



# Tolerance and Acceptance

## Mini-Lessons



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

**The mini-lessons on acceptance and tolerance that follow can be used as part of schoolwide PBIS instructional lessons or in preparation for hosting an R-Word Campaign.** In each lesson, students examine the rights of those with disabilities and the responsibilities of all citizens to help protect those rights, reflecting and examining the problems and issues related to tolerance and inclusion within their school and community. These activities connect well to other instructional opportunities that explore civic responsibility, societal influence, human experience, or peer pressure.

For school staff who wish to use the full set of activities, this series of mini-lessons begins with an immersive experience where students are randomly given different rights within the classroom, prompting reflection on the personal and societal impact of treating people differently based on something not in their control. They examine their personal experiences with intolerance, as a victim or a perpetrator, and consider the consequences of standing by as others are targeted. Students watch an authentic story about a group of teenagers who mock a young girl because of her intellectual disability, and the students examine examples from history when intolerance and prejudice had a significant negative effect. They identify the roots of intolerance and prejudice, and brainstorm strategies and solutions for overcoming them. The students then brainstorm how intolerance and prejudice could be reversed, particularly with other youth their age. Finally, they create a product to influence their peers to show tolerance toward, and acceptance, of others who may be different from themselves.

**“  
The right to play on any playing field? You  
have earned it. The right to study in any  
school? You have earned it. The right to hold  
a job? You have earned it. The right to be  
anyone’s neighbor? You have earned it. ”**

**- Eunice Kennedy Shriver**



# Tolerance and Acceptance

## Mini-lesson 1: How Do Rights Lead to Responsibility?

### Time Required

20 minutes (Discussion time can be adjusted by reducing or adding to the questions posed in the activities at the discretion of the teacher)

### Materials Needed

Index cards and different colored markers or stickers  
Pillows and treat for introductory activity  
Copies of "How Do Rights Lead to Responsibility?"

### Preparation

Before beginning the lesson, put different colored dots on enough index cards to distribute one to each student. Decide which colored dots will represent all or some of the categories below. Students will be given a random index card containing a dot that represents one of the following categories:

- Placed in an area where they have difficulty seeing or hearing you.
- Not allowed to sit on chairs.
- Given an extra homework assignment.
- Select treat of his/her choice.
- Get a pillow to put behind his/her back.
- Get a free homework pass.

### Steps

1. As students enter the room, randomly hand them an index card. Distribute an equal number of each type of card. Explain what each card represents, recognizing that students who are deprived of certain rights likely will protest.
2. Distribute copies of "How Do Rights Lead to Responsibility?," which is found on the next page. Students are asked to reflect on a famous quote and make connections with their own lives.
3. Give students time to complete the task and discuss their answers, while still being treated differently based on their colored dots.
4. At the conclusion of this part of the lesson, restore equal rights for all students. Discuss the exercise using the following questions as a guide. If time allows, expand the discussion to explore why it's so difficult for students their age to stand up to their own friends and how they have felt when they have or have not done so.
  - What did it feel like to have more or fewer rights based on a random drawing of a card?
  - For those who had more rights, did you try to fight for those with fewer rights? Why or why not?
  - How would you relate the exercise to rights or treatment of those around the world based on skin color, religion, gender, or ability?
  - What is the impact to individuals, the community and society as a whole when people are denied rights or treated differently based on things they cannot control?
  - What responsibilities do each of us have because of the rights we enjoy?

### DESIRED OUTCOMES:

Students will:

- Draw conclusions about the personal and societal impact of basing someone's rights on something they cannot control.
- Reflect upon the difficulties of standing up for what is right, especially to one's own friends.

*"Give to every human being every right that you claim to yourself."*

- Robert Ingersoll

# How Do Rights Lead to Responsibility?

Throughout history, people have been awarded certain rights or treated differently based on things they cannot control. Their skin color. Nationality. Gender. Abilities. The quotes below express several people's opinions related to equal rights.

**Select one quote and answer the questions below it.**

*We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors...but they all have to learn to live in the same box.*

- Author Unknown

*Give to every human being every right that you claim for yourself.*

- Robert Ingersoll

*I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample underfoot.*

- Horace Greeley

*He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.*

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Reflections

1. Choose one quote and put it in your own words. What do you think its author was trying to say?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why?
3. What actions (or inactions) have you witnessed or been a part of at your school or in your community that relate to the quote?
4. How might you take responsibility for how others are treated in your school or community?



# Tolerance and Acceptance

## Mini-lesson 2: Standing By or Standing Up

### Time Required

20 minutes (Discussion time can be adjusted by reducing or adding to the questions posed in the activities at the discretion of the teacher)

### Materials Needed

Video of speech by Soeren Palumbo

### Steps

1. Tell students they are going to watch a speech by Special Olympics Youth Leader and Notre Dame honor student Soeren Palumbo. The speech illustrates the consequences of treating someone differently based on something they cannot control. Have students watch the Soeren Palumbo speech. The speech is close to nine minutes long and can be found at Needs updated link.
2. You may want to show students the speech in its entirety or break it up using the guide below:
  - a. Stop the speech at 1:28 when Soeren describes the teens teasing an African-American child and using a racial slur.
  - b. Ask students if they could ever see themselves or their friends doing something similar.
  - c. Stop the speech at 4:25 after Soeren polls his audience to see if they discriminate based on age, gender, or race. He then asks how many have used or stayed silent when others used the terms or stayed silent when others used the terms, "retard" or "retarded." Poll your students using the same question.
  - d. Finally, show the final part of Soeren's speech in which he reveals that his younger sister Olivia was the real target of the teenagers at the store.
3. Hold a class or small group discussion using the following questions as a guide:
  - a. Did you predict that the target of the teens' discrimination was Soeren's sister? If not, what was your reaction?
  - b. How do you think the teasing made Soeren feel?
  - c. How would you describe the teens who were teasing Olivia? (You may want to introduce words like "intolerant," "discrimination," and "prejudiced" if the students don't use them.)
  - d. Why does the use of the R-word demonstrate intolerance?
  - e. Is it just as bad to remain quiet when someone is calling someone the R-word as it is to use the term yourself?
  - f. How might Soeren's story be different if (1) Olivia had been seen by the teens as more than a "retard" or (2) One of the teens had stood up to the others?
  - g. How would your life be different if you were judged by just one element of your life, especially if it was one you could not control?
  - h. Is it possible to be an innocent bystander? What are the important lessons we can learn from Soeren's story?

### DESIRED OUTCOMES:

Students will:

- Draw conclusions about the personal and societal impact of basing someone's rights on something they cannot control.
- Reflect upon the difficulties of standing up for what is right, especially to one's own friends.

*"He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it."*

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

# Tolerance and Acceptance

## Mini-lesson 3: Words Matter

### Time Required

20 minutes (Discussion time can be adjusted by reducing or adding to the questions posed in the activities at the discretion of the teacher)

### Materials Needed

Copies of Reproducible "Words Matter"

### Steps

1. Referring back to the Soeren Palumbo speech, have students think about their own experiences with the R-word (retard).
2. Distribute Reproducible "Words Matter," which asks students to reflect upon their own use, active or passive, of the R-word. Give students time to complete the reproducible and then discuss answers as a class. What conclusions can students draw about the use of the R-word in their school? In their community? What about society in general?
3. Break students into groups and have them share examples of when they have been the victim, witness, or perpetrator of intolerance or discrimination of any sort.
  - a. Based on the examples, would students say that prejudice and intolerance exist at your school? In the community?
  - b. What about prejudice and intolerance specifically toward those with disabilities? Do they exist at the school or in the community?
4. Challenge student groups to identify examples from history when intolerance and prejudice had a history-changing negative effect. Examples include the terrorist attacks on the Charlie Hebdo newspaper in Paris, the Holocaust, the genocide in Darfur, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask:
  - a. What happened through this event to change history?
  - b. How were people discriminated against or treated differently because of something they could not control?
  - c. What positive impact, if any, came from this event?
  - d. How might the world be different if this event had never happened?
5. Refer students back to Soeren's story or another of the intolerance examples shared during the lesson. Ask questions such as:
  - a. Why do you think people treat others in hurtful ways when they don't even know them?
  - b. What might cause someone your age to be intolerant of others? Reasons might include: influence from family, friends, or society; insecurity; fear; unfamiliarity; ignorance; competitiveness; need to conform; need for power; or lack of education.
  - c. How does our choice of words matter?
  - d. Discuss what other options they might have in their behavior that would maintain respect toward others.

### DESIRED OUTCOMES:

Students will:

- Identify and examine current and historical non-inclusive, intolerant behaviors in their school, their community, and society as a whole.
- Identify the roots and consequences of non-inclusive, intolerant behavior.

*"I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample underfoot."*

- Horace Greeley



# Words Matter

Think about your own thoughts and actions (or inactions) with regard to intolerance and prejudice toward others. Then rate yourself using the scale below and answer the questions that follow:

1. I make fun of people for things like race, religion, gender, body size, or physical or mental ability.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

2. I treat people differently if they are or have a different race, religion, gender, body size, physical, or mental ability than I do.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

3. I use the R-word (retard, retarded) to refer to people who have intellectual disabilities.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

4. I use the R-word (retard, retarded) to refer to people or things that I think are silly or stupid.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

5. I laugh when my friends use the R-word.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

6. I remain quiet when my friends use the R-word.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

7. I discourage my friends from using the R-word.

- I never or almost never do this.
- I sometimes do this.
- I frequently do this.
- I always do this.

8. Choose one of the statements from above for which you rated yourself a 2, 3, or 4, and reflect on why you believe you did the action. Would you do it again? Would there be a value in not doing it? What would that value be?

# Tolerance and Acceptance

## Mini-lesson 4: Be the Solution

### Time Required

30 minutes (Discussion time can be adjusted by reducing or adding to the questions posed in the activities at the discretion of the teacher)

### Materials Needed

Copies of Reproducible "Be the Solution"

### Steps

1. Have students select one of the reasons from the list they created in the last lesson and come up with 1-3 ways to overcome it.
2. Create a list of student-generated solutions.
3. Assuming students believe that intolerance or prejudice toward those with disabilities is a problem at their school, in their community, or in society as a whole, whose responsibility is it to find solutions? The principal? Teachers? Parents? Students themselves?
4. Do students think that their generation can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem? How?
5. Distribute reproducible, "Be the Solution," which challenges student groups to create a product (such as a blog, Facebook post or poster) to influence their generation to reverse intolerant, non-inclusive behavior toward those with disabilities. They can act upon one of the ideas from the list of solutions above or come up with a new one. Their product should be targeted toward their peers and should focus on (1) the power of inclusion related to those with disabilities; (2) the negative impact of prejudice or intolerance toward those with disabilities; (3) or both.
6. Reflection: Using the ideas generated in Step 5, ask students to reflect on the potential reaction of their peers to the project they've designed. Do they think their friends will be influenced to be more inclusive? What obstacles do they anticipate? How can they overcome these potential obstacles?

### DESIRED OUTCOMES:

Students will:

- Recognize ways to overcome intolerant behavior, with an emphasis on people with disabilities.
- Influence others to help reverse the trends of intolerant, non-inclusive behavior.

*"A rewarding life is filled with challenge, so do not pity me. Give me a chance!"*

- Thomas Gatu, Special Olympics Athlete



# Be The Solution

Unfortunately, prejudice and intolerance toward those with disabilities and others has been part of our society for many years. Through this lesson, you have explored and reflected upon many examples of this including the teenagers mocking Olivia; the hurtful use of the R-word in school, community, and society; historical examples of intolerance and prejudice; and your own personal experiences. The good news is that your generation has the power to become part of the solution in reversing these long-standing trends. You can do this by making inclusion a part of your life, influencing others to do the same, and explaining the consequences of intolerance and prejudice.

**For this activity, you will create a poster, song, blog, poem or announcement to influence your peers to help reverse the trends of intolerance and prejudice against those with disabilities.**

Your product should be targeted toward students at your school and should focus on:

- The power of inclusion related to students with disabilities;
- The negative impact of prejudice or intolerance toward those with disabilities;
- Or both.

For your project, think about the following:

1. What examples of intolerance and prejudice against those with intellectual disabilities have I experienced or witnessed at our school or in our community?
2. Why might the perpetrators from Soeren's story have acted intolerant or prejudiced? What were their goals?
3. What might help or persuade them to change their behavior?
4. How can I use this information to create a persuasive project?

## Extensions:

- Encourage students to take and persuade their friends to take the R-word pledge on the Special Olympics Web site at: <http://www.r-word.org>
- Hold a school-or community-wide tolerance day featuring students' persuasive projects.
- Encourage students to research Terry Fox (<http://www.terryfox.org>) and write a magazine or newspaper article describing how this powerful young man was a model of activism and engagement and how he influenced change.
- Learn more about Special Olympics athlete, Loretta Claiborne from her humble and challenged beginnings while a student in York, Pennsylvania to her rise to world prominence. Athlete Loretta Claiborne's story may be one of the most inspiring, especially for young people. As a young person, she was told that her future would be in an institution. After discovering Special Olympics, Loretta became a long-distance runner...and she hasn't stopped since. Over her career, she competed in 25 marathons - twice finishing in the top 100 women runners in the Boston Marathon. The Women in Sports Hall of Fame inducted her as a member, and Runner's World magazine named her Special Athlete of the Quarter Century. Loretta speaks four languages and holds honorary doctorate degrees - the first person with intellectual disabilities known to receive such honors. Her life was the basis for Disney film, The Loretta Claiborne Story. In 1996, she received the coveted Arthur Ashe Award for Courage. <http://www.specialolympics.org/video.aspx?id=6093&terms=Loretta+Claiborne> and <http://www.lorettaclaiborne.com>