

Creating a safe learning environment



Purpose of creating a safe learning environment

The NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) donation teaching resources have been designed to enable students ages 11-16 to understand the importance of blood, organ and stem cell donation for individuals and society, and to empower them so they can make informed choices.

Donation can be a sensitive issue, so it is vitally important that teachers read and consider the information in this document before teaching the lessons.

Know the relevant policies and procedures

Teachers should be familiar with their school's safeguarding, child protection and equal opportunities policies and procedures, and work within them. They should know who the safeguarding lead is, and remember that if they suspect a student is at risk, they are legally bound to share this information in line with their school's safeguarding policy. Don't encourage students to disclose sensitive information in the classroom. Students should only share sensitive information in a suitable, one-to-one setting with an appropriate member of staff.

Identify vulnerable students

Teachers should identify any students for whom this learning could be deemed sensitive.

- Students may have personal experience of donation (organ, stem cell, or blood donation). For example, they themselves, a family member or friend may have or have had serious health issues or a student may have experienced a bereavement. See the 'signpost ways to get help' section on page 5 for guidance on supporting these students.
- Some people do not support donations on religious grounds, or believe their religions do not permit it, although the major religions in the UK support the idea of blood, stem cell and organ donation. NHSBT is working with places of worship and faith leaders to spread the message that donation can be an important part of caring for the lives of others. For more information on faith and donation, visit nhsbt.nhs.uk.
- Please note that the video and lesson content shows people giving blood, so it may be advisable to warn students in case any have a fear of needles or dislike the sight of blood.
- The resources highlight the fact that there is a greater need for donors from Black Caribbean, Black African, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Be clear with students about why this is. Familiarise yourself with the section 'How does ethnic background relate to donating?' on page 3 and avoid any guilt messaging when talking about donation and ethnicity. Further information can also be found within the resources, in the student-facing slides and in the teacher's notes beneath the slides. You may wish to use a question box to help you address students' queries on this topic (see page 5). You can also visit nhsbt.nhs.uk for further information.



How does ethnic background relate to donating?

More blood, stem cell and organ donors are needed from Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The causes of this are complicated, and vary depending on the type of donation, but the main reasons are that:

1. For many patients in need of a transplant the best match will come from a donor from the same ethnic background.
2. Demand is higher than the number of donors for blood, stem cell and organ donations for people from Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
3. Individuals from these ethnic backgrounds are also more likely to have rare blood or tissue types that make it harder for them to find a match.

4. There are some conditions that are more common in people from these ethnic backgrounds. Sickle cell disease for instance is more common in people from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds. This makes them more likely to need blood or a transplant.

For example:

- While 69% of patients awaiting a stem cell transplant can find the best possible match from a stranger, this drops to 20% if they are a patient from a Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and minority ethnic background.
- Three in ten people waiting for an organ transplant are from a Black African and Black Caribbean background; Asian background and minority ethnic background.

What is the law on organ donation in the rest of the UK?

England: All adults in England are now considered to have agreed to be an organ donor when they die unless they have recorded a decision not to donate or are in an excluded group.

- **Wales:** As in England, the legislation for Wales is 'deemed consent'. This means that if a person hasn't registered an organ and tissue donation decision, they will be considered to have no objection to becoming a donor.
- **Scotland:** There is an opt-in system for organ and tissue donation. However, legislation to introduce a 'deemed authorisation system' (a type of opt-out system) will be introduced in March 2021.
- **Northern Ireland:** The current legislation is to opt in to organ and tissue donation. Following consideration of the issue, in 2020 the health minister said he intends to hold a consultation moving towards introducing a soft opt-out system for organ donation.

For more information, including on the current legislation around organ donation in the Crown dependencies, visit organdonation.nhs.uk/uk-laws/

Develop effective ground rules

Draw up and establish simple ground rules with students or refer to pre-existing ground rules that you use with the group. Clear ground rules help students express their ideas and feelings while showing respect for others. Ensure students understand that what they say in the lesson shouldn't be discussed outside the lesson and how this creates a safe learning environment. Be clear that, for safeguarding reasons, there are some things you can't keep confidential and remind students of the safeguarding protocols that operate in school. Ground rules will be most effective when students can explain their purpose and express them in their own words. We suggest you display them in the room and review them at the start of each lesson and, where appropriate, during a lesson if agreed boundaries are being crossed. The PSHE Association suggests that ground rules include:

1. Openness

We will be open and honest, but not discuss directly our own or others' personal/private lives. We will discuss general situations as examples but will not use names or descriptions which could identify anyone. We will not put anyone 'on the spot'.

2. Keep the conversation in the room

We feel safe discussing general issues relating to mental health within this space, and we know that our teacher will not repeat what is said in the classroom unless they are concerned we are at risk, in which case they will follow the school's safeguarding policy.

3. Non-judgmental approach

It is okay for us to disagree with another person's point of view but we will not judge, make fun of, or put anybody down. We will 'challenge the opinion, not the person'.

4. Right to pass

Taking part is important. However, we have the right to pass on answering a question or participating in an activity.

5. Make no assumptions

We will not make assumptions about people's values, attitudes, behaviours, life experiences or feelings.

6. Listen to others

We will listen to the other person's point of view and expect to be listened to.

7. Using language

We will use the correct terms for the things we will be discussing rather than the slang terms, as they can be offensive. If we are not sure what the correct term is, we will ask our teacher.

8. Asking questions

We know that there are no stupid questions. We do not ask questions to deliberately try to embarrass anyone else. There is a question box for anonymous questions.

9. Seeking help and advice

If we need further help or advice, we know how and where to seek it confidentially, both in school and in the community. We will encourage friends to seek help if we think they need it.

(Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing, March 2015, p16)

Use a question box

Have an anonymous question box and make it clear at the start of each lesson that students can place questions in the box at any time during the lesson and that they will be addressed at a later time e.g. follow-up lesson. At the end of the lesson, you could ask everyone to write a response, even if they don't have a question, so that no-one feels embarrassed about asking a question in this way (you may want to ask students to write 'urgent' on a question that's particularly pressing, so you can identify and prioritise this). In all cases make sure your answers are factually correct, non-judgemental and in line with school policies. They should be appropriately sensitive for the issue and the individual(s) concerned. It's important to take the questions away and reflect on them before responding, rather than answering them immediately in class. For students who may not be able to write a question, voice recorders or similar could be made available.



Signpost ways to get help

Make sure all students know they can speak to an adult after the lesson. As well as encouraging them to think about trusted adults who can support them and the question box, you may wish to remind them that they can also get help from organisations such as Childline ([childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)) or Mind ([mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)) if they would prefer to talk to someone that they don't know.

If a student in the class has received an organ transplant and it's felt that they would benefit from meeting others who have had a similar experience, support is available at Transplant Sport Kids (transplantsport.org.uk/kids-teens). Similarly, if a student or family member has experience of blood cancer, Anthony Nolan has support for patients and families (anththonolan.org/patients-and-families).

'Distancing' the learning

Teachers should not encourage students to disclose sensitive information in the classroom, and should 'distance' the learning. Distancing means thinking and talking about sensitive issues as an observer or in the third person, rather than talking in the first person and using personal examples. When students can distance themselves from a sensitive issue, they can think more clearly about it and without their thoughts being affected by strong emotions. This can help them more easily derive meaning and insight from the example.

- When discussing examples, help students think about what someone 'like them' might experience, feel, think, say or do. 'Can you imagine a young person about your age, who lives and goes to school around here and who...' Using photos or illustrations of a scenario can help with this.
- When thinking about how best to act or respond to a scenario in a lesson, ask questions that help students explore how they might help a friend, younger student or sibling or act as an 'agony aunt' or 'uncle'.

For further information visit:

- nhsbt.nhs.uk
- blood.co.uk
- organdonation.nhs.uk

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for further free
educational
resources and
initiatives.**