



Beliefs, Values & Attitudes

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PSHE STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

A series of books for teachers and educators containing guidance and a range of activities suitable for use in schools and other settings with young people aged 7-16.

Me-and-Us

Introduction

Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

What are beliefs, values and attitudes?

A **belief** is an internal feeling that something is true, even though that belief may be unproven or irrational.
eg 'I believe that walking under a ladder brings bad luck.', 'I believe that there is life after death.'

A **value** is a measure of the worth or importance a person attaches to something; our values are often reflected in the way we live our lives.

eg 'I value freedom of speech.', 'I value my family.'

An **attitude** is the way a person expresses or applies their beliefs and values, and is expressed through words and behaviour.

eg 'I get really upset when I hear about cruelty to children and animals.', 'I hate school, it's really boring.'

Our beliefs, values and attitudes are influenced by external factors, like upbringing and experiences, and our beliefs, values and attitudes influence our behaviour – what we do or say.

The words 'belief', 'value' and 'attitude' are often used quite loosely and sometimes interchangeably. Imagine a young person who says, 'I believe that protecting animals is as important as protecting humans, so I give money to animal welfare charities.' This statement involves a belief that protecting animals is important, it reflects a value that protecting animals is as important as protecting humans, and it expresses an attitude that shapes the person's behaviour: they give money to animal welfare charities. However, the educator should not be too concerned about whether students are expressing a belief, a value or an attitude.

Why teach about beliefs, values and attitudes?

The opportunity for students to consider and reflect on their own personal beliefs, values and attitudes, to exchange views with peers and teachers, and to learn to make good personal decisions are important elements of PSHE.

Ways of teaching about beliefs, values and attitudes

It is important that beliefs, values and attitudes are explored rather than taught. In this book we have described and used a variety of methods that will maximise student learning around beliefs, values and attitudes. The methods include those that generate ideas; those that encourage young people to consider their own and others' beliefs, values and attitudes; and those that explore appropriate behaviours.

Making the teaching environment safe, inclusive and effective

It is the responsibility of the educator to create an atmosphere of trust by modelling positive behaviour and encouraging students to behave appropriately.

If meaningful exploration of beliefs, values and attitudes is to take place, students need to feel safe with the educator and with other students. Effective strategies include:

- making a group agreement that is adhered to
- using methodologies that depersonalise sensitive issues
- forming small groups for discussion of sensitive issues
- ensuring that materials, language and discussions are inclusive of gender, faith, ethnicity and culture, and are sensitive to the diversity of family circumstances and sexual orientation



The activities in this chapter are designed to help students begin to understand the meaning of the terms, 'beliefs', 'values' and 'attitudes'. The first two activities focus on beliefs, the third on values, and the fourth on attitudes. The final activity explores what influences our beliefs, values and attitudes.

Activity 1: Beliefs

Learning Objectives:

For students to have some understanding of what beliefs are and how wide-ranging they can be.

Age Range:

Ages 7-16

Materials Needed:

None

Notes for the Educator:

This activity will need some modifications depending on the age of the students.

Method:

Explain the learning objectives, and start by asking students to put up their hands if they believe that walking under a ladder will bring bad luck. Invite them to give you some other examples of superstitions like this and explain that these are one kind of belief.

Now create a sentence stem on the board, 'Some people believe . . .', and have students spend a few minutes in pairs or threes discussing different ways to complete the sentence. Encourage each group to think of at least three different kinds of beliefs. Allow no more than five minutes for this.

Bring students back together and have each group in turn contribute examples of beliefs and write these up on the board, eg:

- belief in Father Christmas
- belief in marriage
- belief in ghosts
- belief in life after death
- belief that I am a good dancer
- belief that I can win the Lottery
- belief that killing animals is wrong
- belief that walking under ladders brings bad luck

When you have a good range of ideas, discuss with students:

- are any of these beliefs based on fact?
- are any of these beliefs unproven or irrational?

Put up a simple definition of belief (see page 1), and discuss with students whether this is a good way of describing a belief.

Then, using the list you have created on the board, have students categorise different kinds of belief, eg superstitions, moral beliefs, religious beliefs, beliefs about self.

Review:

For younger students, have them complete a sentence stem 'I believe . . .' and share their sentence in turn around the whole group. For older students, have them reflect on and write down three beliefs that are important to them and share one with their small group.