

Being Me : Knowing You



Parent Guide

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**Australian
Human Rights
Commission**

everyone, everywhere, everyday



*Where language
and culture
come together*

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A curriculum resource - **Being me: Knowing you** has been devised as a partnership project between the Australian Human Rights Commission and Community Languages Australia. This resource provides teaching and learning materials that have been especially written for language students to develop their language skills whilst learning about an important social issue.

‘Social Justice is what faces you in the morning. It is waking in a house with an adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health : a life of choices and opportunity. A life free from discrimination’

*Mich Dodson
Social Justice Commissioner (1993-1998)*

What are human rights and why are they important?

Human rights are about ensuring that everyone is treated equally and fairly. These rights include the right to access appropriate healthcare and education, the right to practise any religion, the right to be free from discrimination based on such aspects as age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion or disability. Human rights are important for everyone, everywhere, everyday.

Discrimination happens when a person is denied the opportunity to participate freely and fully in normal day-to-day activities.¹ As a school we are concerned about this social issue and wish to promote a socially responsible stance on this matter.

Students will work on a resource that has been specifically designed for young adults who are learning a language in a community language school.

The resource has two objectives:

Curriculum resource - Objective A. to develop a students's second language proficiency in the context of meaningful language about a social issue

Curriculum resource - Objective B. to assist students explore the concept of human rights, in particular, how discrimination affects these rights.

The resource Being Me: Knowing You

The resource is designed around five units: one for each week. Each explores aspects of discrimination. The unit dialogues evolve to depict a story which aims to speak to Australian youth. In particular it probes discrimination based on race and ethnicity with secondary themes of disability, age, religious and gender discrimination. The resource provides a context for an exploration of stereotyping, discrimination and intolerance and the implications of these.

The activities are designed to challenge students to question their own perspectives and life experiences as well as understand their own rights and how these align with those of others. It is important for students to be able to discuss and explore issues in a safe environment. This is why students will be asked to undertake some tasks with their families. Specific tasks have been designed to allow for family members to contribute and help explore issues relating to discrimination and what the implications are for the student and the family group. Please take the time each week to help your child with the **home learning** tasks.

¹ Excerpt from "Australian Human Rights Commission" Leaflet. Australian Human Rights

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Being me: Knowing you Human Rights School Awareness Event

Students will undertake a project on human rights as part of this resource. They will be asked to present a creative piece (such as a poster, poem, collage or story) that represents the themes they have explored in this resource.

The school will hold a special event for families to participate in their children's learning and to view project presentations. The event will be an acknowledgement of the wonderful work and effort of the students as well as a celebration of the school community and the spirit of tolerance and respect it demonstrates as a socially responsible institution.

Your support of your child's involvement is important. You will receive details of this event in a school letter so that you can be part of the event.

How can I help my child deal with discrimination?

"My children hate going to school because they are teased and no one will include them in activities because they are Muslim. My daughter is constantly teased about her hijab and my son is always angry."

Parent of a 12 year old daughter and 14 year old son.

"My child has a disability and is always ostracised from the activities of the other children. They do not understand the impact they are having on my child's confidence and well being."

Parent of a 13 year old son.

"My child hears about discrimination in the media but I am not sure that she actually understands it. I have never spoken to her about her experiences or what she understands."

Parent of a 12 year old daughter.

It is important to support your children if they have experienced discrimination. Listen to the children and tell them that it is normal for them to express feelings of anger, confusion, worry and hurt. You might like to use the words they use to describe their feeling, for example: **I understand that you feel hurt**. This will help your child feel they are being listened to and understood. This will also make it easier for him/her to share his/her experiences with you.

Suggest some strategies such as: ignoring teasing, using humour, being assertive and using a firm voice to ask the person who is demonstrating discriminatory behaviour to stop. Having some responses ready for any further such incidences will help your child feel empowered. Monitor your child's behaviour and moods: Is he sleeping well? Is she reluctant to go to school? Is he withdrawn, anxious or depressed? How is she interacting well with friends and family?

For more serious concerns report the behaviour to teachers or other school staff. Concerns of a serious nature can also be reported to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

How can I teach my children not to discriminate?

Teaching children about discrimination is important. Children should learn to be respectful, to be curious about diversity but not afraid of it. Encourage your children to play with other children, for instance, children with a disability or from another ethnic background, in the same way as they would with others. Encourage them to ask questions with an attitude of friendliness and concern rather than giving the impression they are being judgemental or intolerant. Share your positive stories with them. Also, remember that you have a strong influence and are a role-model for your children. Ensure you are a positive one.

Steps in tackling discrimination

1. Understand the meaning of discrimination.
2. Understand why children might be reluctant to tell you about any discrimination experienced.
3. Recognise discriminatory behaviour from others and those within your own family or friendship groups.
4. Recognise that you may need to support a family member if they experience discrimination (restore their self-respect, allay apprehension etc).
5. Know how to deal with discrimination and who to go to if you need assistance.
6. Know how the Australian Human Rights Commission can help you.

What is the Australian Human Rights Commission?

The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 by an act of the Federal Parliament. It is an independent statutory organisation that reports to the federal Parliament through the Attorney-General.

The Commission's work covers four key areas:

- providing education and raising public awareness about human rights
- handling complaints of discrimination and breaches of human rights
- researching human rights issues and contributing to policy developments
- legal advocacy on human rights issues.

(<http://www.humanrights.gov.au>)

What is the Community Languages Association?

Community language schools provide language maintenance in 69 languages to in excess of 100,000 school age children. Community Languages Australia (Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Associations) is an umbrella body designed to unite the ethnic schools of Australia and the state-based bodies which serve as their administrators. It consolidates ethnic schools beneath a single, organisational banner and, in the process, carries out a number of crucial roles in the creation, maintenance, and profile of Australia's over 1,000 community language schools.

(<http://www.communitylanguagesaustralia.org.au>)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. It is the basis for human rights protection and promotion around the world and has been endorsed by all countries. Many countries have included its provisions in their basic laws or constitutions. This Declaration stresses that human rights apply to everyone, everywhere, everyday when it states that:

'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'.

Human rights are about everyone being treated fairly and equally. Everyone is born with human rights. It is up to governments and individuals to make sure that these human rights continue to be respected. Some of the rights that you are entitled to in Australia are the right to:

- live with your family
- a basic education
- be treated equally by the law
- think what you like and practise any religion
- say what you like (without inciting hatred or violence)
- an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing
- access appropriate health care
- maintain your culture and language
- freedom of movement
- privacy
- freedom from discrimination.

Being Me : Knowing You

A Curriculum Resource for Australian Ethnic Schools

*A Partnership Project between the
Australian Human Rights Commission
and
Community Languages Australia*

Developed by Dr. Teresa De Fazio



A teaching resource about human rights
for 11-15 year olds enrolled in community language schools.