

2.1 What is a Student Leader?

As a Student Leader you will support and care for a small group of Year 9 students. You are not expected to solve their problems or counsel the group, but you can help the students by leading discussion groups and activities where they can learn to understand people around them a little better, develop the skills to get along with each other and make sound decisions about their lives.

The support that you give the members of your group is important – don't underestimate it. Knowing enough to support each student means that you will need to learn about them, help the group to become aware of the needs and feelings of others, and help them to develop a sense of responsibility for each other.

Through the skills and learning they gain as you work with them, the students will develop friendships and relationships, together with the confidence to look after themselves at school and develop their own individuality.

2.2 What makes a good leader?

As a Student Leader you will:

- **be an older friend** – there to keep the discussion going without controlling or dominating it. The students learn from their discussion and their interaction with each other;
- **ask** the students what they think and feel, encouraging them to speak about their ideas, experiences and problems (if you feel they need expert help or advice, just listen, then talk it over with your Teacher Leader);
- **listen** to both sides of a debate, encouraging the students to listen to each other as well as talk;
- **respect** the people in the group. The students are sensitive to the way they are treated, you must be careful not to criticise or judge people;
- **learn** as much as possible about your students as soon as you can – learn their names and pronounce them correctly. Use the names because it will make the students feel special;
- **prepare** for each session so that the material is there whether you need it or not. Being prepared will give you confidence;
- **encourage** but don't force people to contribute – look for opportunities to involve a shy hesitant person, or set up activities where they work with a partner/group and don't have to speak out by themselves;
- **manage** the behaviour of the group, making sure everyone knows and respects the ground-rules so that everyone has a fair chance and the group can get on with the activities;
- **contact** the Teacher Leader when you have concerns about the group, your role or what to do in the sessions;
- **participate** in the activities with students and share a little of your own experiences;
- **make time** so that you are available to the students outside group meeting time – perhaps have lunch together occasionally;

- **make it fun**
- **enjoy the role** – being a friend, giving your help and support is demanding, but it makes a real difference and it's rewarding.

Some Student Leaders decide to share the role as Co-Leaders. If this is what you plan to do, check through these questions together. The process will help you to plan how to share the role.

- How will you handle the leading?
one session each;
half a session each;
taking it in turn, one segment at a time.
- When will you get together to prepare the sessions?
before school;
after school;
lunch-time;
another time.
- When will you meet to discuss what happened during the sessions?
before school;
after school;
lunch-time;
another time.
- How will you explain and discuss issues together in a constructive way?
things you feel that you or your Co-Leader could have handled better;
times when you felt that your Co-Leader was judging the group rather than accepting them;
times that you felt your Co-Leader was telling rather than listening;
times when you felt that your Co-Leader was getting heavy with the students (rather than explaining that the group doesn't function when some of them mess around...then giving them a fun game to catch their interest again).

You can also use these questions if you're taking a group by yourself. The questions will help you think about how you handled the session.

2.3 How does a Leader work with students?

The *Peer Support* programme uses group discussion and activities to explore key issues and to:

- meet the needs of members;
- develop trust and friendship between students;
- build a sense of personal and community responsibility in the group;
- provide a safe and friendly place where students can share their concerns, feelings and ideas;
- help students clarify their goals, understand their culture and values;
- develop understanding and awareness of the beliefs and customs of people around them;
- help students adapt to the new school;

- develop a greater understanding of the society in which they live;
- realise the value of family and friends;
- foster leadership skills;
- develop student's confidence so that they can express their beliefs and opinions;
- help students build the strength to resist peer pressure.

Building the Group

Everyone has a culture that shapes the way they think about other people, the way they behave, live and learn. When your culture is different to the school or teacher's culture, it can seem like you have nothing in common and that makes it difficult to feel comfortable and harder to learn.

As a Student Leader there are things you can do to make sure that all students are comfortable in group sessions and feel able to share their culture and thinking. You will need techniques that encourage everyone to participate, to respect the ideas and opinions of all other students. This is a process of learning about each other.

Guidelines and Rules

Through the *Peer Support* sessions students build a group where they are aware of the feelings and needs of others and everyone feels they can participate. As the Student Leader you can begin this process by setting guidelines or ground rules with the group that will let the students know how to behave with other group members. The purpose of the rules is to:

- give everyone a fair chance;
- help people understand their responsibilities to other group members;
- help the group get on with its business.

Make the group rules and guidelines simple and easy to follow. Students find the rules easier to remember when they have a special flavour. For example, *The Four Cs* – commitment, confidentiality, consideration and co-operation.

The Four Cs	
<p>Commitment – means that students are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> punctual; loyal to the group; reliable; prepared to work and follow-up; willing to attend meetings; following school rules. 	<p>Confidentiality – means that students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are sensitive to one another; give examples instead of talking about individuals; keep discussion within the group.
<p>Consideration – means that students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are equal in the group; listen to each other; speak one at a time; share discussion, do not dominate; involve all members of the group; avoid criticism and put-downs; are able to pass on an activity if they wish; accept and are loyal to each other. 	<p>Co-operation – means that students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> share tasks; take turns; help other students; join in activities; help with organisation; sit together as a group; participate in decisions; are positive and encouraging.