



Top Tips on How to Plan and Deliver your Session When you Don't Know the Group

If you are a non-school based RSE educator, you may be asked to provide sessions at youth centres, churches, scout troupes or other community organisations. When you do not have a pre-existing relationship with the young people you are working with it is critical to create a safe space.

1. Create Safe Space. By introducing yourself and your organisation, you give them a context in which to understand why you are there to talk to them. Establishing ground rules helps provide boundaries that are important in any relationship so that people can get along and have fun without upsetting others. It is also a good way to get a glimpse into what their cultural expectations are and how they deal with conflict.

2. Meet them where they are. If writing down ideas, record all ideas using the same language the young people use, otherwise young people may feel they can only make 'acceptable' comments. If they aren't comfortable to be themselves, some of their views will not be expressed and not be discussed. There will also be a wide range of comprehension levels and experiences in the group as the ages may not be uniform. In assessing previous learning, the results may diverse as they may have attended different school or be in different year groups. Flexibility is key in how you plan to approach topics and handle teachable moments.

3. Get your background information before you show up.

- Are you being asked to come to do a session as a piece of prevention work or is it reactionary to a specific incident?
- Do they need to see your Disclosure and Barring Service checks (previously CRB checks)?
- What learning objectives are they hoping to meet through your contribution?
- What would the young people like to learn about?
- How much time is available to cover the topic?
- What procedure would be followed if there are disclosures or child protection concerns?
- Will a member of staff be present during the session to manage behaviour or is that your responsibility?
- What resources are available (eg. Television, DVD player, speakers, internet connection, size of the room)?
- Are there any dynamics or issues that have happened in the group that may impact the lesson (eg. homophobic bullying, slut-shaming, on-line gossiping)?
- Are there any special consideration such as English is not a first language, looked-after-children, youth that are not in education/ employment or training, youth involved in offending behaviour or those with physical or developmental disabilities?

4. Have a backup plan. Unlike school, young people may decide not to show up if they have had an argument with a friend or they may bring a herd of mates that were hanging about in the park on their way to the youth centre, therefore numbers will vary.

As much as the organisers of your presentation will have tried to tell you about the group dynamics, something that happened on Facebook on the way to your session may have changed the vibe for the night. If you do not know the young people, you



need to use all of your best social skills to read the group, and manage excitement or hurt feelings within the group.

5. Keep it fun and interactive. If the organisers have taken into consideration the wants and needs of the young people you should be able to plan a session that captures the imagination of the group. This is not school and they can choose to disengage anytime they want. The brilliance of being outside of a school setting means that you can use a wide range of approaches to get your message across. Here are a few examples:

- **Art** – includes poster-making, graffiti, using images from magazines or newspapers. Art is highly effective for those with low literacy skills, helping to build self-esteem and express feelings that are very sensitive. The art can then be displayed for others to see and trigger additional conversations.
- **Music** – writing a song, lyrics or an advertising jingle encourages cooperation and uses a range of skills, such as researching information, discussing attitudes and reaching a consensus. Again there is a tangible result out of the process.
- **Drama** – includes role-play, use of puppets and masks. Drama is a useful distancing technique to explore specific situations without revealing too much personal information. ‘Freeze frame’, occurs when during a role play the action or scene is frozen, as in a photograph or video frame. Participants not ‘frozen’ discuss the feelings of the characters, what the characters are thinking, what has happened or what they think will happen. Participants may also tap out a frozen character and take the position within the freeze frame to change the outcome of a scene. It is useful for discussing ideas, choices and building self-confidence.
- **Quizzes and questionnaires** – useful for focusing on young people’s knowledge or opinions about specific issues. They can also provide an assessment of future learning needs as well as triggering discussion.
- **Situation cards/scenarios** – a specific situation is presented, providing a useful lead into discussions about values, attitudes and feelings.