

Confidentiality.

The envelope activity

Step 1

Participants to get into pairs.

You have two options but you should choose one approach for the whole group.

On a separate piece of paper or on the inside of the envelope flap, learners either:

1. Write a piece of information that they do not want anybody else in the group to know.
2. Or write down a more insignificant piece of information (such as their middle name or the pet name their parents call them).

Ask participants to place the information in an envelope, seal it then write their forename and surname on the front.

Step 2

Participants should give this envelope to their partner with the name side of envelope down. They pass this envelope on to another person of their choice, again name side down. All participants should be passing on the information at the same time.

This passing on of information is then repeated another three times. By this time learners should have no idea where their information is.

Note: Do not let anyone open the envelopes.

Step 3

Ask the participants to think about and discuss:

- how it felt to 'lose control' of their information;
- how clients might feel if they 'lose control' of their information;
- how their partner could have kept them in control of their information.

Step 4

Turn over the envelopes and return them to the named person.

Step 5

Shred the envelopes.

General guidance for the envelope activity

It is useful to set some ground rules before commencing the activity (for example: “We will not open the envelopes”, “We will not tease each other”, “We will respect each other’s privacy”).

The teacher or trainer should participate fully and record his or her own information. This should then be passed around with the other envelopes.

At the end of the activity, it is essential that the participants receive their envelopes back (teacher or trainer should check this).

The learner should then choose what happens to the envelope.

There are essentially two ways to perform this activity. Decide on one way for your learners (do not mix and match).

Using an important piece of information

Performed in this way, the envelope activity has the potential to be very powerful, and can enable deep-level learning. It does also, however, mean that the activity requires careful handling and sensitivity; you must be sure that the participants will respect each other’s privacy. Also, if you are aware that this may be a particularly sensitive activity for some of the participants, you must take steps to minimise any impact.

Using a less important piece of information

Using the envelope activity in this way may limit the effectiveness of the activity but it may be useful if the group are new to each other or if you are unsure whether the group will honour each other’s privacy.

At the end of the activity, the group could be asked how they would have felt if it had been a more important piece of information.

REMEMBER

Learners are vulnerable, so it is important that the activities for confidentiality are handled sensitively. Some sessions could result in some learners discussing personal and confidential areas of their own lives. You may also have to deal with disclosure of poor practice in the workplace. You must be aware of your own organisation's policies on disclosure and how to implement them if the need arises. Be sure you know the contact person for learner support should it be needed.

Guidance about appropriate action in the event of disclosure of confidential information by learners is part of the government's www.dfes.gov.uk/qualityprotects programme