

# Appendix F

## When Sensitive Topics Arise in Classroom Discussions: Tips for Teachers



Hi Educators! When learning about mental health, students may spontaneously share their experiences with sensitive topics. This tip sheet offers strategies for you to consider when navigating these potentially challenging moments.

**Acknowledge and redirect.** If a student shares a distressing experience or story, briefly acknowledge their feelings and quickly redirect the group conversation to safer topics (e.g., “That sounds really tough, let’s find some time later today to talk about it together”).

**Containment is key.** If a student begins sharing a distressing story with the group, respectfully interject and move the conversation along (e.g., “That’s a big, tricky story and I can tell it’s important for you to share, let’s find some time later today to talk about it together”).

**Check in individually with your student after the lesson.** A student may share a desire for help with a mental health problem, symptoms of a mental disorder or another concern. These conversations are best handled individually with the student, rather than in a group setting. Listen attentively to the student and make a plan to connect them to further support.

**Avoid discussing PTSD or trauma experiences in a group setting,** as this topic needs to be addressed individually by a trained clinician. If a student shares a trauma experience, calmly redirect the conversation. Please follow your school’s protocols to access further support.

**Avoid discussing suicide experiences in a group setting,** as this needs to be addressed individually by a trained clinician. If a student shares a suicide experience (e.g., they know someone who died by suicide), calmly redirect the conversation. Please follow your school’s protocols to access further support.

**If the topic of suicide arises,** briefly reinforce the message that reaching out for help, and getting appropriate treatment for a mental disorder are important ways to prevent suicide. Then, redirect the conversation.

**If you are concerned about a student’s disclosure** (e.g., a trauma experience, concerns about a loved one’s mental health, a safety concern at home, etc.) please follow your school’s protocols to access further support.

**If a student shares thoughts or behaviours of self-harm**, please follow your school's protocols to access further support.

**If a student shares thoughts or behaviours of suicide**, please follow your school's protocols to ensure safety and access further support.

**Remember: your classroom is not a group therapy space!** Consult with the helpers in your school (school counselling team, school administration, wellness coaches, etc.) for guidance if you feel your student(s) would benefit from additional mental health support.

**Handle yourself with care.** If any topics or discussions arise that are emotionally challenging for you, please remember to reach out for your own support, as appropriate.