

## Topic: Freedom of speech

<b>Lesson 2 of 2:</b> Different opinions about freedom of speech: euthanasia	<b>KS or Year Group:</b> Year 9
<b>Resources:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resource 1 – Sky News clip: Euthanasia campaigner to give talks</li><li>• Resource 2 – Vocabulary to accompany video</li><li>• Resource 3 – Information about Philip Nitschke</li><li>• Resource 4 – Should euthanasia experts be allowed to speak in public?</li><li>• Resource 5 – Questions</li><li>• Six sheets of sugar paper and one glue stick</li></ul>	<b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students can appreciate that people have strong opinions about whether freedom of speech should apply to discussion about euthanasia.</li><li>• Students can decide whether freedom of speech should apply to euthanasia.</li></ul>

### National Curriculum

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Key Concepts: 1.2c

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.2a, 2.2d

Range and Content: 3d

Curriculum Opportunities: 4a, 4b, 4c

### Lesson overview

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Students explore euthanasia in some depth: they discuss Philip Nitschke's UK euthanasia tour and reflect upon different contexts in which euthanasia might be mentioned.

Students consider euthanasia in direct relation to freedom of speech laws by debating whether people should be allowed to endorse euthanasia in public.

### Starter

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- Share the lesson objectives with the students.
- Remind students about last lesson's definition of freedom of speech (freedom to talk about your ideas and opinions without being stopped and without worrying about being punished).

## Different opinions about freedom of speech: euthanasia

- Provide a definition of euthanasia (also referred to as assisted suicide: helping to kill someone who is very ill or very old so that their suffering can end). Explain that euthanasia is against the law in the UK (and that it carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison).
- Explain to students that a man called Philip Nitschke came to Britain and spread information about euthanasia, and that this gave rise to lots of discussion about the pros and cons of freedom of speech. Show students the 2 minute **Sky News clip: Euthanasia campaigner to give talks.**
- Ask students to comment upon whether they agree with:
  - ▶ euthanasia
  - ▶ the fact that Philip Nitschke was allowed into Britain to talk about euthanasia.
- You may choose to display **Resource 2 – Vocabulary to accompany video** on the whiteboard.
- Examples of good answers:
  - ▶ ‘I totally disagree with euthanasia. I think that when people are feeling ill or depressed, euthanasia can seem like the easy option. However, we should not allow anyone to encourage this option. It’s much better to help someone to enjoy the rest of their life than to tell them how to die.’
  - ▶ ‘I think that we should definitely be allowed to talk about euthanasia seeing as freedom of speech is one of our human rights. People are capable of making up their own minds about euthanasia, so we should give them access to as much information as they desire about both sides of the argument.’

## Main activity

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### Activity 1:

- Cut out enough copies of **Resource 3 – Information about Philip Nitschke** into three pieces (A, B and C) to give each student one of these smaller sheets. Ask students to find a group of three in which every member has a different sheet.
- Ask groups to put their sheets into alphabetical order and to read the information. Ask each group to think of two reasons why:
  - ▶ Mr Nitschke should be allowed freedom of speech (to promote euthanasia)
  - ▶ Mr Nitschke should not be allowed freedom of speech in this respect.
- Invite spokespersons to feed back the groups’ ideas.
- Examples of good feedback:
  - ▶ ‘A reason why Mr Nitschke should be allowed to speak freely about euthanasia is that you can’t have a freedom of speech law and then say that it only applies to certain topics. We also thought that his talks provided people with information that is already available in some other European countries.’

## Different opinions about freedom of speech: euthanasia

- ▶ ‘We thought of two reasons why Philip Nitschke shouldn’t be allowed freedom of speech in terms of assisted suicide. The first is that his opinions might frighten people with ill relatives. The second is that assisted suicide is against the law in our country.’
- Point out that people have very different views about how far freedom of speech should apply to controversial issues such as immigration and euthanasia.

### Activity 2:

- Invite six volunteers to come to the front of the room and ask each to read out a different speech bubble from **Resource 4 – Should euthanasia experts be allowed to speak in public?**
- Invite the audience to ask the six characters challenging questions. These questions should be relevant to freedom of speech.
- Examples of good questions:
  - ▶ ‘Don’t you think that politicians who talk about euthanasia in public make people like our grandparents feel unwanted by the rest of society?’
  - ▶ ‘Do you think that religious people like you should be allowed to campaign on the internet against organisations like Dignitas?’
  - ▶ ‘Do you think that the information that Mr Nitschke provides is offensive?’
- Encourage the students at the front to respond in character.
- Examples of good responses:
  - ▶ ‘I don’t agree with you that it is morally wrong for me to talk about euthanasia. I don’t have any family, and my friends support my wish to die. How can I possibly be doing any harm?’
  - ▶ ‘I think that it is wrong to let people read about euthanasia on the internet. A group of teenagers committed suicide because they had discussed it online and I wouldn’t like to see the same thing happen to elderly or ill people.’
  - ▶ ‘I think that we should stop the Archbishop of Canterbury and everyone else from discussing euthanasia so that it never gets legalised in the UK. The more people talk about it, the more everyone will think that it’s normal.’
- Praise those who asked particularly challenging questions.

### Plenary

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- Explain to students that they are now going to think about the issues that they’ve covered in the lesson. Tell them that their final task is to decide whether people should have freedom of speech about euthanasia in specific situations.
- Put the students into six groups. Give each group a piece of sugar paper on which one of the questions from **Resource 5 – Questions** is stuck (each group has a different question).

## Different opinions about freedom of speech: euthanasia

- Give students one minute in which to write their answer to their group question on the sugar paper. Each group member has their own pen and writes their answer in silence. Point out that it does not matter if some students write upside down or sideways on the paper!
- Allow students a few moments to read each other's comments and to discuss them.
- Ask each group to pass their sugar paper to the next group. Repeat the process until all six groups have answered each question.
- Invite students to feed back about the comments that they find interesting.
- Examples of good feedback:
  - ▶ 'There's a comment here about the teacher organising a euthanasia assembly. It says that any teacher should be allowed to speak about euthanasia freely, but only if the parents of all the students in the audience have given their consent first.'
  - ▶ 'This comment says that people with terminal illnesses should be banned by law from making documentaries about euthanasia. It says you shouldn't allow people to show other citizens how to die or to talk about it as if it's a good idea. It says that people watching such programmes could be motivated to use euthanasia, and that this could cause huge distress to their families.'
  - ▶ 'My favourite comment is one about an MP going on the radio and publicly supporting euthanasia. The comment says that MPs should definitely be allowed to do this simply because there's nothing to stop other MPs from saying that they disagree!'
- Ask students to make a show of hands about whether freedom of speech should apply to euthanasia. Invite students to comment on their decision.
- Examples of good responses:
  - ▶ 'Even though I totally and utterly disagree with euthanasia, I think that people should be allowed to say what they like about it. The whole point of freedom of speech is that you allow everyone's views to count; not just views that you personally agree with!'
  - ▶ 'I am totally unsure about whether people should be allowed to talk about euthanasia freely. Maybe the media should be banned from mentioning it but terminally ill people should be allowed to talk about it privately with their doctors.'
  - ▶ 'I don't think that people should speak freely about euthanasia because it could cause great offence to someone. A terminally ill person might feel hurt if a politician talks about legalising euthanasia, or a non-religious person might feel angry if the Archbishop of Canterbury says that it's wrong in God's eyes. It's best just not to mention it at all so that no one gets upset.'

### **Aim high**

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- Challenge students to explain whether freedom of speech should apply to all topics or just to non-controversial ones.

## Different opinions about freedom of speech: euthanasia

### Assessment

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For homework, ask students to talk about euthanasia with a trusted adult.

#### Level 5:

- Students can discuss what is fair and unfair about talking about euthanasia.
- Students can understand that other European countries have different laws about euthanasia to those in the UK.

#### Level 6:

- Students are aware of the diversity of opinions on euthanasia.
- Students can challenge the opinions of others about euthanasia (within role play).

#### Level 7:

- Students can represent the views about euthanasia of those with whom they do not agree.
- Students can appreciate that influential citizens might have an effect upon public opinion about euthanasia.

#### Level 8:

- Students can make perceptive observations about the pros and cons of allowing people to speak freely about euthanasia.
- Students can hypothesise what might happen if a large number of speakers like Mr Nitschke were to talk freely about euthanasia.

### Check the web

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[www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/05/assisted-suicide-nitschke-bournemouth](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/05/assisted-suicide-nitschke-bournemouth)

Information about Philip Nitschke's euthanasia tour

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/MembersBills/pdfs/EndOfLifeChoicesConsultation.pdf>

Proposed End of Life Choices Bill (MSP Margo MacDonald)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas\\_\(euthanasia\\_group\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas_(euthanasia_group))

Overview of Dignitas (Swiss pro-euthanasia group)

#### Summary of key learning

- Students can appreciate that people have strong opinions about whether freedom of speech should apply to discussion about euthanasia.
- Students can decide whether freedom of speech should apply to euthanasia.

**Resource 2 – Vocabulary to accompany Philip Nitschke video**

**Bypass rules**

**Choice**

**Compelling reason**

**Death ship**

**Dismiss**

**Freedom of speech**

**Heathrow**

**Medical illness**

**Philip Nitschke**

**Psychiatric advice**

**Public meeting**

**Rational**

**Respect**

**Switzerland**

**Take one's own life**

### Resource 3 – Information about Philip Nitschke

**A** In May 2009, an Australian man called Philip Nitschke started a tour of the UK. This was despite almost being stopped from entering the UK by airport officials who had been asked to keep him out of the country! His tour caused a great deal of controversy due to the fact that he is a euthanasia expert who recommends assisted suicide in certain situations. Mr Nitschke's euthanasia tour began in Bournemouth because of its large elderly population.

**B** Mr Nitschke's tour involved explaining to people how they could take their own lives if they wanted to. He spoke to his audiences about the techniques involved in assisted suicide and also showed them films about how to undertake the process. In addition he answered questions about a range of issues linked to euthanasia. Mr Nitschke targeted his seminars at people aged 50 or over and at seriously ill people. Those who attended were charged £25. This fee included the chance to access a 'DIY suicide kit' and the opportunity to join 'Exit' (a right-to-die organisation).

**C** Despite assisted suicide being illegal in the UK (with a punishment of imprisonment), Mr Nitschke spread the word here that assisted suicide should be a basic right. He feels that he has helped British people by providing them with information about euthanasia. He has commented that the decision that life is not worth living is right for some people, and that humans should be treated with the same compassion that is offered to their pets. Edward Gwinnell, a gentleman who attended one of the events, spoke with great feeling about euthanasia, saying that he wanted to get information about making a peaceful and dignified exit. He also stated that discussing euthanasia should be perfectly acceptable in a country that allows free speech.

## Resource 4 – Should euthanasia experts be allowed to speak in public?

My father has just been diagnosed with stomach cancer and it's too late to save his life. His death will be very painful and distressing. I am grateful to organisations like Dignitas who speak openly about the benefits of euthanasia. Dignitas members believe that qualified doctors should be allowed to help those people with illnesses like cancer and multiple sclerosis to commit suicide. The organisation feels that euthanasia should be considered very carefully before decisions are made. For example, it suggests that someone who helps a person to die should not gain from the death. I am glad that Dignitas gets media coverage in Britain.

For religious reasons, I am appalled when people speak openly about euthanasia. No human should have the right to decide when they die; the matter should be left purely in God's hands. Vulnerable humans should not be encouraged to interfere with God's plans. Talking about any form of suicide causes distress so I can't believe that euthanasia is allowed in places like Belgium. It's outrageous from a moral point of view.

I have been paralysed from the waist down and can no longer do my job as a PE teacher, or even go to the toilet unaided. I don't feel that my life is worth living now. I am thinking of going to Luxembourg where euthanasia is legal, and finding some understanding doctors who will help me to die with dignity. I have no children or partner and my friends respect my wishes, so who would I harm through assisted suicide? I applaud speakers like Philip Nitschke. We need more people like him to stand up for our rights.

Euthanasia should not be introduced in the UK because it would give rise to hundreds of complications. Elderly people would feel obliged to die early so as not to 'inconvenience' their families, and mentally ill people would give up on life rather than getting support. There should be a ban on internet sites that give information about euthanasia. They give out the wrong message to people who are not in a fit state to make decisions.

I deal with elderly people who have been diagnosed with dementia. My job can be very sad at times because many of my patients tell me that they would like to die before they lose a sense of who they are and what is real. A Scottish MP called Margo MacDonald has been campaigning for Britain to adopt pro-euthanasia laws (similar to those in the Netherlands). I am so glad that citizens like her are trying to change things for my patients.

I feel really uncomfortable when people like journalists and the Archbishop of Canterbury discuss euthanasia in a public forum. The more people speak about it, whether or not they support it, the more the public will think that it should become a right. Euthanasia is murder and so we must stop people discussing it so openly. What if all the talk about it leads to a change in the law and it's suddenly allowed in the UK?



### Resource 5 – Questions

1. Should our country's laws allow a teacher to organise an assembly in which a visiting speaker tells teenagers that euthanasia is an option for grandparents with Alzheimer's? Why (not)?

2. Should our country's laws allow a hospital director to run a meeting in which doctors are shown footage of euthanasia being performed (legally) in Switzerland? Why (not)?

3. Should our country's laws allow a religious leader to suggest on a blog that euthanasia is appropriate for people with schizophrenia or depression? Why (not)?

4. Should our country's laws allow someone with a terminal illness to make a TV documentary explaining why (s)he wants to die through euthanasia? Why (not)?

5. Should our country's laws allow a vet to set up a website that gives the message that euthanasia is like putting down a distressed animal? Why (not)?

6. Should our country's laws allow an MP to suggest on the radio that euthanasia should be legalised in Britain? Why (not)?