

Overview

Enlisting the help of others within the community can benefit and value-add to your school/classroom program. However, before inviting a guest speaker to your school, ensure that you know exactly what you want to gain by having the guest speaker. Regardless of the topic being addressed, a 'one off' isolated presentation can have little impact on a students' health behaviour.



Have the following questions been considered?

To help assess whether a guest speaker is relevant for your program, consider the following points.

- What is the **purpose** of the presentation?
- What will have occurred in the **curriculum** in terms of relationships and sexuality education prior to the session?
- Have the **learning outcomes** of the proposed session been clearly outlined?
- Will the presenter **enhance** rather than **replace** the role of the classroom teacher?
- How will the presenter be **briefed** on the health program into which the presentation fits?
- Will the presentation be **part** of an **ongoing** relationships and sexuality education program?
- Are the materials and information **appropriate** to the developmental level of the students?
- How **long** is the presentation and is it **interactive**?
- Do the resources need to be **previewed** by school staff before being used with students?
- Do the resources reflect current **best practice** relationships and sexuality education?

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- Do the resources reflect the **philosophy** of your school?
- Is the content appropriate for a **large group presentation**?
- What **follow up** will be done with the students and by whom?
- What **school staff** will be present during the session? How will they participate and engage in the session? (E.g. Behaviour management? Ensuring a safe space? Dealing with potential triggering content? [Protective interrupting](#)? [Dealing with disclosures](#)?)
- Do all of the students have all the **prior knowledge** required to fully engage with the content of the session?
- How will the presenter cater for **CaLD** students, students with **special needs** and students who may have experienced **trauma**?
- How will **parents** be informed of the presentation?
- Is there an **information session** available for parents?

Sensitive topics

A safe and supportive environment is essential when facilitating lessons on relationships and sexuality education. Talking about sensitive topics such as emotions, resilience, body changes, relationships, alcohol and drugs, consent, sexting, sex, pregnancy and STIs can be very triggering for many students (and staff) - reminding them of their own experiences or experiences of those close to them. It is vital that schools have strategies in place for supporting any students (and staff) that may be distressed by sensitive content presented by guest speakers.

Guest speakers do not have the established relationships with students that teachers hopefully do. Teachers are often privy to student backgrounds and experiences that need careful consideration when discussing sensitive topics. Even with an established rapport, teachers can never be sure of the mental load and experiences that each student brings to school each day - lessons and presentations on sensitive topics need to be delivered carefully with this in mind.

Often guest speakers present to large numbers of students at a time. It is crucial to consider if the content is appropriate for large group sessions. In any session that focuses on relationships and sexuality there is a possibility that students may disclose personal issues or abuse. It is vital that schools have strategies in place to [protectively interrupt](#) where required and know how to appropriately [deal with any disclosures](#). In large group settings this can be very difficult.

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Another consideration is that students may not feel safe and supported learning about sensitive content in large group settings and may disengage entirely.

Suggestions:

- Ask guest speakers how they manage sensitive topics, potential triggers and disclosures.
- Inform the guest speaker of any relevant background information of the students or school that may impact on their presentation (whilst ensuring confidentiality of students and staff).
 - E.g. If there has been a case of image-based abuse/unplanned pregnancy/sexual assault/etc in the school, this can be mentioned to the presenters in general terms without identifying specific students.
- When looking at statistics of prevalence of image-based abuse/sexual assault/intimate partner violence/etc, be aware that these statistics also apply to the people in the room (staff and students). It is safest to presume that some people in the room will have been affected by these issues rather than assuming they have not.
- Consider the timing of the presentation.
 - Will students be heading straight to another lesson, into an exam, to lunch, home?
 - How will students be supported if they are distressed by the content of the presentation or discussions that take place amongst peers after the presentation?
- Consider what staff will be present during the presentation and what roles they will play.
 - Will staff be allowed to catch up on marking or planning at the back of the room?
 - Will staff be required to support particular students?
 - How will student behaviour be managed?
 - Will the school nurse and/or counsellor been briefed about this session in case of potential increased need for student support?

Postscript

This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:

Guest speakers

Background Note

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