 Stepping out to access health services

Suggested duration: 45 minutes

This activity encourages young people to think about the enabling factors for accessing health care for all young people.

Like many other groups within our society, many young people find it difficult to seek the help they require to enhance their own health, safety and wellbeing. In relation to accessing health services, there are often perceived and actual barriers that prevent young people from receiving medical care.

This activity has been adapted from the activity Stepping out[[1]](#footnote-1), and the Youth Friendly General Practice Video teaching program[[2]](#footnote-2).

Course outcomes

1.2 Critically evaluate services and resources to identify sources of reliable information and support.

4.2 Propose, apply and evaluate solutions to take action to lead and contribute to healthy, safe and meaningful lives.

7.2 Demonstrate the capacity to seek help for self and others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Identify reasons why young people use health services.
* Evaluate what makes a youth friendly sexual health service.
* Examine how attitudes, behaviours and access to health services are influenced by factors such as rurality, culture, gender, age, sexuality and socioeconomic background.
* Propose strategies to encourage young people to access appropriate health services.

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Sexuality and sexual health  Focus: Safe and ethical behaviour | Safe and ethical behaviour   * recognising and negotiating safe practices and safe sex behaviours   Reproductive and sexual health   * reproductive health * sexual health care, e.g. positive sexual health, testing, contact tracing, treatment * contraception * sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and blood borne viruses (BBVs) |
| Sexuality and sexual health  Focus: Building health literacy | Accessing information and services   * reliable sources of information * confidentiality * types of services, e.g. community health services, sexual health services, youth friendly services * overcoming barriers to accessing services   Support for self and others   * identifying when help is required * how to access support for others |

Teaching notes

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* Making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* Being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* Enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Being values fair

We all have our own personal values and attitudes. When running positioning activities, sometimes students will question where you would stand with certain statements and it is important that you take time before hand to consider what your thoughts are on the statements in this activity.

The department’s [Controversial issues in schools policy implementation procedures](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/controversial-issues-in-schools) state that:

“In discussions of controversial issues, the teacher should ensure that opinions are expressed and evidence is presented impartially. The teacher is not committed to unnatural neutrality but rather to preserving objectivity and avoiding special advocacy. The teacher’s personal view should not intrude.”

It is not expected that we be value free or value neutral. When doing values based activities it is important as a facilitator that you remain value fair during discussions.

There will be occasions, when a statement of the teacher’s views may be necessary to help students formulate their own views or to answer a request from students when such a request is relevant to the discussion. In such situations, the teacher’s statement should be balanced and restrained and presented as one opinion to be considered critically along with any others. Source: [Controversial issues in schools policy implementation procedures](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/controversial-issues-in-schools)

Required resources and materials for preparation

* Character cards – 1 per student
* Internet access to view additional materials and video clips

Learning experiences

Activity one – Stepping out (25 minutes)

1. Explain to the group:

* this activity is about exploring the lives of others and the barriers and implications of accessing health services.
* the character card students will be given is purely for the purpose of this activity only. No participant should be harassed or made fun of by others at any time because of the character card they have in this activity.
* students will be allocated one character card each and are not to show their card to anyone else in the group until instructed.
* students will assume the identity of the character for the purpose of the activity.
* students will be asked a series of questions. For each question, students will consider their character and decide if they can answer yes or no to the question.
* if students can answer yes, they will take a step forward. If students answer no, they remain where they are.
* students should answer each question according to what they know about health services and accessing health professionals in the community.

1. Allocate a character card for each student. Students review the character on their card and think about their situation.

Teacher note: it is important that the character cards are allocated randomly, so students do not feel like they have been purposely given a specific character. The teacher should provide all students with the option of changing their card if they feel uncomfortable.

1. Select a number of questions to ask students based on the needs of the group and time allocated. Students should answer each question according to what they know about health services and accessing health professionals in the community, rather than what they think should be the answer.

* Could you talk to a parent or caregiver about your sexual health needs?
* Could you talk to a friend about your relationships or sexual health situation?
* Could you talk to the leader of your youth group, sporting club, religious group, music group about your relationships or sexual health in general?
* Could you ask a teacher questions you have about your relationships or sexual health situation?
* Would your parent or caregiver know about health services that are appropriate for you to access?
* Would you find it easy to make an appointment with a GP or health professional?
* Would you be comfortable with seeing any GP, i.e. whoever is available, for a sexual health checkup such as getting a pap smear, testicular check or an STI test?
* Would you be able to choose your own GP? For example, choose a specific doctor or ask for a female doctor.
* Could you get your own Medicare card?
* Could you take your partner with you to an appointment to see a GP or health professional?
* Could you go to an appointment with a GP or health professional without having to ask or tell your parents?
* Could you go to an appointment with a GP or health professional without your parents accessing your health records?
* Are you able to make your own medical decisions, for example give consent to receive treatment or medication?
* Would you be confident that an appointment with a GP or health professional would remain confidential?
* Would a GP or health service understand and be supportive of your lifestyle?
* Would a GP or health service have information for your specific needs?
* Could you talk openly with a GP or health professional about sexual health topics such as masturbation, menstruation, pap smears, erections or STIs?
* Could you openly talk to a GP or health professional about your relationships, sexual behaviours or sexual health without fear of judgement?
* Would you be comfortable asking your doctor or health professional for an STI check?
* Would you talk openly with a GP or health professional about contraception?
* Could you access the female contraceptive pill if you wanted to or needed to for reproductive issues such as endometriosis?
* Could you pay for medical tests if they were required?
* Could you access follow up support or treatment if it was required?
* Could you ask your parent or caregiver to pay for any health services you want or need to access?
* Would you talk to a friend about a visit to a GP or health professional?

Initial discussion – sharing thoughts

1. Students do not reveal their character card where possible. Discuss the activity as a group by posing the following questions:

* how did you feel about your character and seeing others ahead of or behind you?
* were there any questions that you weren’t sure how to answer? If so, what made it difficult to answer the question?
* what reasons influenced your decisions to move forward or not? e.g. cultural and religious backgrounds/beliefs, character’s sexuality, character’s gender or age, geographical location, societies attitudes, or having to consider what and to whom to disclose information.

1. Students reveal the character on their card one at a time from the front of the group to the back.
2. Use the following discussion questions to dispel myths and discuss the barriers to accessing health services.

* Why do you think you are standing in different positions? What does this mean?
* Are there any characters who are the same but are standing in different positions? Why do you think this is?
* Considering the different characters standing here - What do you think are the barriers to accessing health services for?
  + males vs females
  + city vs rural/remote communities
  + those under 15yrs of age
* What are your thoughts about the experiences of the character on your card after considering their situation and the barriers they face in accessing health services?

1. Students return their character cards. In small groups, discuss the following questions:

* what are the barriers for young people to accessing health services or health professionals? Why are these barriers for young people?
* what are the implications for young people when they don’t access health services? What impact does this have on their health, safety and wellbeing?
* what can you do to find out about health services in your area?
* what steps can you take to access a health service for the first time?

Knowledge circle

1. Form a circle as a large group or two smaller groups depending on numbers. Remind everyone that during this discussion they have the right to choose whether they respond or not and can pass if they want to.
2. Ask the following questions one at a time and move around the circle to hear the thoughts of each student or a number of students.

* What makes a health service ‘youth friendly’? What would it look like, sound like, feel like? What would it include? Where would it be located? Who would be involved? What would be the opening hours?
* What did you learn from your participation in this activity?
* What could individuals and health professionals do to support young people to access health services?
* How could health services create a more supportive environment for young people?

Concluding the activity

1. Debrief the activity

* Explain to students that the character card they had in this activity was for the purpose of the activity only.
* Make it clear that no one should be harassed or made fun of by others after this activity or when they leave here today because of the character card they had in this activity.
* Provide an opportunity for all students to ask questions about this activity, i.e. using strategies such as an anonymous question box, linoit page, google doc, post it notes, graffiti wall.

Activity two – Stay and stray – what do you know (20 minutes)

1. Use a strategy such as “stay and stray” to group students to share their thoughts on a range of statements.

Stay and stray

Create groups of 3 and number students 1, 2 and 3. Spread the groups of 3 around the room. For each statement each person will be provided a set period of time, e.g. 30 seconds to express their thoughts on the statement. For this 30 seconds the other 2 are listening and not speaking or interrupting. Each person in the group takes their 30 seconds on the same statements.

Once all 3 have expressed their thoughts, rotate the groups by moving person 1 clockwise; person 2 stays stationary and person 3 moving anti-clockwise.

Repeat the process for each statement.

Use the following statement as examples for discussion:

* all health professionals must keep your visit confidential.
* a health professional can tell your parents what is discussed after your consultation.
* health professionals should provide reliable information for young people.
* young people trust health professionals enough to ask personal questions.
* some young people might be embarrassed to discuss their health with a health professional.
* all young people need their parents’ permission to visit a GP.
* you can visit a GP without your own Medicare card.
* most young people are aware of all the services a GP can provide.
* health professionals in our area offer services, which can overcome the barriers we explored in the stepping out activity, including language, gender and confidentiality.
* watch the 8 minute [NSW Kids and Families - Youth Friendly General Practice video](http://au.professionals.reachout.com/youth-friendly-general-practice-video)to provide additional information and provide further points for discussion.

Additional resources

[NSW Kids and Families - Youth Friendly General Practice video](http://au.professionals.reachout.com/youth-friendly-general-practice-video) outlines:

* the broad (holistic) role of the General Practitioner (GP)
* how to access a GP
* confidentiality in health care.

The NSW Health [Play safe website](https://playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au) provides information young people need about safe sex, STIs and getting tested.

More information on what is involved in a sexual health check up, confidentiality and how to access a Medicare card can be found on the [NSW Health website](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/Pages/sexual-health-check-up.aspx)

[Sex Health Check - What's involved in a sexual health check in Australia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqRHR3s2D2Y) - Video focuses on getting tested for chlamydia and the process of contact tracing. The video has been developed to target young Aboriginal populations.

[ReachOut.com – All about your healthcare rights](http://au.reachout.com/all-about-your-healthcare-rights) (http://au.reachout.com/all-about-your-healthcare-rights) - Provides information you young people about

* rights as a health consumer
* how age affects rights
* how to make a complaint about a doctor or health provider
* rights regarding treatment and consent.

Character cards

A female in a long term relationship with a male from another religion, thinking about having sexual intercourse for the first time

A Muslim boy with a Muslim girlfriend

A 14 year old girl

A young person living with friends in the city

A student who is transgender and lives in the city

An opposite sex attracted male who lives in the country and has HIV

A sexually active, opposite sex attracted male who lives in a remote town

A male who lives with his parents in a small country town

A 16 year old girl who is pregnant and living alone

A 14 year old young person who has supportive parents

A 16 year old person with Hepatitis C whose parents are not supportive

A bisexual male in a steady relationship with a girl

A female who is in an abusive relationship

An Aboriginal male who is same sex attracted but currently in a steady relationship with a female

A 15 year old male with Hepatitis C

A 15 year old male with a 25 year old partner

A 15 year old female with a 19 year old boyfriend

A 15 year old male with a 19 year old partner

A 16 year old female with casual sexual partners

A 16 year old male with an intellectual disability who has casual sexual partners

An 18 year old female with an intellectual disability

A 14 year old female from the local cultural community who has had more than one sexual partner

A 14 year old female who has had her first sexual experience

A 17 year old male who is bisexual and has Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

A 17 year old female with a boyfriend who has chlamydia

An 18 year old girl whose first language is not English

A 15 year old female who is worried about her irregular periods

A religious male who has chosen to abstain from sex

A religious female who engages in sexual activity

A 16 year old male whose girlfriend thinks she might be pregnant

Create your own character – age, sexuality, religion, medical issue

Create your own character – age, sexuality, religion, medical issue

Create your own character – age, sexuality, religion, medical issue

Create your own character – age, sexuality, religion, medical issue

1. Ollis, D, & Mitchell, A, 2001, *Talking Sexual Health: a teaching and learning resources for secondary schools*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University for the Australian National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases (ANCAHRD) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thomson, J, 2013, *Youth Friendly General Practice Teaching Program, NSW Health. Accessed online: http://au.professionals.reachout.com/youth-friendly-general-practice-video*  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)