

Responding to racism

Everyone in the school community has a responsibility to monitor and tackle racial harassment and racist incidents.

Themes	Education, Discrimination and Xenophobia, General human rights
Complexity	Level 3
Group size	4-50
Time	120 minutes
Overview	<p>This activity uses role-play and review of a critical incident to provoke participants to review their understanding of cultural difference. It also involves discussion and collective writing to address issues about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The difficulties of stepping outside one’s own cultural perspective ▪ Racism, stereotypes and cultural differences ▪ How to deal with racism in a school or other educational organisation.
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equality in dignity and rights ▪ The right not to be discriminated against ▪ The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To stimulate interest in human rights and racism ▪ To develop skills for democratic participation, communication and co-operation ▪ To promote responsibility, justice and solidarity
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large sheets of paper or flipchart paper and markers ▪ 4 volunteers to present a role-play ▪ Critical incident role card and guidelines for facilitators, handout 1 ▪ The school’s (or organisation’s) policy and guidelines on racial incidents ▪ Copies of handout 2, “ some practical points for consideration”, or write the points up on a large sheet of paper or overhead transparency (optional)
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the critical incident presented in handout 1, and if necessary adapt it to your own situation. ▪ Choose four volunteers and ask them to prepare to present a very short role-play based on the critical incident.

Instructions

This activity is in two parts: part 1, a review: what do we understand by the term “racism”?; part 2, drafting a policy for dealing with racist incidents in school (or in a club or organisation).

Part 1. A review: what do we understand by the term “racism”?

1. Begin the activity with a brainstorm about racism. You may consider challenging participants to react to racism by telling a racist joke and asking them what they think about it. Write their responses on the large sheet of paper or flipchart paper.
2. Racist incidents and potential intercultural misunderstandings happen every day. Go on to

THEMES



EDUCATION



DISCRIMINATION



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS

COMPLEXITY



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120 MINUTES

- brainstorm what kinds of everyday incidents and behaviour people identify as being racist.
- Now work with the critical incident. Hand out paper and pens. Ask people to watch the role-play and to write down a couple of key words which summarise their response at each of the breaks in the presentation. Get the volunteers to act out the role-play.

- Conduct a short debriefing of people's comments:

- What did people write down in the first break? What led participants to their conclusions?
- What did people write down in the second break? What led them to those conclusions?
- What did people realise at the end? What assumptions had they been making?

Part 2. Drafting a policy for dealing with racist incidents in school (or in an organisation).

- Introduce the next task, to draft a policy for the school, club or organisation.
- Make a short brainstorm of the different actors in their school or club. For example, in a school there are pupils/students, teachers, a headteacher, cleaning staff, librarians, school bus drivers and supervisory staff, for instance, playground supervisors.
- Next, ask the participants to divide themselves into small groups of four or five people to consider the duties and responsibilities of the different members of the school community with respect to racist incidents. The objective is to draft guidelines on how these people should deal with such incidents. Give the groups 30 minutes for their discussions and to prepare a report with key points on flipchart paper.
- Ask participants to come back into plenary to report on their work. The facilitator should make a summary of the points and invite the participants to compare them with whatever policies or guidelines already exist in their school.
- Now encourage each group to work further to develop one aspect (step or measure). For example: if a general school statement about racism and discrimination is needed, then one group should be in charge of writing it. Groups should also discuss ways to present their results in plenary, for example, using not only their writing but also images, collages and body sculptures to better convey their feelings.
- In plenary, ask the groups to report their results and discuss how to implement their ideas.

Debriefing and evaluation

Begin with a review of the activity itself and then go on to talk about what people learned and what they should do next.

- How prevalent is racism in the school or club, and in society at large?
- Which groups suffer most? Why? Were the same groups targeted twenty or fifty years ago?
- Have people's concept of what constitutes a racist incident changed as a result of doing the activity? How? Give examples?
- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that racist incidents do not happen in your school (or organisation)?
- Think back to the critical incident. What should the teachers, Abdallah's father and the headteacher have done to ensure a just outcome?
- Having a policy on dealing with racist incidents is important, but would it not be better not to need it in the first place? What can and should be done to address the causes of racist behaviour, both in school and in society at large?

Tips for facilitators

Be aware of the background of the members of the group and adapt the activity accordingly. People will be more engaged if you deal with issues that are real for the group. On the other hand, you need to be prepared for the emotions that may be brought out as a result. It is important to pay attention to the feelings of those participants who feel that they themselves have been discriminated against at school. It may be useful, instead of focusing on one critical incident/case study, to gather insights from several examples and different perspectives. This approach will enable you to take different power relations into account; for example, the implications of racism among peers and racism coming from a teacher or headteacher.

If you want to be provocative at the beginning and to use a racist joke, you may consider choosing one that pokes fun at a group which is not represented in your class or youth group. In every country there are traditions of jokes about other nationals. You could start off the discussion by asking the group to share one or two. You could then go on to talk about the dividing line between racist and non-racist jokes. For instance, are jokes about Pakistanis or Turks nationalistic or racist? This could lead you on to the definition of a racist joke and of a racist incident (see below in “further information”).

It may be that at the end of part 2 at step 4, the conclusions are not sufficiently focused for the participants to use them for the next step. In this case, you may wish to use handout 2, “some practical points for consideration” and encourage groups to develop the first four steps.

Variations

The activity can be adapted to address issues such as bullying. If bullying is an issue, you may like to explore the activity “Do we have alternatives?”, on page 111, before you try to develop an anti-bullying policy.

Suggestions for follow-up.

Review the issue regularly, for instance, once or twice a year. Policies need to be reviewed to ensure that they are in fact meeting the objectives. As society changes, so policies need updating to ensure that they continue to meet the challenges of the changing conditions.

The group may wish to look at how aspects of racism come into commercial decision-making. The activity “Access to medicaments”, on page 80, looks at various issues, including racism, which were raised in the 1990 court case between the South African government and companies producing drugs for the treatment of AIDS.

Ideas for action

Continue to work on the policies in your own school or organisation and ensure their implementation. The group could also link up with anti-racist projects in other countries. For instance with “Schools Without Racism”, a programme implemented in Belgium that requires at least 60% of the school population to sign and implement a common anti-discrimination statement (www.schoolwithoutracism-europe.org).

Key date

21 March

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Further information

Definitions of racism

Racism, in general terms, consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. Its more subtle forms are as damaging as its overt form.

Institutionalised racism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages people from ethnic minorities. Racist incidents and harassment can take place in any institution, regardless of the numbers of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds within it.

A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.

What kind of incidents may be considered racist?

The following list of actions may be considered to be racist incidents.

Physical harassment: comprises the more obvious examples of violent attacks or physical intimidation of both children and adults from minority groups, as well as incidents of “minor” intimidation which may be cumulative in effect.

Verbal harassment: name-calling directed at those from minority groups and any ridicule of a person’s background or culture (e.g. music, dress or diet) may be the most obvious examples. There may be other forms of verbal abuse, which are less obvious, involving teachers, pupils or other adults, such as off-the-cuff remarks of a racist nature, which cause offence.

Non co-operation and disrespect: refusal to co-operate with or show respect to minority pupils, students, teachers, trainers, youth leaders and others by people in the school/education community may constitute a racist incident if there is evidence of racist motivation or if the “victim” perceives racism to be a motive. Disrespect can also be inadvertent, for example if a teacher or trainer shows ignorance of a pupil’s cultural practices in a way that makes the victim feel harassed or uncomfortable.

Other incidents: racist jokes and use of racist vocabulary, the wearing of racist insignia, badges, T shirts, etc., racist graffiti, the distribution of racist literature or posters, the presence of racist or fascist organisations in or around the school community, or stereotyping by adults which could lead to discrimination.

Many racist incidents will be of a less obvious type. Such insidious actions which occur are often the most difficult to detect and deal with. Many racist incidents involving pupils or students will not occur in the presence of teachers or adults. It is therefore important that schools develop strategies to ensure that all members of the school community are sensitive to, and take responsibility for, reporting and dealing with incidents.

Some practical points for consideration in relation to developing an anti-racist policy.

In dealing with racial harassment and racist incidents, a whole school (organisation) approach to policy development and implementation is required. It is important that approaches to racist incidents fit in with general school/organisational policy and practice. The issues should be regarded as “special but not separate”. Some practical points for consideration are:

- A clear statement of policy needs to be made showing that no racist incidents or racial harassment will be tolerated.
- In the policy, the school should make a clear statement as to the procedures that should be followed when a racist incident occurs.
- The whole school approach, including processes and agreed actions for dealing with incidents, must extend to all members of the school community: governors, staff (teaching and non-teaching), parents, pupils, students and visitors.
- There must be clear understanding that everyone in the school community has a responsibility to monitor and tackle racial harassment and racist incidents.
- There should be a consistency of approach so that everyone involved is aware of what is expected of them.
- It should be understood that a response to an incident should be made at the time the incident occurs or is reported.
- Any follow up responses to an incident should be made within an agreed time-scale.

(Source: Northamptonshire Country Council)

HANDOUTS

A critical incident – Role-play card

Improvise a very short role-play based on the following incident. It should be presented in three short scenes as indicated below. In the breaks, the facilitator(s) will ask the observers to write down their thoughts about what is happening.

Scene one. Two teachers chatting in the staff room.

Over the last month there have been several incidents of pickpocketing in the school. Once again money is missing. The headteacher is determined to get to the bottom of it and involves the teachers in trying to identify the thief. Abdallah, a pupil whose family is originally from Northern Africa is suspected of being responsible, at least for the latest incident.

Scene two. The conversation between Abdallah's father and the headteacher.

The headteacher invites Abdallah's father to a meeting. As a result, Abdallah's father reimburses the full sum that was stolen to the headteacher.

Scene three. The two teachers are again chatting in the staff room.

That Abdallah's father paid is viewed by the teachers as an admission of Abdallah's guilt. Later however, they find evidence that Abdallah had nothing to do with the stealing.

A critical incident - guidelines for the facilitator

Let the volunteers perform their role-play. At the breaks, you should interject with the questions and ask the observers to write down a couple of key words which summarise their response at that stage in the presentation.

Scene one: Over the last month there have been several incidents of pickpocketing in the school. Once again money is missing. The headteacher is determined to get to the bottom of it and involves the teachers in trying to identify the thief. Abdallah, a pupil whose family is originally from Northern Africa is suspected of being responsible, at least for the latest incident.

First break. First question to the observers: If you were the headteacher, what would you do?

Scene two: The headteacher invites Abdallah's father to a meeting. As a result, Abdallah's father reimburses the full sum that was stolen to the headteacher.

Second break. Second question to the observers: Do you think the matter has been solved satisfactorily?

Scene three: The teachers view this as an admission that the thief was actually Abdallah. Later, however, they find evidence that Abdallah had nothing to do with the stealing.

Third break. Third question to the observers: What do you think now?

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