

Setting a safe learning environment

The PSHE Association have some excellent resources around setting a safe learning environment when teaching sensitive or controversial issues through PSHE education. These can be accessed via the PSHE Association resources section on their website. In addition, YGAM has produced comprehensive guidance in the form of a Practitioner & Teachers Guidance and example parent / guardian letters that teachers or practitioners may use. These letters may be useful for colleagues who wish to inform parents of your intention to talk to students about the potential risks of gambling & social gaming.

In addition to the above and using the PSHE Association guidance around Ground rules for teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing, YGAM has produced the following supplementary information specific to In the Know.

Introduction

When teaching or talking to students about minimising gambling-related harm or other mental health issues, it is important to think carefully about the possibility of personal disclosures from pupils who, as a result of the lesson, may develop the skills, language, knowledge and understanding needed to make a disclosure about their own gambling or social gaming activities. Whilst this is not to be discouraged, it is very important that if pupils make personal disclosures to school staff, they do so in a suitable, one-to-one setting. It is not appropriate, therefore, to encourage pupils to talk about sensitive personal matters in the classroom. Where such disclosures are made, YGAM have included an appendix of specialist gambling counselling services and their details at the end of this document. YGAM always recommends a referral to such agencies where harm from gambling may be experienced.

It is vital that clear 'ground-rules' are established or reinforced and the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity covered at the start of the lesson. Ground rules need to be consistently adhered to, regularly revisited and, if necessary, renegotiated and reinforced. The teacher should lead the way by modelling the ground rules in their own communications with the class.

Where time allows, ground-rules are most effective when they have been negotiated and agreed with the pupils, rather than imposed by the teacher. Below are some areas to introduce if they do not arise naturally.

- Openness: Keep the conversation in the room / Non-judgmental approach.
- Right to Pass: Make no assumptions / Listen to Others.
- Use of language: Ask questions / seeking help & advice.

Teachers and practitioners are reminded to use the 'distancing' technique to protect both the students and the practitioner when delivering this programme. Ways in which you can do this are through use of stories or scenarios, film or YouTube clips, photos, pictures and use of the phrase "Imagine a young person of about your age who lives and goes to school or college round here...."

Openness

Gambling Addictions are often referred to as the 'secret addiction'. The reason being, as unlike substance addictions (such as drugs or alcohol), there are no immediately obvious symptoms (such as appearance, slurred speech or a specific smell). Therefore, it's important to break down the stigma that surrounds gambling-related harm and to encourage an ethos of openness but within specific boundaries. YGAM have developed an Introductory Lesson Plan and Quiz which teachers may find useful.

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It is important to keep the conversation in the room as pupils need to feel safe discussing general issues related to gambling-related harm within the lesson without fear that these discussions will be repeated by teachers or pupils beyond this setting.

Pupils should feel confident exploring their misconceptions or questions about gambling-related within this safe setting. It is important, however, to make it clear that if you become concerned that a child may be at risk then you will need to follow the school's safeguarding policy.

The teacher must take a non-judgmental approach when talking about the potential issues that may arise from gambling or social gaming. Gambling, like other social activities is enjoyed by the majority of the British population, however a small percentage do experience harm and young people aged under 24 years are the most vulnerable to that harm. As gambling is far more accessible and visible (through advertising and sponsorship predominantly) it is important that these can be explored within the classroom environment without fear of being judged or ridiculed. Discuss with pupils the idea that it is okay, and often healthy, to disagree with another person's point of view but it is never okay to judge, make fun of or put down other pupils. Where pupils disagree with another's point of view, they should challenge the belief and not the person. Gambling is also for some religions a taboo and so empathy and understanding must be at the forefront of any teacher who delivers lessons in this area.

Right to pass

Whilst participation in the lesson is important, every pupil has the right to choose not to answer a question, or not to participate in an activity. Pupils may choose to pass on participation if a topic touches upon personal issues which they should not disclose within a classroom setting, or if the topic of the activity or discussion makes them feel uncomfortable in any way. They could be invited to discuss such concerns with the teacher individually. Teachers can prepare the class by letting them know the nature of the topic beforehand and offering pupils the opportunity to let the teacher know either anonymously or directly if they have any concerns about themselves or a friend. This will enable you to ensure that your teaching is as inclusive as possible and is matched to the pupils' needs.

If you are aware of pupils in your class who are likely to find the topic of gambling-related harm particularly sensitive, perhaps due to their own pre-existing problem, or that of a family member, then the lesson content should be discussed with those pupils beforehand. It may be appropriate to give such pupil the right to withdraw from the lesson. They should not be expected to justify their absence to their peers. If the lesson is missed, then consideration should be taken as to how to follow up the missed lesson with the pupil in question so that they are able to benefit from the learning without being made to feel uncomfortable in front of their peers.

In addition to not judging the viewpoints of others, pupils must also take care not to make assumptions about the values, attitudes, life experiences, faith values, cultural values or feelings of their peers.

It is also important that every pupil in the class has the right to feel listened to and they should respect the right of their peers to feel listened to as well. You might choose to revisit what active listening to others means. It is okay to challenge the viewpoint of another pupil, but we should always listen to their point of view, in full, before making assumptions or formulating a response.

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Use of language

Pupils should be reminded to take care in their use of language within (and beyond) lessons about gambling-related harm. You should also consider with pupils how they would feel if inappropriate words were applied to them. Such words include 'looser' or 'mug' are used in a derogatory fashion. Often people experiencing gambling-related harm are told to 'sort themselves out and just stop gambling'. For a true addict, who has developed a sense of dependency to gambling, this is incredible hard to achieve. Many addicts describe the process of stopping gambling in a way that is similar to stopping substance addictions as many need specialist help, support, counselling or treatment. YGAM has produced a fact sheet on the facts around gambling addictions which is well worth a read as often the process of overcoming a behavioural addiction is misunderstood.

It is important to foster an open environment where pupils feel safe asking questions and exploring their preconceptions about gambling & gambling-related harm. Pupils should understand that no question will be considered stupid, and when they are in doubt about an issue relating to gambling or gambling-related harm, they should ask. It's also important that pupils realise it is never appropriate to ask a question in order to deliberately try to embarrass somebody else or to encourage pupils to laugh at someone. Additionally students can be invited to write down any questions they have anonymously at any time during the lesson. To ensure that students do not feel self-conscious about being seen to ask a question, the teacher or practitioner can ask all students to write something: either a question or 'no question' if taking anonymous questions during the lesson. Time can be set aside at the end of the lesson for this as well.

Lessons on gambling-related harm, or for that matter any mental health issue may result in pupils having questions they need to explore with you outside of the class setting. Where possible, it is helpful if you're able to remain available to pupils immediately after the class to facilitate this or point them to the YGAM information sheet.

It is worth considering how best to finish a lesson of this nature, which can be emotionally exhausting for both pupils and teacher. Building in an activity which is light-hearted at the end of the lesson can be a good way to chance the class atmosphere so that pupils are ready for their next lesson. YGAM have provided a fun quiz which is available at the end of the lesson.