

News from Equity and Inclusion



Meridian educates global citizens in an equitable, inclusive, and increasingly diverse community

March 2019

BEING AN ALLY

As parents and teachers of young children, we all face the struggle of deciding whether and how to talk about shocking and extremely sad news like the attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. At such a difficult time, we also wonder what we can do and how we can help to interrupt Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments, and other hateful attitudes and actions against people based on their identities. This may feel bigger than us, but the truth is that we all can do something. This may feel far away, but we have within our own community people representing targeted and vulnerable communities. We can use our own privileges either to ignore or to act. Here are some resources you can explore to take action.

Learn about Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is the automatic rapid association of people with our attitudes and stereotypes about them. These thoughts are activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control, but they result in attitudes, behaviors, and actions that are prejudiced for or against a person or a group of people. They can be either positive or negative. They also run contrary to our explicit beliefs. We can say and believe that we support equity, but then behave in ways that are discriminatory. It is important to know that everyone has implicit bias.

There are several scientific studies that demonstrate how implicit bias is connected to the way our limited brain works. A great resource to learn more about implicit bias is the book [Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People](#), based on a study by Mahzarin R. Banaji from Harvard University and Anthony G. Greenwald from the University of Washington.

It is very important to learn and be aware of our **implicit bias**, because it results in and helps to justify unfair treatment of a person because of their identity. Implicit bias leads to a chain of reactions. It is perpetuated by **stereotypes**, which are mostly derogatory generalizations about a group of people based on their identity. Stereotypes result in **prejudice**, making opinions and judgments of others without prior knowledge. Prejudice leads to **discrimination**, actions taken by individuals or institutions to deny access or opportunity to people based on their social identity. And finally, discrimination creates

systemic racism, which is when institutional laws and practices support bias against a group of people based on their identity.

Learn about the Pyramid of Hate

[The Pyramid of Hate](#) (provided by the Anti-Defamation League) shows how bias and stereotypes can escalate to actions and even violence against people, in particular when these attitudes are reinforced by negative propaganda, fear, and accepted normalized biases that dehumanize communities. We are sharing this pyramid with Meridian's adult community (not young students) to bring awareness, promote intentional counternarratives to break stereotypes, and interrupt negative comments or behaviors that perpetuate bias and discrimination. As Cori Collins states in her Teaching Tolerance article "[Finding Resolve After the New Zealand Mosque Shootings](#)":

The pyramid [of Hate] underscores the importance of never normalizing biased behaviors in the lower levels, which educators can emphasize with students. It also underscores the necessity of educators interrupting and unpacking acts of Islamophobic or anti-immigrant bias they witness it in their school communities.



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Being an Ally

Students are listening. They are watching. They, too, live in a world where a major news network personality inferred that a lawmaker's wearing of a hijab "is antithetical to the United States Constitution." They, too, live in a world where the horrors faced by Friday morning's victims were spread online—made into a spectacle, as the perpetrator wished.

Educators can spread a different story. A story that empowers Muslim students. A story that refuses to offer a simple narrative of what it means to be Muslim. A story that interrupts white nationalist talking points before they become white nationalist actions.

Learn Techniques to Have Difficult Conversations With Children

Children understand unfair treatment as a very early age. They also notice differences and add value to those differences, according to several studies. (See "[They're Not Too Young to Talk About Race](#).")

When deciding if you should talk with your child about social justice issues related to people's identities, consider the fact that families from vulnerable identities and communities have no other choice than to talk with and prepare their children to navigate discrimination and repeated microaggressions. (As an example, see "[Dear Child: When Black Parents Have To Give The Talk](#).") Here are some further resources:

- ⇒ "[How to Talk About Race](#)" with young children
- ⇒ "[Your 5-year-old is already racially biased. Here's what you can do about it.](#)"

When talking with children about current events, consider the following resources:

- ⇒ "[How to Talk to Children About Difficult News](#)" (American Psychological Association)
- ⇒ "[How Do I Explain the News to My Kids?](#)" (ParentMap)

Learn and Talk About Islamophobia and Anti-immigration Sentiments

Learn and talk about your own beliefs and values and how other people have other beliefs, spiritual affiliations, traditions, and rituals. Reading about other people's beliefs and rituals helps to break stereotypes. Include books about people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Who are Muslims in America? Why do they use different clothing? What does it mean? Who are immigrants? Why do they leave their homes? Talk about your own family's immigration stories and heritage.

- ⇒ "[American Muslims: Facts vs. Fiction](#)"
- ⇒ "[Muslim Parents Talk to Their Kids About Prejudice and Islamophobia in 'Dear Child' Video](#)"

Books:

- ⇒ [Under My Hijab](#) by Hena Khan
- ⇒ [45+ Books on South Asian History and Culture](#)
- ⇒ [7 Children's Books About Immigration](#)
- ⇒ [19 Books for Kids About the Immigrant Experience in America](#)

Practice how to react:

- ⇒ "[What to Do if You are Witnessing Islamophobic Harassment](#)"

Engage in This Educational Partnership

As we have stated before, at Meridian we believe that in our parent-school partnership:

- We are committed to offering a learning environment that normalizes diversity through books and a curriculum that represents people from different backgrounds.
- We are committed to engaging children at their age level in conversations that bring awareness to [bias](#) and unfair treatment. (Children develop bias in the early years.)
- We are committed to empowering students to learn, investigate, communicate, and see themselves as agents of change through their everyday actions of kindness and care for themselves, their communities, and their places.



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