

# BEYOND REFERRALS

## Student Engagement sessions

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## Contextual Safeguarding Student Engagement

This guidance forms part of the Beyond Referrals audit toolkit and should help schools audit their responses to harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). This guidance outlines one method that can help a school complete their beyond referrals audit – Student engagement sessions. In this toolkit we provide key pointers on how to conduct a student engagement session with young people, as well as example questions that can be adapted to suit the concerns and needs of individual schools.

The document includes:

- Guidance for carrying out a student engagement session
- Appendix A: Session plan
- Appendix B: Student consent form

### Student Engagement sessions

Student engagement sessions provide a safe space for young people to freely discuss their thoughts about HSB. In a student engagement session the facilitator(s) asks the participants a series of questions to prompt informal discussion, which is then anonymously captured and reviewed.

The questions provided here are examples, use them as a basis for developing and adapting your own questions. The purpose of this conversation should be to assess the current situation and allow students to feel comfortable to talk and reflect on their views on the school responses to HSB. It is important therefore that the conversation is confidential unless a student discloses a safeguarding concern that has not been responded to or has not been responded to appropriately.

Students should feel able to raise concerns in a safe space without being judged or fear of repercussions. The focus of the student engagement session is on student wellbeing and school environment in general terms, rather than individuals specific experiences. The aim is not to get students to disclose; it should be noted that a group setting is not the right environment for young people to disclose, and could lead to additional harm. However, if any safeguarding concerns do arise at any stage of the session then these should be appropriately followed up.

Before engaging students, it is important that a response is developed in the event that a student does disclose harm. For example, identifying a member of staff – normally the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – through an appropriate referral pathway.

For the purpose of auditing we advise holding at least two one hour sessions in total. Where possible (or relevant) we advise holding single-sex groups.

Key steps and considerations for setting up and carrying out a student engagement session are provided below.

We also advise listening to the following interview before holding a student engagement session:

<http://contextualsafeguarding.libsyn.com/carrying-out-focus-groups-with-young-people>

**In order to arrange a student engagement session we recommend taking the following steps:**

**1. Develop a session plan:**

The student engagement session should follow a session plan. Appendix A provides an example session plan and script that can be used.

**2. Identify facilitators:**

We advise that two facilitators are identified to lead the student engagement sessions. Facilitators could be members of staff who students feel at ease talking to, or schools may also choose to train and support students to deliver student engagement sessions themselves.

**3. Identify participants:**

Sessions should be held with 4 – 8 students, in single sex groups. When selecting young people to participate in the groups within each key stage, careful consideration should be taken to whether the young people selected will be appropriate to talk together. Consider, for example, if there are any current concerns or problematic peer group dynamics at play before going ahead with the selected group. You may need to make some adjustments to the group. The sessions should involve a diverse range of students from across all school years and from a range of backgrounds and academic ability to capture as many perspectives as possible.

**4. Ensuring consent:**

Students must be clear that they do not *need* to take part in student engagement: it is an optional activity. We therefore recommend asking the selected young people to fill in a consent form in advance of the session taking place, such as the example provided in Appendix B.

**5. Establishing confidentiality protocols:**

Both facilitators and participants must be clear on confidentiality protocols. This includes establishing what confidentiality means and what procedures and processes are in place if a disclosure is made. While students might assume that 'what is said in the room stays in the room' is important they know that what they say will be kept confidential unless they say something that suggests they, or another young person may be at risk of harm. It is important to state at the start what would happen in this event.

**6. Finding and creating the right space:**

Student engagement sessions should be held in a quiet and private room during class time. It is important that students feel comfortable to discuss challenging issues, and that an informal, comfortable space is created to enable this. This includes allowing the students to leave at any time if it is safe to do so.

**7. Capturing the information:**

The session could be recorded in notes. When recording notes of the session, it should remain anonymous, however it is important that any individual concerns arising are noted and appropriately followed up.

**8. Right to withdraw:**

Students have the right to withdraw their consent to engage in the research. They can do this at any point during the focus group itself and we also allow time after the focus group for

students to change their mind about being involved in the project. As a guide, we usually allow 4 weeks following a focus group for a student to withdraw their consent.

**9. Follow up:**

Once the session has been captured, an intervention plan should then be developed for issues that arise from the information gathered. All issues reported should be taken seriously. Some of these may relate to concerns outside of the school, for example a particular location where young people feel unsafe. It is important that these are raised with the local authority. The first point of contact within the local authority will vary between local areas. Actions that result from the student engagement sessions should be disseminated to the students so that they know their voice and opinions are being taken seriously.

Group settings are not the right environment for young people to disclose, however, if any safeguarding concerns do arise at any stage of the session then these should be appropriately followed up.

We would value any feedback you have once you have used the student engagement guidance and session sheet. Please send any feedback to the Contextual Safeguarding Team.

## Appendix A: Session plan

<b>Student engagement session plan</b> Time needed: 1– 1.5 hours		
Before the group starts, set up the room so that everyone can sit around one table. Ensure there is flipchart paper, pens, card and toothpaste (if using). If there are two members of staff, consider where you will sit so students feel comfortable.		
<b>Timing</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Resources</b>
15 minutes	<p><b>Introduction and consent</b> Go around the table group and introduce ourselves</p> <p>Explain the reason for the group and assessment: [Example script] ‘We are here today because we want to talk about your feelings of safety in school. In particular, we know that students sometimes experience sexual harm at school, for example sexual harassment, unwanted touching, and harm online. So we want to speak with you today about how well you think this school does and how we can improve. We are working with the University of Bedfordshire to improve school responses. We are not asking you to talk about your own experiences, but, to think about issues that might affect students here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does that sound like what you expected?</li> </ul> <p>We want to use what is said here to capture themes and ideas and think of ways to improve. But before we begin we need to talk about sharing in a group.</p> <p><b>Confidentiality-</b> We keep all information confidential. We will not tell anyone outside this group who said what and we will make sure that no one’s name is used in the assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you think of a time when we might have to break confidentiality?</li> </ul> <p>The only time that we would have to break confidentiality is if you told us something that makes us worry about you or someone else being seriously harmed. If this happens we will have to talk to someone about that but we will always try and let you know we will do this. For example, we will not have to tell anyone if you tell us you have been smoking, but if you told us that tonight someone was going to get badly beaten up then we would have to tell someone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does that make sense?</li> </ul> <p>But to be clear, we are not asking about your own experiences. Before we begin we are going to play a little game.</p> <p><b>Tooth paste exercise- Explaining limits of confidentiality in group setting</b> (5 mins) We’re going to do a very quick exercise before we start (*ask that if anyone has done this exercise before they don’t explain to others).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ask for a volunteer (or nominate someone).</li> </ul>	Name stickers Pens Card Toothpaste Group agreement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hand them a sheet of card and tube of toothpaste – tell them their task is to empty the contents of the toothpaste onto the sheet of card.</li> <li>● Ask them to hand to person sitting next to them. Tell that person their task is to put all the toothpaste back in the tube – but explain that they can't cut the tube and there can't be a single bit of toothpaste left on the card or their hands.</li> <li>● Ask rest of group to help them/ give them ideas – the group should quickly come to conclusion that it's not possible.</li> <li>● After a few minutes ask them what this exercise has to do with confidentiality in a group?</li> </ul> <p>Prompt if necessary – how is the toothpaste like information that we share? Once information is shared in a group setting we can never completely control what happens to it – while we are all committed to respecting each other's privacy we need to recognise that we can't guarantee that someone might accidentally share something. For this reason we all need to make sure we are only sharing information in a group that we feel comfortable to share. Words are like toothpaste, once it is out we can't take it back.</p> <p>So that we know you are happy to take part we are going to ask you to sign a consent form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pass around consent form</li> <li>- Read out each section and explain any parts</li> <li>- Ask students to tick and sign the consent form.</li> <li>- Collect in consent forms and make sure everyone is happy to take part.</li> <li>- If someone is not happy to they are allowed to leave.</li> </ul> <p>Ok great, we are going to get started, you are welcome to stop at any time.</p> <p>So that I can capture everything I am going to take notes.</p>	
15 minutes	<p><b>Words about feeling safe at school</b></p> <p>When we described the project in our introduction, and when we talk about safety at school, what do you think about? What types of harm do you think happens to students when we talk about sexual harm?</p> <p>(map out words on flipchart paper)</p> <p>[prompt: sexual harassment, cyber-bullying, unwanted touching, blackmail, rape, sending nudes]</p> <p>[You can ask further questions, for example 'you said sexting, can you tell me a little more about how that might happen? What makes it harmful]</p> <p>[Try and map as many as possible]</p>	Flip-chart paper Stickers

	<p><b>Are there any on here that you think are issues in this school?</b> [put stars next to all] [Make sure students don't refer to any students or gossip]</p> <p><b>Are there any particular places this happens more, or different times?</b></p>	
30 minutes	<p><b>Statements exercise</b> – Do something, Do nothing, Don't know [Get students to stand up. Tell them that you are going to read out a scenario and ask them to move along a line to how they think a student (not themselves) would respond. At one end have 'do nothing', in the middle 'something else', at the other end 'tell a teacher']</p> <p>Ask the students to move to different parts of the room along a line depending on their response to each statement: [Adapt the scenarios depending on the age of the group]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If a girl walked along and someone shouted 'Sket/Slut' at here</li> <li>● Would this be different if it was a racist word</li> <li>● If a naked photo of a student was shared on social media, would another student at the school.....?</li> <li>● If a female student is pushed against a wall and groped, would another student at the school.....?</li> <li>● If a student was at a party and had been drinking, a video was shared around where they were forced into sexual activity.</li> <li>● Can you think of your own scenarios that happen in school?</li> </ul> <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What happens, tell us more about that?</li> <li>▪ Why don't people respond?</li> <li>▪ What would stop someone telling a teacher?</li> <li>▪ How should it be responded to?</li> <li>▪ How does the school respond?</li> </ul>	
20 minutes	<p><b>School response</b> [Sit back at the table]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When something like this happens how has your school responded?"</li> <li>- What do you see the school doing?</li> <li>- Do you feel like you know who to speak to?</li> <li>- What does the school do well?</li> <li>- What can they do better?</li> <li>- We don't want this to happen in the first place, is anything done to prevent it – assembly, posters...</li> <li>- What 3 things would you do if you were in charge?"</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What one thing do adults need to know about what life at school is like for young people?</li> </ul>	
15 minutes	<p><b>Close</b></p> <p>Thank everyone for taking part  We will be using this information to see what the school is doing well and how we can improve. We know that sometimes when we talk about issues like this it can get you thinking about issues that you hadn't thought about before, that's very normal. Here is a follow up sheet with some contacts if you want to talk to someone more about this. [Teacher name] is also available.</p>	Follow up sheet leaflet.

## Appendix B: Student consent form

### Safety in school research project

#### Consent form for young person

Before we start, we need to be sure that you are happy to take part in our research project. Please read or listen to these things and tick the box if you agree. If there is anything you're not sure about, please just ask me.

<u>I know that:</u>	Yes
This group is about how well schools keep young people safe from sexual bullying, sexism, violence and harassment	
You will ask us questions about safety at our school	
I can stop taking part at any time or change my mind about you using what I tell you within four weeks	
You will use what I tell you to improve how the school responds but you won't use my name or anything that would let people know that it was me.	
If I tell you that someone (including myself) is being hurt or is in danger, you will have to tell someone to get help.	
I can talk to a staff member at school if I have any worries or questions after taking part.	
It is important that I don't tell other people what was said in the group.	

I want to take part in this focus group	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
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Your name:	
Your age:	
Your signature:	
Date:	

