

Junior aMUSE
Take Action Project Sample Sessions: Prejudice Busters

One of our human rights is that people are not discriminated against for their race, skin color, gender, disability or sexuality. Girls can examine prejudice and discrimination and teach others through a play or other form of public presentation.

Session One

Hide 'n Seek Fairness—*discuss fairness*

Session Two

National Forum on Kids and Prejudice—*discuss acts of unfairness, discrimination and prejudice*
Letter to Self—*pledge to self*

Session Three

Stereotypes
Prejudice Buster Contracts—*commit to ending prejudice*

Session Four

Speaking Out!—*share Prejudice Buster actions*

Session Five

Letter to Self—*review pledge to self*

Resources

"WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR? A Kid's Guide to Building Character" by Barbara A. Lewis

Session 1: Hide n' Seek Fairness

Objective: Inspire thought on the topic of fairness.

Time Allotment: 30 minutes

Materials:

- Three balls of yarn—one brightly colored, such as yellow. The others should blend in with the environment.

Prep Needed:

- Cut approximately 30 pieces of each color of yarn. Hide them in a designated playing area. Brightly colored yarn should be easy to find. The other yarn should blend in and be difficult to find.

Game:

1. Divide girls into two or three teams.
2. Assign each team a color.
3. Designate a length of time and agree on a "time's up" signal.
4. Ready, set, go! Girls race to find pieces of their color of yarn.
5. When time is up, gather girls together and count the number of pieces each team found. The team with the most pieces wins. Most likely, it will be the team with the brightly colored yarn.
6. Discuss the following questions:
 - What did it feel like to be on the winning team?
 - What did it feel like to be on the losing team?
 - Which team found the most pieces? Why?

- If we played again, which team would you want to be on? Why?
 - Is the game fair? How would you make it fair?
7. Optional: play the game again using the girls' ideas on making it fair.

Session 2: National Forum on Kids and Prejudice

Objective: Discuss acts of unfairness, discrimination and prejudice.

Time Allotment: 25 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Copies of "National Forum on Kids and Prejudice (end of packet)

Prep Needed:

- Read through "National Forum on Kids and Prejudice" and discussion questions.

Role-Play and Discussion:

1. Ask the girls if they remember what you talked about in Session 1: Hide n' Seek Fairness.
2. Tell girls you will be talking about a specific kind of unfairness—prejudice and discrimination.
3. Ask girls what those words mean to them.
4. Ask girls to choose roles of the characters in the National Forum on Kids and Prejudice (end of packet).
5. Read the Forum aloud as the characters.
6. Discuss the Forum based on the questions at the end of the Forum.
7. Discuss what kinds of prejudice and discrimination the girls know about. Perhaps they experience discrimination themselves, read about it or see it on TV.

Session 2: Letter to Self

Objective: Girls write letters to themselves about how they would like to stop prejudice and discrimination in their lives.

Materials Needed:

- Paper
- Pens
- Envelopes that can be sealed

Letter Writing

1. Pass out paper, pens and envelopes to girls.
2. Ask girls to think about what has been talked about so far in regards to fairness, prejudice and discrimination.
3. Ask each girl to write a letter to herself describing her goals to be inclusive and help stop prejudice and discriminatory behavior.
4. Ask each girl to seal her letter in an envelope and write her name on the front.
5. Collect envelopes and tell the girls they will get their letters back at a later date.

Session 3: Stereotypes

Objective: Learn positive strategies that can be used when confronted with situations where an individual may have a physical or perceived difference.

Time Allotment: 20 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Several opaque containers
- Knick-knacks and small objects you can put into containers

Prep Needed:

- Gather several opaque (not clear) containers and fill them with different objects.

Discussion:

1. Ask girls to define stereotypes and generate a list of stereotypes.
 - Are stereotypes true?

- How do stereotypes hurt those who believe them?
 - How do stereotypes hurt those at whom they are directed?
2. Bring out the containers. Tell the girls that they have to guess what is in the containers and put labels on them, so you can store them properly. Stress the importance that the label must be correct. Girls cannot look inside to see the objects. When they realize they cannot tell you what is inside without seeing it first, explain to them that is exactly what they are doing when they “stereotype” others: judging without knowing what is on the inside.

Session 3: Prejudice Buster Contract

Objective: Make a commitment to decreasing prejudice and discriminatory actions in the community.

Time Allotment: 25 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Large sheets of paper for brainstorming
- Paper
- Pens
- Folder or large envelope

Prep Needed:

- Make a Prejudice Buster Contract sample.

Discussion and Contract Signing

1. Gather girls in a circle.
2. Ask girls to brainstorm different ways they can stop prejudice and discriminatory behavior. Some suggestions are:
 - Speak up when someone tells an offensive joke
 - Make a new friend with someone
3. Pass out paper. Ask girls to write “I (name), pledge to help stop prejudice and discrimination in my community. I will...”
4. Ask girls to choose two different actions they will take to stop prejudice and discrimination. Girls should write these in their contracts.
5. Girls sign each other’s contracts as witnesses.
6. Place contracts in an envelope or folder.
7. Girls should practice their Prejudice Buster actions and be ready to report back on their efforts.

Session 4: Speak Out!

Objective: Girls share with each other and the community their Prejudice Buster actions.

Time Allotment: 30 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Prejudice Buster Contracts

Sharing Circle:

1. Girls gather in a circle.
2. Girls take turns talking about what they did to honor their contracts.
3. After a couple weeks of working on the commitments of Prejudice Buster Contracts, discuss how to Speak Out about what has been learned. Some suggestions are:
 - Write and perform a play.
 - Create a visual display and install it in a public space.
 - Attend a youth conference and present.
 - Make Prejudice-Busting discussions a regular group activity.
 - Organize a Prejudice-Busting group at a school, community center, etc.
 - Write a Public Service Announcement for radio or public television
 - Write a Letter to the Editor

Session 5: Letter to Self

Objective: Think about what has occurred over the duration of the project.

Time Allotment: 20 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Letters to Self from Session 2

Sharing Circle:

1. Pass out letters to girls.
2. Give girls time to read their letters to themselves.
3. Gather girls in a circle. Ask girls to share their reactions to their letters.
 - Were there any surprises?
 - Has anything changed? If so, why? If not, why not?
 - What did you learn about prejudice and discrimination? About yourself?
 - What did you like about the project? What did you dislike?

National Forum on Kids and Prejudice

Imagine being chosen to attend a meeting of kids from across the United States interested in helping people get along better. Let's meet the participants at an imaginary National Forum on Kids and Prejudice. Find out how they tried to make a difference.

Cast:

Yvonne, Shawn, Bernadette, Roberta, Andrea, Lin, Haile, Debbie, Kristin, Andrea, Beth Anne and Jen.

Setting:

The whole group is meeting for the first time. Yvonne and Bernadette had been chosen as coordinators and had met the day before to do some planning. Everyone in the group was interested in helping people get along better, but no one was sure where to start.

Yvonne: Since I picked the card that said Facilitator, I guess I'll start facilitating....

Shawn: Let's set some rules, first.

Yvonne: Like no interrupting! But, that's a good idea. We already thought about how to do this. Bernadette, you brought your notes with you?

Bernadette: I have them right here. Welcome everyone to our first National Forum on Kids and Prejudice. Some of you may feel uncomfortable talking about this subject, so we thought we should all discuss setting some ground rules—and everyone has to agree to them. No exceptions, right?

Roberta: She's tough!

Andrea: What are you saying—girls can't be tough?! Maybe we have our first stereotype. And we haven't even been here a minute.

Roberta: I was joking, okay?

Lin: That's part of the problem: jokes that make fun of people because of their race or because of anything—age, gender, abilities.

Bernadette: We're not saying you can't have a sense of humor; lots of times that helps a tense situation. But, ethnic jokes are wrong. Any joke that puts people down is not funny. Anyway, let's go over our rules. We're here to make a plan to fight prejudice—starting with ourselves and then working in our communities. We're hoping to leave with some practical steps we can all take. But, because we're starting with us—what's inside—we thought it was important that what we say in this room stays in this room. No going back and telling your crowd at school what so and so said at the forum. Everyone agree?

Haile: That's really important. We have to trust each other enough to be able to share our feelings—and that's hard enough to do without thinking someone's going to be telling the whole world afterwards.

Bernadette: Great. Any problems? Okay, the next ground rule should be obvious: No name-calling, no disrespect, and no laughing at what other people say. What each person says is important, so give each other the chance to speak. And really listen to each other, too.

Debbie: Okay, where do you want to start?

Kristin: I'll start. In my neighborhood, well, I don't see many kids who are different from me. I mean, even at school—and the ones I do see always hang together. I don't think they really want to be friends with anyone else.

Yvonne: How do you know if you don't ask?

Kristin: But, I feel uncomfortable. I think people like to be with people who are like them—have something in common—including race.

Andrea: That was what I was always taught by my parents and teachers—all people are basically the same. You know, it's a small world sort of thing. And, well, isn't that the way to stop people from hating each other—by talking about how people are really the same?

Yvonne: At the same time, when people emphasize the similarities, what happens to the differences?

Roberta: It's an easy way to ignore them!

Yvonne: Right! How can we respect what makes people different and unique if we ignore those things?

Kristin: Yeah, but, I still want to know how you can expect to value someone's differences if she doesn't want to hang around with you?

Beth Anne: Well, no one is saying you have to like everybody. There are annoying people of all races—but it's more of a respect thing.

Debbie: And taking the time to break down some stereotypes and find out what the person is really like—at the very least, not thinking that just because she is Asian, she is very smart. I get that stereotype all the time from my teachers and it is very hard. They expect me to be brilliant. And when I'm average, I almost think they're so disappointed because I don't match their expectations that I get even lower grades from them!

Shawn: Wow—you know, I think I always thought that too. And I'm embarrassed because I really know how it feels when people look at you and expect you to behave a certain way. I'm sorry, Debbie.

Debbie: You're forgiven. But, I think it's harder when you're so visibly different. And, not only racially different. There's a girl in my apartment building. She's blind and has a guide dog, you know, and I always feel uncomfortable if she's leaving the building the same time as me—like, should I help her down the stairs? I open the door and then I start mumbling stuff.

Yvonne: I guess you should just ask her if she needs help and let her tell you.

Bernadette: Exactly! But, why do people feel so uncomfortable?

Kristin: Well, I think that if I start by just talking to one person—one on one—maybe someone I sit next to in class or in band with me—and take it from there.

Jen: I don't know. I'm Jewish but people don't know that when they look at me. So the thing I find hard is when people start telling Jewish jokes in front of me. Then what do I do? Sometimes, I tell people, hey, I'm Jewish and then everyone gets really embarrassed and uncomfortable. And sometimes it's people I really want to get to know better and then I think I've put up a barrier. And so sometimes I just listen—but then I get so angry with myself.

Bernadette: You should never just listen. You have to speak up!

Haile: That might be easy for you, Bernadette, but for some of us, it's not so easy.

Lin: You can let someone know his joke isn't funny—"Hey, putting people down isn't very funny," or "Let's be positive. Making fun of other people doesn't make me feel good."

Roberta: I think you have to feel comfortable about yourself—who you are—respect your own background—feel pride in it. Then it’s easier to speak up.

Yvonne: My grandmother has told me stories since I was a baby about women in my family who were really strong. And I’ve read a couple of books. One was on queens and princesses in different African empires and another was on African-American women. Listening to my grandmother and reading those stories made me feel great inside. So, if I hear put-downs, I try hard to remember my great-great grandmother who supported her family with her own farm and managed to send two of her sons to college.

Beth Anne: But some of us don’t really identify with a particular group. My family is all mixed up, so I don’t really think of myself as belonging to an ethnic group. If anyone asks me who I am, I say I’m a Southerner.

Andrea: And really, though I have an Italian name and all, my Mom makes hamburgers more often than lasagna. And I hate when other kids think my father must be in the Mafia!

Roberta: That’s why it’s important not to stereotype people. Go back to what Debbie said. Don’t expect people to act a certain way because of how they look. Like, my grandmother gets so furious when she sees older people on TV shows or in commercials shown as being helpless. She runs her own graphic design company—and she’s 78!

Andrea: And don’t think someone is poor or homeless because she is lazy. There are lots of reasons for poverty or homelessness, and they’re complicated.

Yvonne: So, what are the important things that we are all saying here?

Andrea: Respect the differences among us, but also celebrate what we all have in common—like, having the freedom to even hold a forum like this one. A lot of countries don’t have our freedom of speech!

Lin: Respect your own heritage. Learn more about it. And respect yourself. Feel proud of who you are—your strengths and talents.

Shawn: And no put-downs. Ethnic jokes are not funny.

Kristin: And look beyond stereotypes that you might learn from TV and books and magazines—or even from adults. Try to see the person inside.

Beth Anne: And make an effort. You have to work on your own attitudes—and then work on the attitudes of others. Reach out to people.

Debbie: And have the courage to get beyond feeling self-conscious and make friends with people who are different. Learn more about them.

Roberta: Like in sports, or in debating groups, school and community clubs. Find places where different people can work together.

Bernadette: Like making the neighborhood better!

Jen: Exactly!

Yvonne: And when you start in your neighborhoods—well, then you are making the world better, too. And that’s a powerful feeling!

National Forum on Kids and Prejudice Tips

This forum was developed to help girls see many of the ways prejudice develops and how it can be counteracted. Be certain to emphasize the following points:

- Ethnic jokes are wrong.
- Some people feel uncomfortable with those who are different from themselves.
- Getting to know people as individuals helps break down stereotypes.
- Some differences are very visible while others are less noticeable.
- Feeling pride in one's own heritage does not mean one is prejudiced.
- Diversity within groups should be recognized.
- People working together towards a common goal helps reduce prejudice.

Discussion Questions:

1. What ground rules did the group set? Why was this important?
2. Was there a character you identified with—a character that had similar questions and felt the same way you do? Who was she or he and why?
3. What problem did Kristin mention? What solution did the group develop?
4. What advice did Lin have for dealing with put-down jokes?
5. Have you experienced or witnessed prejudice or discrimination? In what way? What did you do? Would you react the same or differently if it happened again?
6. What were some steps the group thought would help fight prejudice?
7. What can you do as an individual? As part of a community group?