

Respecting Differences

School Wide Expectation:	Act Respectfully
Setting:	Classrooms, Hallways, Lunchroom, Community
Lesson Focus:	Self Control

Purpose of the Lesson

1. Define tolerance and analyze how tolerance co-exists with opinions
2. Apply one of the strategies below to practice tolerance on a single issue

SEL standard(s) met: 1B.3a; 1B.3b; 1C.3a; 3C.3b

Discussion Points

These discussion questions can be used for discussion purposes, role-plays, for writing prompts, or for topics of debate to teach appropriate ways to argue a point.

1. *“Tolerance. Yeah, I know about tolerance. I tolerate my kid brother hanging around me all the time.”*

That is one definition of tolerance: the ability to withstand hardship. Let’s focus on a different one: having the capacity or ability to respect the beliefs or practices of others. Tolerance means that you don’t make fun of what you think is odd, strange, unusual, or weird. You don’t have to understand it to be tolerant and to have respect for another person’s ideas, choices, and beliefs, no matter how different they are from your ideas, choices, and beliefs.

2. *“Yeah, yeah. I learned that people first came to America because of religious intolerance. But that was back in the day. It doesn’t apply now.”*

America is a melting pot of different cultures, genders, religions, ethnicities, races, attitudes, prejudices, like and dislikes. America is also a country that guarantees, through its Constitution, certain basic freedoms. Many people came to America in search of those freedoms, which they did not have at home: freedom of speech, freedom of opportunity, freedom to think and to be educated. That burning desire for freedom is what gives America a great sense of energy.

3. *“But those beliefs are WEIRD! And they’re dumb. Why would they believe THAT?”*

We all have a comfort zone, and that zone is often defined by our experiences. If we have never experienced something, our first reaction is to think something is odd or weird or dumb...because we don’t understand the WHY. Perhaps someone dresses modestly because of a religious conviction. It might seem odd to you that a faith would tell you how to dress...but in that tradition, the requirement makes perfect sense.

4. *“Does that mean I should just tolerate it when someone does something rude, and they tell me that’s how they are?”*

Rude and disrespectful behavior should not be tolerated. Tolerance is about accepting *people* for who they are, for their best selves — not about accepting bad behavior. Tolerance also means treating others the way you'd like to be treated.

5. *“Well, give me some ideas on how I can have this tolerance thing.”*

Don't judge a person on your first impression, which is usually based solely on the way he or she looks. Take the time to learn more about that person than what's on the surface.

Keep an open mind. It may be easier to spend time with people who seem just like you, but you can miss out on a lot of interesting experiences — conversations, foods, books, music and art, sports, religious ceremonies, and more. Getting to know people who seem different can be difficult at first, but you'll probably find that you have much more in common than you think.

Be informed about what's happening in America and the world and find out what you can contribute. You might volunteer at a social services or human rights organization. You might want to learn more about how you can combat hate. If you like to play music or write, you might try using those skills to express and share your feelings.

You probably know many people who have something that sets them apart from the norm. All of these people have feelings and deserve to feel accepted for who they are. Everyone has something to offer, even if it's something unexpected, like a new idea or a new way of looking at something. The more we learn about others, the more likely we are to realize that the myths and stereotypes we hear are unfair or incorrect.

Reinforcement Activities

1. Over the next week, as the opportunity permits, consider playing Peter Elbow “the Believing Game” and “The Doubting Game.” Both develop critical thinking skills and can be adapted to age-appropriate issues. The websites <http://www.teachablemoment.org/high/criticalthinking.html> and <http://www.esrnational.org/believinggame.htm> are helpful, or you can simply google “Peter Elbow” and the term game to the search.