

Teaching Sensitive/Triggering Topics in Health Education

Identify topics that may be triggering to some students (some of these topics would include: suicide, mental health, eating disorders, bullying, harassment, consent, sexual abuse).

As you prepare for and teach your lesson, please consider the following:

Lesson Prep Considerations:

1. Depersonalize content when possible. Ask students, what might you notice in a friend.... (instead of asking personal questions)
2. Videos - when necessary, provide a warning that the video may be upsetting
3. Consider doing an anonymous check in with your students at the beginning and end of class
 - a. Allows you to check the mental health of your students
 - b. Allows you to identify students who may need additional resources (such as talking to the school counselor)
4. **Emphasize resources** that are available and how the resources may help a friend
 - a. This may include resources local to the school or the surrounding community
 - b. Providing hotlines or crisis center phone numbers
5. Be very thoughtful of how to do skill practice
 - a. Ex. Instead of doing role plays, provide students with scenarios- Ex. Students could watch video clips (such as the tv show “What Would You Do) that models positive actions taken by bystanders

Prior to Lesson Delivery:

1. Contact your school counselor to make them aware of the day the content will be delivered
 - a. Invite the counselor to join your class during instruction (even if only for a few minutes at the beginning of the class session)
 - i. This allows students to begin to build a rapport with the counselor
2. Tell students one day prior to the lesson to prepare students when triggering content will be taught
3. Consider communicating with parents to inform them of the day the content will be delivered

During Lesson:

1. Disclosure Statement for Triggering Content
 - a. Provide a disclosure statement at the beginning of every class that contains content that could be triggering.
 - i. Ex. “Today in class, we will be talking about “x.” It is important that we are serious as we are talking about this topic today. If at any

point you feel uncomfortable during class, you can raise your hand and make a fist with your hand. I will then know that you need a break.”

- b. Be sure to include that you are a mandated reporter and explain what a mandated reporter is
- c. Also share what students can do during class if they feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed by the content
 - i. Students do not need to disclose why they feel uncomfortable or need a break, but for safety reasons they need to let you know they are leaving the classroom (virtual or physical classroom)
 - ii. Always follow up with the student upon their return to check in with the student and refer to the school counselor when necessary
- 2. **Students should not be pushed to actively participate** (i.e. answering questions out loud, etc.) - Provide the option for students to “pass”
 - a. Pushing a student to participate could increase the risk of triggering the student and possibly increase the student’s risk if they are in the same room/house as their abuser