



Controversial or Sensitive Topics Policy

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Purpose of this policy

This policy outlines how staff and mentors should approach controversial or sensitive topics when working with young people. It is designed to ensure that discussions are handled safely, respectfully and appropriately, while protecting young people from harm and maintaining professional boundaries.

MENT4 recognises that young people may want to talk about real life issues that affect them. These conversations can be valuable, but they must be managed carefully.

What we mean by sensitive or controversial topics

Sensitive or controversial topics may include, but are not limited to:

- violence or criminal behaviour
- exploitation or gang related issues
- relationships and sexual health
- identity, including race, faith, gender or sexuality
- trauma, abuse or personal experiences
- mental health and self harm
- substance use
- political or social issues
- discrimination or inequality
- family breakdown or conflict

These topics can be important to explore, but they can also carry risk if not handled appropriately.

Core principles

When discussing sensitive topics, staff must:

- prioritise the safety and wellbeing of young people
- remain professional and boundaried
- create a respectful and inclusive environment
- avoid causing distress or harm
- avoid sharing inappropriate or harmful content
- follow safeguarding procedures at all times

Creating a safe space

Staff should aim to create an environment where young people feel able to express themselves safely.

This includes:

- setting clear expectations for respectful discussion
- not allowing harmful language, bullying or discrimination
- encouraging listening and understanding
- being aware of group dynamics
- stopping conversations if they become unsafe or inappropriate

A safe space does not mean allowing anything to be said without challenge. It means managing conversations responsibly.

Professional boundaries in discussions

Staff must maintain professional boundaries when engaging in conversations.

Staff must not:

- share overly personal or inappropriate experiences
- promote personal beliefs in a way that pressures or influences young people
- engage in debates that become confrontational or divisive
- allow conversations to become unsafe or harmful
- present themselves as experts in areas outside their role

Staff can share perspectives where appropriate, but must remain balanced and professional.

Handling disclosures and personal sharing

Sensitive conversations may lead to disclosures.

If a young person shares something concerning, staff must:

- listen calmly
- avoid asking leading questions

- not promise confidentiality
- explain that information may need to be shared
- record what has been said
- report the concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead

Staff must not attempt to investigate or manage safeguarding concerns alone.

Challenging harmful views

Young people may express views that are harmful, discriminatory or influenced by their environment.

Staff should:

- challenge respectfully and calmly
- explain why the behaviour or language is not acceptable
- encourage reflection
- avoid shaming or humiliating the young person
- maintain the relationship while setting clear boundaries

The aim is to educate, not to punish.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity

Staff should be aware that young people come from different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and experiences.

Staff should:

- avoid assumptions
- respect different perspectives
- be sensitive to lived experiences
- create space for diverse voices
- ensure inclusion

Faith and belief

MENT4 is values led and rooted in a Christian ethos. However, staff must not impose faith or belief on young people.

Discussions about faith should:

- be appropriate to the context
- be respectful of all beliefs
- not pressure young people
- allow space for different views

Managing group settings

In group sessions, staff should:

- set clear ground rules
- monitor the tone of conversations
- intervene early if discussions become unsafe
- ensure quieter voices are not excluded
- avoid allowing dominant individuals to control discussions

Group settings require active facilitation.

Knowing when to stop a conversation

Staff should stop or redirect a conversation if:

- it becomes unsafe or distressing
- harmful language is being used
- a young person becomes overwhelmed
- safeguarding concerns arise
- the discussion moves beyond appropriate boundaries

Staff should explain clearly why the conversation is being redirected.

Seeking support

If staff are unsure how to handle a topic or situation, they should seek support from:

- a line manager
- a programme lead
- the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- a senior member of staff

Staff should not feel they have to manage complex situations alone.

Breaches of this policy

Failure to manage sensitive topics appropriately may lead to:

- supervision or additional training
- review of practice
- formal action where necessary

Serious breaches may be treated as a safeguarding or conduct issue.

Final note

Sensitive conversations can be powerful opportunities for learning, reflection and growth. However, they must always be handled with care, professionalism and clear boundaries.

MENT4's role is to support young people to think, reflect and grow in a safe and respectful environment.

This document has been approved by:

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A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to be "L. Peters".

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