



High school teachers' guide to ethics classes

About high school ethics classes

Our new Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) curriculum provides all families with a high-quality option in the Special Religious Education (SRE) timeslot in high schools. All students are welcome in high school ethics lessons, whether they have participated in ethics lessons in primary school or not.

Ethics lessons support students to develop a capacity for making well-reasoned decisions about ethical issues. Through the give-and-take of reasoned discussion, students learn to disagree respectfully, to challenge ideas and to support their opinions with considered evidence rather than according to habit or peer pressure.

Our volunteer ethics teachers use detailed lesson materials which present stories and scenarios and questions to generate discussion. Ethics teachers are trained to impartially facilitate student discussions, helping students develop their critical thinking and collaborative inquiry skills.

Ethics teachers support student learning by:

- modelling the inquiry process – asking questions and encouraging discussion
- showing genuine curiosity and interest in students' responses
- remaining neutral so that students understand that their teacher is really curious to uncover a whole range of perspectives from the group of students
- creating a positive learning environment – by allowing students time to consider the ideas of others and reflect on and form their own reasoned responses in a safe and supportive environment.

About the high school ethics curriculum

Our lessons are based on the traditions of philosophical inquiry combined with the findings of cognitive psychology and pedagogical research. We use a community of inquiry learning model supported by teacher-led questioning. This student-centred approach to learning supports students to puzzle over and discover concepts for themselves, in collaboration with their peers. The curriculum is reviewed by the NSW Department of Education for age appropriateness. The topics invite students to examine what we ought to do, how we ought to live, the kind of society we should have and what kind of person each of us should strive to be.

The ethical dilemmas presented in the lessons are designed to be challenging, providing students with the opportunity to practise and apply their collaborative inquiry and critical thinking skills. The overall aim of ethics lessons is for students to develop both the capability and the willingness to discuss ethical issues with those around them, in a well-reasoned and respectful way. Topics include *Life under COVID-19*, *Thinking hot, thinking cold: when emotions influence behaviour* and *Yuck: does it matter if something is disgusting?*

Primary Ethics' lesson materials are aligned to the following general capabilities in the Australian curriculum and the NSW syllabus:

- ethical understanding
- critical and creative thinking
- personal and social capability.

Visit www.primaryethics.com.au/about-ethics-classes/our-curriculum to learn more about our curriculum.

Supporting Primary Ethics' volunteers in your school

A volunteer ethics coordinator will be your main point of contact.

Please welcome our volunteers into your school and provide:

- the names of students in each ethics class
- the name and location of a teacher who can provide assistance or advice as required
- any information needed to ensure the safety and appropriate management of students, including students with additional learning and support needs
- an understanding of your school's behaviour management framework
- safety briefings.

Our volunteer ethics teachers welcome the support of a classroom teacher – you can help in the classroom by:

- discussing how to work together with the ethics teacher to support classroom management
- understanding that ethics lessons are discussion based and are sometimes a little noisy – talk to the ethics teacher about what is and isn't an acceptable noise level in your classroom
- explaining which furniture can and cannot be moved to create a circle
- understanding that discussions in ethics lessons are peer-to-peer – please observe the lesson rather than joining in
- asking if the ethics teacher would like to use the smartboard, whiteboard or other resources.

When setting up ethics classes please understand that:

- our classes must be conducted in a circle to aid discussion
- acceptable class sizes are between 8 and 22 students to enable effective facilitation of discussions
- our curriculum is stage based (Stage 4) and it is not possible to have ethics lessons that span different stages.

Our volunteers understand the importance of minimising disruption in your classroom spaces and ensuring students are focused and ready to continue learning after ethics. Please help them achieve this by communicating your classroom management expectations.

Volunteer training and support

Our volunteer ethics teachers and coordinators undergo a National Crime Check and hold a current Working With Children Check. Teachers undertake online and face-to-face training in child protection awareness, facilitation techniques and classroom management. We have a Classroom Support Team of specialised coaches to support our volunteers in schools and a program of continuous learning.

Starting ethics classes in your school

Provided that families at your school are interested in having ethics classes for their children, we can assist by recruiting, training, authorising and supporting volunteers to deliver the program. When assisting schools in setting up their ethics programs we are guided by the NSW Department of Education's Special Education in Ethics procedures. Please visit our website to contact us to find out more.

"It's important to think more deeply, critically and analytically about various issues and be able to have open discussions about them – and it's fun to do this with one's friends and classmates!"

Feedback from a year 7 ethics student's parent

If you have any feedback or questions, please visit our website: primaryethics.com.au/high-schools or contact us on 02 8068 7752 or helpdesk@primaryethics.com.au to find out more.