

Foundations in Social Justice

For Parents and Educators

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Introduction

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

What is social justice? How can we begin to understand the issues and experiences that others face? How can we help our children gain an awareness of bias and injustice without becoming overwhelmed, frightened, or discouraged? What can we do to help children to interact with the world in a way that is conscious and connected? How can we equip ourselves and our kids with the tools to be positive agents of social change?

In this course, we'll explore ways to bring social justice principles and action into our everyday parenting and teaching. Gaining a more complex understanding of how your actions impact others will improve your ability to find equitable and just ways of interacting. It will transform the way you understand and relate to those who have a different life experience from yours. In addition, it can open opportunities for your family to connect with many different people. This will increase your responsiveness to issues that arise within your family, community, and world, which will create a safer, healthier, more equitable world for everyone.

Social justice isn't just something that we learn about and then move on; hopefully it will become part of your life, and your family or classroom—part of who you are. Consider this course the first step on a journey to build awareness and open transformative dialogue.

What You Can Expect in This Course

There are seven units in this course:

Unit 1: Getting Started with Social Justice

Unit 2: Principles of Social Justice

Unit 3: Racial Justice

Unit 4: Economic Justice

Unit 5: Disability Justice

Unit 6: Gender Justice

Unit 7: Making Connections

These units are divided into lessons that present the information in manageable chunks and allow you time to absorb and work with the material. These are not the only topics in social justice, but they are a good place to start. Feel free to customize this course by exploring other topics and resources. Let it be a springboard that will launch you into a lifetime of learning.

In each unit, you'll find the main topics explained, and then see links to a variety of reading, viewing, and listening resources, all of which were carefully chosen to help you learn about the different topics. You'll also find activities that provide the opportunity to explore the material in a personally relevant way and worksheets that encourage you to reflect on your learning.

Throughout the course, you will see words that you might not be familiar with. You can look up these terms or refer to the definitions section of the course. At the end of the course, you'll find a list of resources used in the course and a list of recommended children's books. Check your local library for them, and suggest the library purchase the books to make them available to many people in your community. Keep your eyes open for new resources as you learn more and meet others involved in social justice issues.

We'll use the *experiential learning circle* (based on work by David Kolb, Roger Greenaway, and others). In it, each step leads naturally to the next:

1. **Do It!** First, we do something. In this course, it will be reading an article, watching a video, trying out a conversation with our kids, reading social justice books with our kids, or taking action for social justice together.
2. **What?** We reflect on the experience: What happened (or didn't happen)? What issues came up in conversations? What questions arose?
3. **So What?** Next, we relate the experience to our lives. Why does this matter? How does this fit into or challenge our world view? We connect our experience to what others have experienced and to the principles of social justice.
4. **Now what?** We make a plan for next steps. What else would strengthen our learning? What else might we try?
5. **Do it!** Take the next action and keep the experiential learning circle going.

Important Note About Course Content

This course includes difficult topics and some of the resources include profanity. Please review all material before choosing what to share with your children. Some of the resources and activities are meant for adults only, and others are for children of different ages. This course is written for adults. It is meant to guide your own learning about social justice topics and to give you tools to use to help guide children in gaining age-appropriate awareness about social justice. You might find it most

helpful to complete each unit on your own first, and then choose what activities and resources to share with your children.

Definitions of Social Justice Terms

In the course, you may come across terms you are unfamiliar with or unsure about. Refer to the list of definitions included here to get a sense of how the term is being used in this course. You can also do online research to learn more about the terminology and concepts.

[See Appendix](#)

How to Get the Most Out of This Course

After reading the material in each lesson, take the time to read or view the linked resources and then do the related activities. Don't rush through the activities; give yourself time to be thoughtful and sort through your feelings. Afterward, write down your thoughts using the prompts in the reflections. You might find it helpful to keep a journal as well as you move through this course. It's as much about your personal transformation as it is about teaching children about awareness and action around social justice.

Some activities and reflections are meant to be done individually, and others are more effective in a group setting (even if it is just a group of two). The reflections are mainly aimed at adults, but you might find they offer rich discussion points for your work with children. As you process your own feelings and experiences, you can help distill the essence of these learning touchpoints into a form that is appropriate for your children.

This course is designed for parents and educators to go through each unit at their own pace, either on their own or with other adults. You can expect to spend between 2–3 hours on each unit. It can be helpful to set a goal for completing the course. For instance, you might decide to complete one unit every two weeks, or to complete the entire course in 6 weeks (one unit per week). You may want to choose a specific time each day or week to focus on this work; creating a planned time for the course-work is especially important if you are working with others.

Social justice is a collective process. You will get more out of this course if you do it with a small group of people to develop a community of practice. It could be with one other family, or a group of educators. Whatever your community of practice looks like here are questions to answer before you start:

1. How often will we meet?
2. What will we do when we meet? For instance, will we watch videos and do readings together? Will we share our answers to reflection questions? Will we have more general discussions after everyone has completed a unit in their own?

3. How will we organize facilitation? Will we rotate who facilitates the meeting? Will we have an open-discussion format?
4. What will our kids do while we meet? Will older kids join the conversation? Will we rotate childcare, or have older kids provide childcare?
5. Will there be refreshments? How will that be organized?

One last thought: You (or others) might find some of the questions difficult to answer, especially at first when you are just learning how to recognize and analyze these social issues. Don't worry if you don't have answers—just considering these questions is often enough to initiate the process of inner transformation.

We hope this course gives you a solid foundation in social justice principles and a toolbox of skills to help you build on your experience and use your new awareness to effect positive change in the world.

Unit 1

Getting Started with Social Justice

Lesson



We're All Different and We All Belong

Group Labels and Group Identity

Take a minute to think about who you are and what you like to do. Do you like to read? Do you like to draw? Maybe you like dogs or hip-hop music or anime. Maybe you ride a motorcycle, or garden, or cook, or go camping. Think about the family labels that apply to you. Are you a mother, a son, a cousin, a sister? What about social relationships? Are you a friend, a teammate, a colleague, a neighbor, an employee, or a volunteer? We all belong to many groups at once.

Watch

Watch this short video from TV2 Denmark:

[*"All That We Share"*](#)

This video is a great one to share with your older children and teens. Afterwards, talk about the experience of watching the video—what feelings did it bring up? How might the exercise have affected those who participated in it?

Activity #1: Group Identity

Throughout this course, you'll find a lot of activities and reflections. These are designed to give you the opportunity to work with the topics in a personal way. Activities are meant to be done in a group with your family members, in a classroom setting, or with friends or a study group. Reflections can be done individually or with others as a group activity or discussion.

For the first activity, list all the groups you belong to—think big and small. Each person can create their own list because everyone is an individual. Afterwards, compare where your areas of interest or roles overlap with others in your family or group, and which interests or roles are uniquely yours.

Afterwards, choose from your list three labels that you most identify with. (For now, we won't include identities related to ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.) Circle these three or write them in a separate list.

Reflection #1: Group Identity

Throughout this course, you'll find worksheets for writing down your reflections—the act of writing encourages introspection and brings a deeper awareness and an intention to your work.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the group identity activity and the concept of group identities. After writing down your thoughts, you may want to have an informal discussion about the experience.

Think about the three groups that you chose to circle. Why did you choose them? What makes you identify strongly with each activity or role? What does this say about who you are?

Think about all the groups you belong to. Can you think of another person who belongs to all the same groups? Is that person very much like you? How are you two different?

Are there any common traits or values shared among members of a particular group you are in? Does everyone in the group share these traits or values?

Write down two or three thoughts or questions that came up during this exercise.

How might this experience change the way you think of or relate to others that are in your group? How might it change the way you relate to others outside of your group?

Speaking on Behalf of a Group

Sometimes we identify with a particular interest or aspect of our nature. Perhaps you describe yourself as an introvert and a singer. Just because we take on a particular identity, it doesn't mean that identity defines us or our behavior. It is just one more part of who we are.

Suppose you are a singer, and someone asks you "Do all singers like to sing in public?" Do you think you can speak for all singers? If you're an introvert, would you be comfortable speaking for all introverts? If you are a parent, can you speak for all parents? For instance, you might think, "Parents always worry about their kids," or "Parents never have enough time for themselves," and this might be a very accurate description of your experience as a parent. But is it true of all parents? Probably not, and there's no way of knowing for sure without talking to *all* parents.

When someone speaks about a group to which they belong, it is often well-meaning but their experience is not necessarily an accurate reflection of others in the group. When someone speaks about a group to which they don't belong, it is sometimes well-meaning, but it can also be very inaccurate, misguided, and even unfair.

Have you ever had an assumption made about you based on your membership in a particular group? Was this assumption an accurate reflection of your experience? Was it an accurate reflection of the experience of everyone in the group? See if any of these statements sound familiar:

“Everyone in that neighborhood is poor.”

“That school is full of troublemakers.”

“Homeschoolers are weird.”

“Skateboarders are dangerous.”

“Teenagers are so self-absorbed.”

“Little brothers are pests.”

“Only rich kids go to that school.”

Sometimes the statements seem positive or complimentary:

“Little kids have endless energy.”

“Gay men are such good cooks.”

“Old people are good storytellers.”

“Black people are such good dancers.”

“All Asians are smart.”

Can you think of statements you’ve heard (or made) that make assumptions or judgments about groups of people?

Regardless of the intent behind the words, making general statements about individuals based on a group identity is misleading and unfair. It leads to stereotyping and discounts or marginalizes those who do not fit into the limits of the statement. But this is often what we ask others to do: make general statements about a group identity based on their own experience.

“You’re Hispanic—tell me, how do Hispanic Americans feel about undocumented farm workers in this country?”

“How will gays like you respond to the efforts around transgender bathroom access?”

“Since you have a disability, can you explain what people with disabilities think are the biggest obstacles to employment?”

Can you think of times you’ve asked others to speak for a group they belong to, making assumptions or statements about the whole group based on their experience? Have there been times when you’ve been asked to do this? How did you respond? We all have the right and responsibility to express our personal truth, but no one should assume that an individual’s experience or opinion reflects the experience or opinion of others.

Watch

Watch this short video: "[How Microaggressions Are Like Mosquitos Bites.](#)"

Activity #2: Group Statements and Assumptions

Choose one of the groups to which you belong and complete the following statements:

Every [insert group label here] likes to _____.

Every [insert group label here] dislikes _____.

For instance, if you like to sing, you might say "Every singer likes to sing in the shower" or "Every singer dislikes singing with someone who is off-key."

Next, estimate how likely it is that others in this group would agree with your statements. Would half the people in the group agree? 75%?

Like statement: ____% agreement likely among group members

Dislike statement: ____% agreement likely among group members

Repeat the exercise, but this time make statements about someone else's group (one to which you don't belong but someone in your study group does). The statements will reflect the speaker's assumptions about what members of the group like and dislike.

Afterwards, complete the reflection about your experience.

Reflection #2: Group Statements and Assumptions

How did it feel to make statements and assumptions about a group to which you belong?

How did it feel to make statements and assumptions about a group to which you don't belong?

How did it feel to hear someone outside your group make assumptions about you? Did you agree or disagree with their statements?

If less than 100% of the members of a group agree with your statement, is that statement accurate? What percentage of the group would need to agree in order for that statement to be deemed true for the entire group?

Is it fair to make assumptions about members of a group to which you belong? Why or why not?

Is it fair to make assumptions about members of a group to which you don't belong? Why or why not?

How might this experience change the way you make assumptions about others? How might it change the way you respond when asked to make statements about a group?

Write down two or three thoughts or questions that came up during this exercise.

Consider This

At the end of each lesson, you'll find one or more relevant quotes. You are encouraged to use these as discussion prompts with your family, class, or group. You might want to post a quote somewhere prominent in your house to promote discussion not just between family members but with anyone that comes into your home.

If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room.

Anita Koddick