

Why Tolerance? Why Now?

It has never been more necessary for young people to learn tolerance. With incidents of school violence, harassment and physical abuse commonplace, tolerance education is important for everyone's health and safety.

What is tolerance? Many people simply think it's a measure of how much of something one can stand – stress, for example. But there is another, more important definition for tolerance in today's multicultural world. According to the United Nations, tolerance is the capacity to accept differences, respect one another and stand up for what one knows is right. The organization considers it one of the foundations of human rights.

This capacity is more important today than ever. In communities across America and around the world, hate crimes and other forms of intolerance are on the rise. The only way to prevent hate crimes and the pain and suffering caused by intolerance is to practice tolerance in daily



living, and teach it to children, the next generation.

In general, we need to stress to ourselves and our children a "live and let live" attitude. While people may not accept the choices of others, ultimately they must still learn to respect others and the way they live their lives. (In fact, many differences between people, such as race, color, language or sexual orientation, are not matters of choice and cannot be used as bases for deciding whether people are good.) And while teasing one another in school with derogatory names and excluding others from social activities because of their appearance or interests is considered "typical" middle- or high-school behavior, such behavior is at the root of the problem today. As more and more students have access to the Internet, cable, television and, yes, guns and explosives, intolerance can lead to deadly violence. Bottom line: **Children must learn to respect one another.**

What Can Parents Do?

What can you do as a parent to promote tolerance in your child's life? First of all, **talk to your child**, asking him or her about any hostility or unrest at school. If young people see that parents are interested and willing to take the time to listen to what they have to say, they will be more receptive to what parents have to say. And in addition to talking to your child, it is important to **talk to teachers and school administrators** about intolerance and school violence and otherwise become involved in young people's education.

Also, encourage your child to become friends with all different kinds of students and to **accept people for who they are**. Our world today is changing, bringing more people of different backgrounds together in educational, professional and social settings. Teaching your child tolerance is a way you can help him or her thrive in the face of that change.



Tolerance: An Important Life Lesson

As a parent, **you are responsible for teaching your child tolerance**. When a child learns how to be more tolerant and get along with all kinds of people, he or she acquires an important life skill. Tolerance is a part of school life, as your child will be exposed to many students, some of whom will be quite different from him or her in terms of race, culture, appearance and lifestyle. Tolerance is also important in the working world, because people who can get along with all kinds of people make more productive workers. With the world getting smaller in a sense, your child will most likely encounter people from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds with a wide variety of experiences and interests. When parents cultivate in their children acceptance of people's differences and the belief that it's what's inside that counts, they are helping children grow into happy, more successful people.

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teaching your child tolerance.

How to Help Your Child Become More Tolerant

As your child gets bombarded with images throughout the media displaying and even appearing to endorse intolerance, it is easy to get concerned as a parent. You might wonder, "Will my children become intolerant? How can I teach them the right ways to think? Look what I'm up against!"

Fortunately, there are ways to help your children become more tolerant:

Talk to your child openly about unfair discrimination and tolerance. Ask if he or she has ever witnessed intolerant behavior and what his or her feelings are about it.

If you see an act of intolerance in a movie or television show your child is watching, be sure to point it out to your child and discuss it. Make sure he or she knows such acts are wrong and why they are wrong.

If you hear about intolerance going on at your child's school or with your child's friends, investigate the situation. Discuss what is happening with school administrators and teachers, other parents, and community members and agencies who can help. Talking about the problem and getting involved shows that you and others will NOT stand for intolerance.

Finally, all the talk in the world is not going to work if your child does not see you being a tolerant person yourself. Children learn by what they see, and they imitate their parents more than anyone else. By working on your own prejudices, you are helping your child learn to become a better adult.

Tolerance-Training Activities

Here are a few ideas for activities to teach your child tolerance. The activities are simple and fun, exposing your child to different cultures and ways of thinking. Keep the activities casual and playful, while still keeping in mind the serious goal of teaching tolerance.



According to the United Nations, tolerance is the capacity to accept differences, respect one another and stand up for what one knows is right.

1. Have your child and a few of his friends come over for a “heritage party.” Invite parents to cook their or their ancestors’ native cuisines, and have a potluck meal. Both the parents and the students will benefit from learning about one another, and enjoy the food at the same time!

2. Go to a public place such as a mall or movie theater and see how many different types of people are there. Discuss the importance of understanding one another as people, not as “typical” representatives of races or appearances or lifestyles.

3. Ask your child about any myths he or she may have heard about different cultures or races. Try to dispel those myths by watching a movie that shows them in a different light.

4. Encourage your child to volunteer in the community to help the homeless or the poor. Teach your child to learn to help people who are in need, and then apply those lessons to the school community as well.

6. Use entertainment media your child enjoys as a way of teaching him or her the value of diversity. If, for example, he or she listens to rock or rap CDs, try interesting him or her in listening to old jazz recordings as well. You might explain that many rock and rap musicians were inspired by jazz masters. Also, if your child enjoys movies, look into showing him or her movies on video that were made in another country or express a minority point of view.

5. One night each month, expose your child to a different culture by going out for different kinds of ethnic foods. It could be Chinese, Mexican, Indian, Japanese or anything else that’s in your neighborhood. Use each dinner as an opportunity to teach your child about that culture.

7. Encourage your child to try out for a new sports team, take an art class or learn a new skill. Exposure to as many different kinds of hobbies and lifestyles will help your child become more tolerant of others.

These activities all lend themselves to learning more about tolerance and understanding others better, but it is important to let kids choose what they want to do and the pace at which they want to learn. Knowing your own child, you can brainstorm activities for him or her based on these activities, or let the child come up with his or her own tolerance activities.

SKILL BUILDER



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teaching tolerance
to **teens**

