

FAST FACTS



10-20
People



30
Minutes



\$0



Medium
Risk Level

Common Ground – Religion

Adapted with permission from *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*

Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to gain awareness of the different religious experiences and traditions that are represented by the participants in the room. It begins to establish a more personal framework for discussions of advantaged and targeted religious groups in the U.S.

Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

After participating in this activity, participants will be able to recognize the inequalities that exist in society, especially relating to religion. It will help participants to acknowledge their privileges, contextualize their own experiences, and learn about their peers. Through the final discussion and processing, participants will be able to apply this activity to their lives to support

Ground Rules:

- Be fully present and participate at your own comfort level – challenge by choice.
 - Follow up - What does it mean to be “fully present”?
 - Follow up - What does “challenge by choice” mean?
- Push yourself outside of your comfort zone – the most learning happens when we are a little bit uncomfortable.
- Listen respectfully, share air time, and encourage others to participate.
- It’s ok for us all to be at different places with the things we discuss today.
- Show respect for one another’s beliefs, values, and experiences.
- Respect and maintain privacy.

Disclaimer:

- If as facilitators you are not a member of the subordinated group (ie. non-Christian) focused on in this program, be sure to acknowledge that. Frame the conversation that you do not understand what it means to be of a subordinated religious group from personal experience, nor are you an expert because this is the topic of the program. You are simply trying to be an ally by doing education on the topic.
- If someone DOES attend the program who is of the subordinated group, be sure not to single them out for the “[subordinated religious group] perspective,” stare at them to judge their reaction, or basically put them on the spot. They should be treated like every other student, and invite everyone to share/participate as much as she/he/ze is comfortable.

Facilitation Guide:

- Clear an open space large enough to accommodate a comfortable line of all group members. You may want to prepare additional statements in advance from the

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examples listed below to emphasize various family and intergenerational religious affiliations held by group members in the class. Also provide statements that identify experiences not represented in the group.

- **Introduction**

- *The common ground activity is designed to show what experiences come with diverse religions. Honesty is important in this exercise, but your participation is entirely voluntary. You will learn things about the religions of other people in this group that you didn't know and it is very important to understand that the personal experiences shared in this activity are private and not to be said to anyone who is not here to participate in it or witness it.*

- **Instructions**

- *Please form a circle. I am going to say a variety of statements relating to religion and religious practices. If you identify with the statement, please take a step into the circle, pause for a moment and look at who is inside and outside the circle. If at any time you do not feel comfortable doing this, stay where you are. Please do not talk until the end of the exercise.*
- *Offer an opportunity for the students to share their own statements for the activity. Provide as much time as they need. The statements shared MUST apply to the individual speaking.*
- *Everyone return to the circle and think about what you noticed during this experience. As you think about these things, you can have a seat. We're now going to take a few minutes to discuss this experience.*

- **Statements**

- If your family attended a mosque...
- If your family attended a temple...
- If your family attended a church...
- If your family worshipped at altars in your own home...
- If your family traveled to sacred sites for worship...
- If you or members of your family found it challenging to find an appropriate place to worship...
- If you or members of your family had to create an appropriate place to worship...
- If your language of worship was English...
- If your language of worship was a language other than English...
- If you have developed your own form of religious faith or mode of worship...
- If you or your family members do not adhere to a religious following...
- If you or your family identify as more spiritual than religious...
- If your family were the only members of your religious group in your home community...
- If you were one of the few members of your religious group in your K-12 schools...



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- If you were part of the majority religious group in your K-12 schools...
- If you see celebration of your religious faith in public places...
- If you do not see celebration of your religious faith in public places...
- If you had to make special arrangements to eat at school because your religion has requirements about what you eat ...
- If your religion requires you to wear certain garments as part of your faith...
- If someone has directly challenged your religious beliefs...
- If you have ever felt discriminated against because of your religious faith...
- If you have had to request special accommodations from work or school in order to observe your religious holidays/practices...
- If you are proud of your religious faith...

Processing Questions:

After all participants are seated, the facilitator should lead the group in discussion. The questions listed below are recommended. Be sure to allow time after asking the question for participants to raise their hands.

- How did this activity make you feel?
- What did you observe as you were doing the activity?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What have you learned from this activity?
- How has this activity changed your perspective of others?

Final points to summarize:

It is important to recognize that everyone has a unique experience in life. There are some people who have been more privileged than you and some that have been less privileged in our religious upbringing. By recognizing this fact, we are able to avoid judging others. We can also see what privileges society has given us, and/or what we have overcome to be where we are. It is important to be grateful for the experiences that have been given to us, but to also recognize the societal structures that may have contributed to these. Although it is important not to talk about the specific experiences that were shared outside of this group, talking about what you learned is the key to helping to make a change in society.

Possible facilitation issues:

- Participants may begin to feel uncomfortable with sharing and may choose to sit out. Make sure that all participants are aware that this is all right.
- Talking about privilege and personal experiences may bring up strong emotions. Be sure to tell participants that this is a normal response and be willing to let them share.