

Lesson #1

Ground rules

What does a safe and supportive learning environment look like?

13–17 years

🕒 1 hour

Lesson outline:

Setting ground rules

In this lesson, students will come to a group agreement on the type of environment that will help them to discuss difficult and sensitive topics in a safe and respectful way. They will agree on a set of ground rules for everyone to follow, and make suggestions on how they would like to be supported by their teacher/educator.

Lesson objective:

To create a safe space in which to discuss online sexual harassment.

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Understand and suggest behaviour expectations during the planned activities
- Identify individual needs to feel comfortable to take part in the planned activities
- Express expectations of the educator's approach during the planned activities

Vocabulary:

'Ground rules'
'Environment'
'Safe'
'Respect'
'Expectations'

Before the lesson:

- Review the [Teaching Guide](#) for information about online sexual harassment and further advice on how to deliver these lessons.
- Refresh your knowledge of your school's reporting procedures. Speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) about how the school supports students who make a report.

Activity

Timing

Resources

Activity		Timing	Resources
Starter	How many..? sorting activity	10 mins	
Activity 1	Ground rules in groups	20 mins	Flipchart paper, pens
Activity 2	Expectations	20 mins	Flipchart paper, pens
Plenary	Summing up	10 mins	

Starter

🕒 10min

To warm up and encourage teamwork, ask students to think of how many online accounts they have that they use regularly (e.g different social media accounts, gaming accounts, email accounts).

Ask students to arrange themselves in a line in order of least to most online accounts.

Discuss with students what they use their accounts for, and what they like to do online.

Activity 1

🕒 20min

Explain to students:

“In the next few lessons we will be exploring the topic of sexual harassment, and how this can happen online. Issues like this can be very sensitive and difficult to talk about sometimes. It’s okay to feel unsure or ask questions, but it’s also important that as a group we all agree on how to treat each other during these lessons and that everyone feels comfortable and safe to take part. To do this, we will agree on a set of ground rules and consider what behaviour is acceptable during these lessons.”

Ask the group to silently reflect on how they would like others to act and behave during these lessons. Split the group into several smaller groups, and give each a piece of flipchart paper. Ask them to think of some ground rules they would like everyone to follow when discussing sensitive topics. Encourage them to frame their statements in a positive way e.g “We listen to each other and respect our different opinions” instead of “we won’t interrupt each other or be disrespectful.”

Come together as a whole group to share and create a master list of ground rules.



A note on seating arrangements:

Decide beforehand if you would like to change the seating arrangement of your classroom, e.g. sitting in a circle or changing the seating plan. The action of rearranging or changing seats can be used as a reminder to students that a new lesson has begun, and the ground rules are now in action.

If some of the suggestions on the list below are not included, ask the group for permission to add them. Do not use the whole following list – just present the ones that are not already included in the master list created by the students.

- We will always be on time.
- If we can’t attend or don’t feel comfortable then we will tell someone beforehand.
- We will always respect everyone in the group.
- We will be sensitive to everyone’s different backgrounds, needs and experiences.
- We will keep everything that is discussed during the lesson confidential.
- We will keep people’s names out of our discussions.
- We know that there are no wrong answers – everyone is there to learn.
- We know that we don’t have to answer or discuss things we don’t want to.
- We know that this lesson is a safe space, free from violence – physical or verbal.
- We will treat others as we wish to be treated.
- We will use our phones in line with the school rules (refer to your school policy on the use of personal devices in lesson time).



See p. 10 of the [Teaching Guide](#) for further advice on establishing a safe environment for a high quality PSHE or RSE lesson.

Review the ground rules and check that everyone agrees with them. If not, work through them until everyone agrees. You could ask all students to sign their names around the list of rules to show they agree to uphold them.

Display the master list of ground rules prominently in the room.



A note on language: Derogatory name-calling, offensive language and swearing often form part of online sexual harassment. It is for the educator to decide if students can use these in the context of the lesson - for example, explaining a scenario or recounting an example. Be clear on expectations from the start and apply them consistently. If this type of language is allowed to be used, explain that it is only to be used if relevant and does not imply students can use it without good reason to.

Activity 2

🕒 20min

Divide the whiteboard or a piece of flipchart paper into two columns. Add a tick on one side and a cross on the other.

Explain to the group that as the teacher/educator, you want to make sure you are following the ground rules too, and want to support the students to discuss these issues in a way that makes them feel safe and listened to.

Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6 and ask them to think about what they expect from their teacher/educator– what they find helpful and supportive, and what they don't.

Take some feedback, and add these suggestions to the appropriate column. You may need to explain or clarify your role if any expectations are too unrealistic. However, it's important to take your students seriously, and suggest different options that may be more appropriate and reasonable.

At this point it is important to clarify your position on disclosures. Remind students that you all agreed in the ground rules to keep the discussions you have confidential, and not to discuss them with people outside of the group. Include yourself in this ground rule and add to the list if it's not already there.

The one exception to this is your duty as a member of staff to follow up on anything that poses a risk to a child's safety. Explain:

“I will also follow the ground rule about confidentiality, however, there is one exception to this. If anyone in the group shares that they are being hurt or abused by someone it is my responsibility as a member of this school to make sure you are safe and help to protect you from harm. If I learn that someone is hurting you, I will do everything I can to help you and to prevent this from happening again.

There may be times when you feel uncomfortable about sharing something very personal in the group. You do not have to do this if you don't want to. But, if you would like to talk to me about something alone, you always have the opportunity to do this. Just ask me and we will arrange a time to talk alone.”

 See p.10 of the Teaching Guide for more advice on setting up the physical space of the lesson.

Plenary

🕒 10min

Ask for volunteers to sum up the key messages of the ground rules in a gradually decreasing number of words. For example, the first student sums it up in 15 words, the next in 10 words, the next in 5 words, until a student can sum up the key messages in one word.