

How teachers teach health education

This sheet is for teachers, leaders, Board of Trustees, and external providers. There is a separate handout for parents.

The teachers Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession details the way all New Zealand teachers are expected to teach.

The New Zealand Curriculum also outlines the expectations of the way teachers will teach.

Teacher actions (p35-36 NZC)	Teachers of health education
Creating a supportive environment	To develop and foster respectful communication and positive relationships within the classroom (or other learning environment), teachers of health education engage students in many interactive, cooperative and collaborative activities. They use group activities that require a lot of discussion and verbal communication of ideas. This approach helps students learn and use knowledge and interpersonal skills, to promote learning relationships that are caring, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and cohesive.
Reflective thought and action	To encourage all students to think critically, teachers select activities that require students to think reflectively and build their own knowledge about wellbeing. Teachers of health education help students learn about the big ideas and concepts that underpin health education knowledge, alongside the health and wellbeing topics they are studying. <i>Health education teaching is not just transmitting health 'facts' or telling students what to do and how to do it.</i>
Relevance of new learning	Teachers of health education select topics or themes that are age-appropriate and relevant to the students they are teaching. Students are often involved in making decisions about which topics or aspects of topics will feature in their learning programme. They may have specific local interest, or they may be of interest at national or global level — or all these things.
Shared learning	Teachers of health education select learning activities that require students to work cooperatively and collaboratively, so students share ideas to help each other understand different perspectives and work together to suggest solutions for enhancing wellbeing. The teacher is not the source of all knowledge. They will encourage students to question existing beliefs, structures, and practices and use ideas generated by other students as a resource for learning.
Connections to prior learning and experience	Teachers of health education use learning contexts that reflect their students likely life experiences, community participation, and experiences of the wider world. These are matched to identified student learning needs. They carefully consider how they teach to have safe and ethical classroom discussions that mean students can engage in the learning opportunities without being required to talk about their own lives.

Opportunities to learn	Teachers ground all learning in the big ideas underpinning health education. This means that whatever the topic, the same big ideas are applied and reapplied to help students develop depth of understanding about wellbeing. Developing literacy skills is as important as thinking skills. To analyse and evaluate health and wellbeing situations requires substantial vocabulary and comprehension skills, plus writing and speaking skills for communication learning.
Teaching as inquiry	Teachers use an approach that means they are continuously monitoring how well their students are learning, and adjusting the way and what they teach. They may plan the main teaching points well in advance, but the specific detail of the learning activities for each class are decided in response to the learning needs of the students. Depending on what they observe of students, they may adapt the details of a lesson or activity for the whole class, a group of students or an individual. Teachers may adapt a whole topic or unit to meet the learning needs students and this may mean the learning programme looks quite different across classes, but the big ideas being taught remain the same. Teachers also use this approach to plan whole programmes, ensuring students have a quality learning pathway in health education across their years of learning. This ensures students at senior secondary level who wish to carry on learning are provided with a qualification pathway.
e-Learning	Teachers also help develop students to become responsible digital citizens. They develop student capability for thinking critically about the information they source online, the information they contribute online, and help students use digital technology in ways that support and communicate their learning.

Answering student questions

Students ask many curious and sometimes challenging questions, often about sensitive issues. Teachers are legally entitled to respond to any questions that students, but can refuse, for example:

- Personal questions about themselves
- Questions where students are seeking medical advice
- Asking for advice that is outside of a teacher's expertise

Teachers should know who to speak to for further guidance and how to help students access further support at their school.

Anonymous questions

Where a student wants anonymity, strategies such as a question box allow teachers to have time to consider their response and answer in a respectful way.

If you are interested in knowing more about the expected practices of all teachers, visit Our Code Our Standards: Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession <https://teachingcouncil.nz/content/our-code-our-standards>