Resilience research confirms that the presence of a caring adult in aspects of their lives is important in assisting students to overcome adversity and achieve at school.

Effective teaching in PDHPE relies on positive relationships that are developed in a professional manner. The teacher is, by the nature of their role, in a position of trust, authority and influence. Modelling respectful interactions is an important part of teacher and student interactions.

Establishing a trusting relationship between student and teacher supports effective teaching and learning. This relationship should focus on the needs of the student.

Child protection and wellbeing

The legislation passed in 2009 for the Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing stipulates that all NSW agencies which provide services to children, young people and their families, or whose staff come into contact with children and young people in the course of their work, are considered to

have a particular role in protecting children and young people from harm.

Employees of the NSW Department of Education have responsibilities under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 relating to recognise safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns and report concerns about suspected risk of significant harm and risk of harm to children and young people to their principal or workplace manager.

The [Mandatory Reporter Guide \(MRG\)](#) can assist in making an informed decision regarding child protection concerns. If concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of children or young people constitute risk of significant harm, principals must report these to the Child Protection Helpline on 133627.

The Child Wellbeing Unit can be contacted on 9269 9400 when staff are unclear about how to use the MRG, wish to get advice on the MRG or the MRG indicates to contact the Child Wellbeing Unit.

Education has an important role to support children and young people and to identify where problems arise that may put their safety, welfare or wellbeing at risk. All staff must convey risk of harm concerns to the principal.

The [Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People Policy](#) sets out the responsibilities of NSW Department of employees under the legislation.

[Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People: Revised procedures](#) (updated 14/3/2014) require that all staff in schools are aware of the indicators of child abuse and neglect of children and young people, their

obligations to report suspected risk of harm and the procedure for doing so.

If staff have reasonable grounds to suspect risk of significant harm to a child or young person, they are required to tell their principal or workplace manager.

Further advice about professional practice in the teaching of PDHPE and Child Protection Education can be found in the fact sheets:

- Advice about maintaining professional relationships with secondary students - Student: Friend or Foe?
- Advice about the use of touch in PDHPE or Sport - A Touchy Subject

For more information contact

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