

Tolerance

Character... It starts with me!

LOOKING AT TOLERANCE

THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAUMA

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Vs. Hostility

I WILL:

- not confuse what is right with what is popular
- expect the same of myself as I expect of others
- look for ways to help others mature
- accept my own unchangeables and the unchangeables of others
- listen before I form an opinion

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Accepting others at different levels of maturity

By Jodi Landers

For decades, people have been learning intolerance at a young age, through the influence of parents, older siblings or relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, etc. When we think of tolerance, it's important to be aware of some current research. Tolerance can be taught, but believe it or not, human beings have a natural tendency toward being accepting of people who are different than them. Research shows that even if children are never directly taught or influenced to be intolerant, chances are they will learn to accept people who are different from them. However, children who are exposed to trauma, judgment, injustice, and are never taught to be accepting of others certainly are at great risk of growing up to be intolerant. And, in turn their tendency toward hostility grows.

When children are raised in homes where violence and betrayal are commonplace, there is a complete breakdown in natural emotional growth. Hence, we see students who explode and become hostile over what we consider to be "small things". If I am a child of trauma, the "small things" in my life may be the only things I can control. When that is taken away, I fall apart. And really, don't we all want a little control of our world?

As educators, it is often difficult to "manage" our own emotions when we're faced with student hostility. It can be enraging and downright frightening sometimes. It's difficult to create new behavior plans, then try a few more, and feel that no progress is being made. I recently read that many of us suffer from "compassion fatigue". But, as is often the case, we're asked to dig deeper. I liken it to the saying about working smart vs. working hard. If we can dig smarter rather than deeper, we could see results sooner. In our classrooms, a lack of emotional self-management and understanding of our own feelings can breed intolerance and hate. Teaching children tolerance starts with adults modeling emotional responsibility and tolerance for others. Teaching children tools

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and skills for emotional self-management, compassion and understanding of others is the first step.

As I've said before, so much depends on the relationship you have established with your students. You can watch miracles come from students who know they can trust you. However, it is difficult to undo in 6 hours what happens in the other 18. That being said, a traumatic home life is NEVER a reason to give up on a child. Below are a few elementary grade ideas of activities you can try in your classroom to increase tolerance. There are many, many great activities for middle and high school at <http://www.tolerance.org/>.



Play detective - Make fingerprints of classmates and friends. Examine them with magnifying glasses and invite students to share what they notice, similarities and differences.

Label objects in the classroom in English and Spanish, or other languages - Collect coins and money from different countries, or even quarters from different states. Point out the different designs and talk about them.

In your classroom, tape up photos - of international buildings, unique shelters, blueprints of different house plans, and maps, etc. Discuss similarities and differences and where different buildings, homes and shelters would be found on a world map.

Remember, if you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting.

Peace-
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Tolerance.org