



SAMPLE

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teaching tolerance
to teens

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Bases of Intolerance

Intolerant behavior has many motivations. Students may express intolerance of one another over differences in race, gender, interests and activities, appearance, physical disability, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status and religion; newcomers to the school can also be targets. (Although it does not apply to the school setting, age-related intolerance and discrimination are definitely present in adult society.) And because America's schools are highly diverse places, and becoming even more so, the problem could easily become worse before it improves. According to the U.S. Department of Education, school enrollment had risen to a record 52.2 million students in 1997. Public school enrollment is expected to increase by 13 percent by 2007, and a large number of these students will be enrolled in schools with increasing numbers of students from different races, ethnic backgrounds and cultures. (A significant number will also be in some way disabled; one in five Americans in the general population has some kind of disability.) Hispanic students will outnumber African-American students by 2.5 percent. (There are currently more than 28 million Latinos in the United States, accounting for nearly 11 percent of the population. Latinos are likely to become the nation's largest minority group by 2005.) The numbers of Asian- and Native-American students are expected to increase dramatically, while the percentage of white students is expected to decline to 61 percent from 66 percent. By 2022, 50 percent of all students will belong to a minority group.

Intolerant Behaviors

Intolerance in schools is displayed in several different ways, with varying degrees of hostility. Stereotyping, while seemingly harmless in and of itself, is indeed harmful because it prevents people from seeing others' deeper individual characteristics and relating to them on a deeper, more substantive level. This paves the way to exclusion and isolation of people who do not fit in with the group, and, on a more active and hostile level, taunting and mockery of those people. And, of course, intolerance can also be manifested in the form of physical violence, which endangers everyone at the school, especially with the easy access to weapons that character-

FACTS on Tolerance

In 1996, about 70 percent of reported hate crimes were crimes against a person, and the remainder were property crimes. A substantial number were committed by males under age 20.

"Preventing Youth Hate Crime,"
U.S. Department of Education

Tolerance-Building Activities

The following activities can be either conducted in class or given to students to complete outside of class. They involve talking about intolerance, reading and writing about it, and practicing tolerance in daily living.

Discussion Activities

1. Many myths about certain groups, young people included, still exist. Ask students to think of some of the myths they may have heard about an issue you want to discuss (disabled people, students with special needs, a specific race or religion, a sexual orientation issue). Try to dispel these myths via a class discussion in which students have to respect each other's opinions and are not allowed to put anyone down. Have them think about and talk about experiences with people that prove the stereotypes to be false.
2. Walk around and distribute something to almost every student in the classroom (a new pencil, a sticker, something neat but of minimal value). Arbitrarily exclude several students, for example, those who are sitting on the right-hand side of the classroom, or all the boys or all the girls. When the left-out students question why they did not receive anything, ask them how they felt, and hold a discussion about their feelings. Use this as a springboard for a discussion of people being excluded from jobs, organization membership and social groups because of their ethnic background, religion or some other characteristic that has nothing to do with their qualifications or intelligence. (Caution: This activity needs to be performed with care. Viewing the videotape *Eye of the Storm*, available through the Anti-Defamation League, beforehand is recommended.)
3. Hold a class discussion to make students aware of the diversity represented in the class. Ask students to share with the class where their ancestors were born (they may have to be assigned to talk with their parents first about where their ancestors lived and their way of life there; they may also do library or Internet research to prepare for the discussion). Make a list of the different countries, even though some students may have to go back several generations to get to ancestors who lived in