

Tips for Talking: For kaimahi working with young people

Use this handout to help guide your conversations with young people about sexual wellbeing. Integrating these tips into your daily mahi can help you to support young people to feel heard, validated and safe to kōrero with you.

Always follow your organisation's policies and code of conduct; and talk to a colleague or supervisor if you are ever unsure.

Note: These tips are derived from best practice guidance in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. Please contact Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa for a list of references.

Tips for Talking

1. Be curious

Approaching a conversation with curiosity, rather than assumptions, will give you an indication of a young person's knowledge and perspective on a topic. Use open ended questions, for example: *What do you think about this? That's an interesting view – can you tell me more about that?*

2. Be empathetic, caring and supportive

Young people are learning. Be patient, understanding and respectful of their feelings, emotions, and views, even if you don't agree with them. Be mindful of how you show empathy, care and support through your body language and the tone of your voice.

3. Leave blame, judgement and shame at the door

Listen without judgement – avoid jumping to conclusions or solutions or criticising them. Accept that they are on their own journey and that every journey is different, and that you may not necessarily agree with aspects of it. This can help build trust and connection.

4. Empower young people by taking a sexuality-positive approach

Taking a sexuality-positive approach means talking about sexual wellbeing topics in a positive way and as something that young people should have the space to explore, learn about, and express without fear or judgement. For example, if a young person under the age of 16 expresses interest in having sex, approach this from a positive angle by talking after safer sex, rather than fear-based messaging around breaking the law.

5. Include knowledge, attitude and skill

Having conversations that build knowledge, skill and explore attitude mean that a young person has all the information they need to make informed and healthy choices. Give correct knowledge, encourage them to reflect on their own values and attitudes, and teach them the skills needed to take care of their sexual wellbeing throughout their lives. Take 'consent' for example:

- Knowledge: Defining consent as freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and specific.
- Attitude: Consent is important every time someone has sex.
- Skill: Learning how to communicate assertively and how to actively listen.

6. Talk often and normalise the conversations

Instead of one big “talk” or lesson, normalise conversations about all aspects of sexual wellbeing by keeping them short, ongoing and simple. There are lots of ways to start conversations, including asking for their perspective on a social media trend or what they think of a storyline on a TV programme, referring to celebrity culture and relationships, or sharing something you’ve recently learnt about sexual wellbeing and getting their take on it.

7. Match the conversation with the young person

Consider the young person’s age and stage when talking about sexual wellbeing. Don’t assume what they know, or want to know, or what their views are based on their identity (e.g. gender, sexual identity, religion, culture). Try to be responsive - what’s on top for the young people you work with? Is it consent, relationships, sex and alcohol, or something else?

8. Stick to the facts

Share information that is correct, not based on your values, opinions, anecdotes, or “what you’ve heard” – this can unintentionally influence young people’s decision-making. If you don’t know – that’s ok - find out from credible and reliable sources or build their help-seeking skills by finding out the information together.

Visit sexualwellbeing.org.nz/learn to learn more about how to support young people with their sexual wellbeing.