

It is important that young people feel safe and comfortable in an environment where they can thrive and develop. So, here are some EmpowHER tips on how to make your session/spaces safe for young people whilst delivering social action or social learning lessons.

# Making safe spaces for young people

## Top Tips for Pre & First sessions

- ★ Sending out an agenda for the session/resources needed or laying them out before the session.
- ★ Comfortable environment – setting the mood (music, lights, snacks etc)
- ★ Initial Wellbeing activity – icebreakers – group activity (creating a group charter/ground rules)
- ★ Having resources like stress balls/fidget toys available for YPs if needed.

## Top Tips for during the session

- ★ Allow young people to choose topics they are interested in
- ★ Let young people speak/explain/ask questions during the session
- ★ Be fully present at the session – no distractions or interruptions
- ★ If appropriate, share your own experiences and thoughts
- ★ Group sessions that focus on team binding/relaxing – pamper night/games night/movie night etc

## Top Tips for post session

- ★ Allow time for questions/suggestions for next session
- ★ Closing activity/recap of lessons learnt
- ★ Call to Action activity or task for next session
- ★ Youth workers can schedule in regular 1-2-1 check-ins with each young person to see how they are finding the sessions.

## Top Tips for Online safe spaces

- ★ When using online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom or Microsoft FlipGrid, ensure the login links/details for the meeting is password protected and participants are admitted from a waiting room.
- ★ Ensure that the chat functions are set to one or more of the below options:
  - Be turned off completely and any messaging directed to an organisation's mobile device or
  - Set to public messaging only
  - Set to private messaging of the Host only
- ★ Always ask participant permission and consent if photos or recordings will be taken during the online session. (They need to be informed in advance about the purpose of recording as well as the distribution of any recording and given the chance to turn their camera off and/or change their name if they prefer).
- ★ Encourage young people to find a quiet space/environment before each session
- ★ Ensure there is one or two more additional adults/youth workers online during the session to ensure that young people have enough support. One member of the team will have the role of 'tech' and will be able to remove any participants if necessary, keeping a record if this happens.
- ★ If the session involves multiple breakout rooms, additional staff required to facilitate each breakout room.
- ★ Allow some time at the beginning of the session for participants to join and get settled in before starting the session. During this time, you can encourage participants to chat amongst themselves about their day/week/school. You can also encourage them to have their first names or preferred name and pronouns shown on screen (optional), chat to the group, grab a drink or resources they might need etc.
- ★ Always let participants know at the start of the session that they can turn on or off their cameras if they prefer and can do what feels comfortable to them
- ★ Always start the session with an icebreaker, wellbeing activity or informal check-in to understand how the participants are at that very moment.
- ★ Avoid long online sessions that are beyond an hour and if session is above an hour, ensure adequate breaks are embedded into the session
- ★ Ensure that young people know that they can take mini breaks if they need to during the session or ask questions also. Using reactions and the raise hand function are great ways young people can let you know that they want to speak.

## Being called a 'role model' can be intimidating! Support people to get involved

People are usually keen to share their experiences and help support and encourage others – but role models can need encouragement too, especially if they're not experienced working with young people.

- ★ Highlight the benefits of getting involved – EmpowHER role models told us that volunteering with young people helped to build their own confidence, added to their CVs, inspired new creative ideas and even inspired them to start their own businesses!
- ★ Be flexible with the options available. As you'll see below there are lots of ways people can support your group as a role model – find out how much time and capacity they have and work with that.
- ★ Take the time to chat to people and find out what support they might need. Do they have accessibility requirements? Might they want time to practice a presentation with you beforehand? Can you give them technical support with playing videos or getting hold of resources?
- ★ Set boundaries that everyone's comfortable with. Some role models might be happy to answer questions for hours after a session or give follow-up support; others will only have a set time that they can contribute or won't feel comfortable answering questions on certain topics. Have honest and ongoing conversations about what people do or don't want to contribute.
- ★ Brief your role models about the group they'll be working with. Share as much information as is appropriate about their age, ability-level, the numbers you're expecting and how you might be expecting them to respond to the session. This can be particularly important if you'll be addressing a sensitive or difficult topic.
- ★ If a role model is leading a session with young people, remember to get engaged yourself and don't be afraid to chip in and facilitate the conversation.



## Use your networks to reach out

There are so many diverse ways that role models can get involved to support young people, and valuable contributions are about quality, not quantity. Role models could:

- ★ Give a talk or run a workshop, in person or online
- ★ Be the 'expert in the room' to give advice on a project the group are working on
- ★ Respond remotely to questions that the group have by recording their answers in a video, voice note, email or card
- ★ Provide encouraging messages via video or by sending a card or letter
- ★ Give a tour of their workplace (by filming themselves, or having the group visit in person)
- ★ Share the work they've produced - whether that's a relevant research report, a film they've made, tickets to a play they've directed
- ★ Take part in a 'speed-dating' session with other role models to introduce themselves to the group
- ★ Support the group by attending an event they're putting on, or sharing their campaign on social media
- ★ Review something the group have produced and offer advice or edits
- ★ Take part in an online 'Role Model Event' arranged for young people to explore a specific topic



## Celebrate your role models!

Find a way to show your appreciation with thanks, a card, or feedback from the young people involved. Lots of role models might be keen to continue to hear how the young people get on or what they achieve with their social action projects – try and keep them in the loop with a newsletter, or an invite to a final event!