



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

TAKE-HOME SKILL: EXPANDING WHAT'S CULTURALLY FAMILIAR— BROADENING YOUR SENSE OF "WE"

"Those who do not know themselves cannot value themselves, and those who are not known by others cannot be valued by others."

—J. Blaine Hudson

OVERVIEW

Parents/caregivers and their teens attend an event or center that celebrates people with a different cultural identity than their own and reflect on their experience, helping to foster a sense of civil courage.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As part of an exploration of cultural identities because your family values cultural diversity
- In response to your teens' curiosity about their own or another cultural or social identity
- In response to questions your teen may be posing about cultural identity
- As part of a larger discussion around helping your teen learn their capacity for bridging differences
- To begin fostering courage to act for justice

TIME REQUIRED

- Multiple Sessions

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Access to a computer
- Access to transportation

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Increase their knowledge about culturally diverse groups and their worldviews
- Recognize shared strengths or common values with people from culturally diverse groups that can be sources of connection
- Explore differences with people from culturally diverse groups that are valuable and worthy of being celebrated
- Reflect on their capacity for civil courage
 - Civil courage is acting bravely against injustice in spite of risks or costs to yourself like being punished or rejected by your own community or society

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Curiosity
- Humility
- Empathy
- Respect
- Courage
- Fairness

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open awareness
- Non-judgement

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Before engaging your teen, take a moment for yourself to think back to a time when you were in a community with people representing a particular cultural or social identity that seemed different from your own. For example, you can reflect on identities like race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, religion, age, national origin, ability, or political orientation.
- What did you learn about this identity? About yourself? What values did you have in common with the people of this community? What strengths did you notice in the people of this community? How much more familiar did you feel about people with this identity after your interaction with them? What acts of civil courage have you taken in the past? What acts are you committed to taking in the future to promote justice for people of this community? What were or might be the consequences of these acts?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

One way to encourage your teen to broaden their sense of what's comfortable and familiar is to help them learn about communities of people with identities that seem different than their own. Here's how to begin building the foundation for greater understanding and connection, and, in turn, prepare to act with civil courage in pursuit of justice for people that seem different.

Having these conversations with your teen can be hard at first. With regular practice, these conversations can become much more comfortable. What's more, this activity is backed by research with evidence that it works.

ACTIVITY

- While you're having dinner together or driving to or from school, for example, talk to your teen about attending an event together that celebrates a community that seems different from your own. Some examples are a city-organized multicultural festival or an international visual or performance arts experience (e.g., music or film). You could visit a museum that is devoted to exploring and celebrating a racial or ethnic group. You could join an interfaith community service day. You can take part in a 5K run/walk to support neurodiversity or disability. Encourage your teen to choose the event or experience to nurture their motivation and acceptance of this activity.
- To offer your teen support, you can model your thought process by thinking aloud about and discussing the following optional prompts together. You can take inspiration from and adapt the following prompts using a familiar conversational style that feels natural for you.
 - What do you think you might learn during this experience?
 - What do you think you might learn about yourself?
 - What emotions might you feel, and what thoughts might you think during this experience?
 - How might the mindfulness practice of open awareness—simply noticing things like thoughts, feelings, or sounds as they come and go—be helpful during this experience?
 - How else might you [navigate challenging emotions](#) if they arise?
- Discuss when you might have this experience and schedule it together.

- On the ride to the event or center, consider modeling your thought process by thinking aloud about and discussing the following optional prompts:
 - Positive expectations you have for this experience
 - Strengths of people of this cultural identity that you might learn about
 - Ways you are similar to the people of this cultural identity
- Make space for reflecting on navigating moments of challenging feelings like discomfort or uncertainty as well
- On the ride home from the event or center, talk with your teen about your experiences. You can model your thought process and invite your teen to share their reflections on these optional prompts:
- What shared strengths or common values are a source of connection?
- What differences do you value?
- What will you do to continue to engage with people in this community? For example, could you shop at businesses owned by people from the community? Could you eat at restaurants frequented by people from the community? Could you engage in another experience similar to the one you just had?
- How might *bias* or *privilege* affect the way you (or others) view this community?
 - *Bias* is “the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment”
 - *Privilege* is “an advantage that only one person or group of people has, usually because of their position or because they are rich”
- If this community is harmed by bias or privilege, how might you speak up or act to promote justice for people in this community?
- If this community’s identity has been historically privileged, how might you account for any complex feelings that arise in you?
- Invite your teen to reflect on how they might tell a friend about this experience? What are the key takeaways they learned about that they’d share with a friend? What would they tell a friend are the questions this experience left them wondering about?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did your teen respond to this exercise? Did it deepen their awareness and understanding of themselves and people of other cultural identities? How has your own perspective shifted and/or your understanding grown? Has the sense of responsibility for standing up for members of this community strengthened in one or both of you?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Students](#) in a doctoral psychology program planned and completed an individualized experiential activity within a cultural group different from their own as one part of their diversity training. They were supported in planning, completing, and reflecting on this experience by their teachers and senior students in their program. Following their diversity training, students felt increased satisfaction with their growing skills about diverse cultures. They were also able to express a rich awareness about multicultural identities in their internship application essays. What’s more, they showed a greater willingness to organize school events focused on supporting prospective students from diverse groups.

[Students](#) in other doctoral programs who completed similar activities also showed positive growth. These activities helped them grow their perspective-taking about diverse cultural identities, which increased their awareness of injustice and fostered their courage to take action.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Learning about diverse cultural identities by reading books, writing assignments, or having discussions in a classroom setting alone is a starting point for growth, but has limitations. To continue a lifelong learning journey in understanding diverse groups, teens need experiential ways of learning about these communities. Being immersed in a community that seems different from your own can [challenge](#) your comfort level. But carefully engaging in these emotional experiences with support from parents, caregivers, and teachers can help teens grow their multicultural understanding and open up more social opportunities within these communities to cultivate meaningful connections and relationships.

[Civil courage](#) is about acting bravely against injustice in spite of risks or costs to yourself like being punished or rejected by your own community or society. Teens and adults may want to act with courage to foster a more just society, but they might not always recognize injustice against people with diverse cultural identities because they aren't familiar with cultural identities beyond their own.

You can support your teen to gain experience being with people who seem different as a way to act bravely against pressure from society to remain separate. By opening ourselves to new experiences of being in community with people who are unfamiliar to us, we can begin to build bridges and relationships across cultural differences. Building these bridges is a first step in taking a stand against division and beginning to live a more [integrated](#) life. Ultimately, growing our sense of common humanity and unity helps us to notice injustice and act to foster justice for all people.

SOURCE

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