

Bias activity/hate crimes

Concern

Identity-based aggression around other students' race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability, as characterized by taunting, beating up, bullying, ridiculing or otherwise harassing.

Description

Contrary to popular belief, most hate crimes are not committed by hardened extremists. Rather, a surprisingly large number are youthful thrill seekers. Often, the perpetrators hope their acts of violence will earn them respect from their friends.

The second most common perpetrator of hate crimes, is the "reactive offender" who feels that he or she is responding to an attack by the victim -- a perceived insult, being overlooked for a job, interracial dating, the integration of his neighborhood. Often, "reactive offenders" imagine that the very existence of lesbians and gay men -- or having to compete with women on the job -- is an assault upon their values or their own identity.

Being unsure about oneself and needing desperately to belong to a powerful group are factors that can lead young people to commit hate crimes. If teens are surrounded by a community filled with prejudice toward particular groups, and if they have no personal experience of people different from themselves, they may be unable to empathize with potential victims. They may see them as objects or stereotypes, not as human beings. Thus a key goal in intervention with bias offenders is to develop empathy and strengthen or establish connection with the wider community.

The best way to prevent hate crimes is to prevent prejudice and to promote respect for all of the similarities and differences among people. However, once a bias offense has been committed, Restorative Justice requires both making things right and reconnecting the offender with the community.

Goals of intervention - students will:

- Examine and understand their own identity, life experiences and actions
- Build skills in managing feelings and controlling impulses
- Develop greater appreciation for the experience of others
- Develop capacity to understand bias
- Make things right
- Reconnect to a caring community, or begin connection to community

A suggested scope and sequence - Teens

Bias crimes - target	Triggers - inside	Connecting with others
Prejudice	Triggers - outside	Power
Bullying	Anger	Strengths
Discrimination	Depression	Respect - getting it
Ethnic slurs	Letting go	Reflecting on performance
Gay bashing	Controlling impulses	Stereotypes
Racial conflict	Reactions - stopping	Diversity - preferences
Religious attack	Consequences - predicting	Diversity - appreciating
Sexually harassed	Breaking rules	Diversity - cultural
Managing feelings	Blurting out	Diversity - disability
Physical sensations	Hitting	Diversity - ethnic
Persepctive - taking	Teasing	Diversity - gender
Restitution (Restorative justice)	Making things right	Diversity - physical
Empathy	Owning up	Diversity - religious
	Apologizes	