

Tackling frequently asked questions raised in primary workshops

Below are some example questions raised in workshops with pupils from Upper Key Stage 2. Staff may have ways to adapt the wording of the suggested responses below using their deeper knowledge of their pupils' reactions to sensitive topics. In many cases, posing the question to the whole class can be useful in gauging the wider response and in ensuring that pupils are sharing ideas in their own terms, before answering yourself as a facilitator. This guide is intended to address typical questions which may arise from pupils but is not exhaustive.

Workshop 1- Identity

Question 1a: Why does Mo Farah run for Great Britain and not Somalia?

Suggested response:

Ask pupils their thoughts. Consider ideas about the fact that he has spent most of his life in Great Britain and that he was given opportunities by GB. Make sure to mention that it may have been difficult for him to fit in in a new country at first but that, generally, GB provided him with a safe refuge from Somalia at the time. Ask pupils if this means he leaves his Somalian identity behind and reiterate the idea that a person can choose to identify as dual nationality if they want to.

Question 1b: What if someone else says you're not part of a community?

Suggested response:

Reiterate the values held by a strong community with focus on being welcoming. Discuss with pupils the idea that a community should be inclusive and make a person feel supported, rather than isolating them. Ask pupils how they know if they are part of a community and consider the idea that it is up to an individual as to whether they feel part of a community themselves, not others.

Question 1c: Why do people use stereotypes?

Suggested response:

After taking ideas from other pupils, discuss the fact that sometimes people are not used to seeing others who are different from them (for example, if we were to see an alien land on Earth we might assume that it might act in a particular way towards us if we didn't take the time to get to know it). The more we are used to spending time with and communicating with different kinds of people, the more we understand about them and can find similarities- even if we are different in lots of ways we will have something in common and we are, ultimately, still human. Mention that sometimes people might blame people who are different from them for certain problems for a number of reasons. It may be because they have been given this idea by people around them or by the media- or it may be because they feel like they are helpless in their own community. Ask pupils, even if you think a member of a particular community has mistreated you or caused problems for you, does this mean that everyone in that community is to blame?

Workshop 2- Understanding Violent Extremism

Potential questions or comments raised during “What Is Violent Extremism?” discussion-

Question 2a: Why do the KKK wear those kind of clothes?

Suggested response:

After taking ideas, explain that the actions of the KKK could get members in trouble and would affect their reputation and the reputation of their families etc. Also consider the idea of outfits being recognisable, like a gang uniform. Another point to reference is that the group used these outfits also to resemble traditional Christian outfits worn during Easter parades to suggest a moral identity (you can refer back to this when discussing Isis/negative communities later on).

Question 2b: Why would someone deliberately fly a plane into the Twin Towers?

Suggested response:

Reiterate the fact that terrorist attacks like 9/11 are intended to shock people and make them feel fearful. As violent extremism tries to make a big political statement because a group doesn't like the way another community lives, attacks like this are intended to be memorable and affect not just a local community but others in the wider global community. Explain that 9/11 was a truly shocking and memorable moment in history for any adult who may be in the room as most people can remember when it happened and what it was like on that day. In terms of someone causing harm to themselves, explain that, once a person believes in hatred and violence enough they will forget about the harm they are causing and will believe so much that what they are doing is right that they will sacrifice their own safety or even their lives to spread the message of hate and violence further.

Question 2c: Why might someone discriminate against Muslims and accuse them of bringing death?

Suggested response¹:

The group who carried out the 9/11 attacks were known as Al-Qaeda. Sometimes, Al-Qaeda would mention Islam to justify their actions using religion. We know that no religion teaches to murder and so we can question whether they really represent this religion. However, sadly, some people might not think about that and might not understand the difference between religious people and those who say they are from that faith and commit these acts, which might mean that they blame the religious community for such actions.

¹ NOTE: You may wish to mention this during the discussions of extremist groups as “Negative Communities”.

Potential questions or comments raised during discussion on Isis and National Action-

Question 2d: Why do we not hear about Christian terrorists?

Suggested response:

Reiterate the idea that extremist groups may use a religion to justify the hatred and violence they cause but that this does not reflect the true values of any religion. Explain that people may use labels based on religion if they do not understand the difference between the actions of a violent extremist group and the teachings of the religion they say they are acting upon. Use KKK as a comparison and state that some people might call them “Christian extremists” because they often use symbols from Christianity but that this label is not accurate because Christianity, like all other religions, teaches kindness and respect.

Question 2e: What should I do if I come across National Action or a group like them?

Suggested response:

If you think you have seen some National Action graffiti or leaflets etc (or if you see any other signs of similar groups to those on the slides), make sure you tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. Try to make note of when and where you saw it and, if possible, take a photo. This can be reported to Local Authority teams working in the community and will be taken seriously. If you come across any group which puts you in direct danger or threatens you in some way, try to get out of the situation as calmly and quickly as possible. When it is safe to do so, contact a trusted adult and this can be reported to local police and, again, taken very seriously. Reassure pupils that these kinds of groups are minority groups and that most of the time, in our daily lives, we are very unlikely to come across them and if so we should be reporting to avoid anyone coming across them or being threatened by them in future.

Question 2f: Why do terrorists kill themselves and others?

Suggested response:

Explain that people who commit terrorist acts have very strong ideas of hatred and violence, which they believe to the extent that they will consider these ideas as the most important aspect of their life- they are willing to commit extremely violent and fatal attacks in order to try to make their ideas known in the most dramatic, memorable and threatening way. You may wish to mention how, when you ask many adults about their memories of a certain attack (9/11, for example), they will be able to recount the day clearly.

Question 2g: Why is no one doing anything to stop these groups?

Suggested response:

Remind pupils that these kinds of groups are illegal and that their actions are taken very seriously by security and police. Reassure pupils that, even though we often hear about their actions in the news and other media, we will not hear about the many people working on a daily basis to intervene or stop these kinds of groups. Explain that it is important to remember that, amongst the global population, these groups are a minority.

Potential questions or comments raised during scenario discussions-

Question 2h: Why do some people not have a religion?

Suggested response:

Pose the question back to pupils. Discuss the idea that people may decide that they do not feel a connection to the religion and may choose to leave or convert or that it may be that a person is simply unsure and wishes to explore other ways of living or other beliefs. It may be that that individual has been brought up in a non-religious environment.

Question 2i: Can you be born an atheist?

Suggested response:

Pose the question “can you be born into a religion?” to pupils. Some may talk about initiation rites of passage, such as adhaan in Islam or baptism in Christianity. Discuss that this does act as a rite of passage and welcomes a child into a religious community but consider the idea that some individuals may make choices over faith as they get older and form their own opinions of the world. A person born into a family of non-religious people or atheists may choose to enter a religious community later on in life or remain an atheist.

Question 2j: What if Sophie didn't want to be an atheist anymore?

Suggested response:

Remind pupils that, over the course of a person's lifetime, they will make choices about their own identity or their identity may shift in some way so it is Sophie's choice if she chooses to change her beliefs. You might want to explain that Sophie may wish to formally convert to a religion through practises like baptism or that she may simply wish to explore religion in her own way. Reiterate that this is Sophie's choice and she should not feel forced to do this through others discriminating against her or through peer pressure.

Question 2k: What if someone is told that they can't play with another person because of their religion?

Suggested response:

Use your school or classroom rules to demonstrate that, no matter what a pupil's religious belief, faith or cultural background is, within school everyone is treated equally and respectfully. Explain that sometimes we might not want to play with someone if we have fallen out with them but that there are obviously better ways of resolving conflicts, however, when we are in school we follow shared values and our religious beliefs will teach us to treat others with respect and kindness.

Question 2l: Why are some people gay?

Suggested response:

Explain that there are often many debates around this question but that being gay is not a conscious decision someone makes, it is something that they feel- perhaps from a young age or perhaps they realise they are gay later in life. Explain that being gay is not a condition but that it is someone's natural feeling.

Question 2m: What if a gay person does something that hurts or upsets you?

Suggested response:

Remind pupils that any person has a choice about making good or bad decisions, no matter what their identity or sexuality is. Reiterate the question, "if one member of a community makes a mistake or does something which is not right or harmful, does that mean you can blame an entire community?".

Question 2n: What if my religion teaches that being gay is a sin?

Suggested response:

Explain that religions can be interpreted in different ways (you may want to use an example if you feel confident to do so) and so a person may believe that, in the rules of their religion that it is not acceptable to be gay. However, remind pupils that, even if you interpret your religion to disagree with being gay, all religions teach to be tolerant and kind to others.

Question 2o: Are there any other forms of religious hatred/discrimination?

Suggested response:

Explain that hatred comes in many forms and that, sadly, anyone may be targeted for their beliefs or even for not having religious beliefs. Sometimes people may discriminate others from their own religion if they practise their faith differently. Reiterate that religions should be based in tolerance and follow positive values such as kindness rather than hatred. Offer children an opportunity to self-reflect and ask what they could do or say if someone claimed it was wrong to practise a religion?

Question 2p: Why do we only ever hear about Islamophobia and no other kinds of religious discrimination?

Suggested response:

Ask the pupils their thoughts. Explain that Islamophobia may be commonly talked about at the present moment in time because of current events in the news and so it may be more relevant to what is happening in the world or British society. This does not mean that Muslims are the only religious group who suffer discrimination as, sadly, religious discrimination comes in many forms. Explain or ask pupils about the fact that, during World War 2, we would have perhaps heard more about Anti-Semitism because of Jewish persecution going on at that time across Europe.

Question 2q: What is an illegal immigrant?

Suggested response:

Recap the term “immigrant” as being a person who moves from one country to another and ask the pupils for the reasons someone might be an immigrant. Clarify that some people may choose to legally migrate for economic or family reasons, or some may seek refuge to escape difficulties like conflict or natural disaster. Explain that, sometimes, a person may try to enter a country without the correct or full documentation and so they may be described as an illegal immigrant.

Question 2r: What if a person is genuinely angry about their dad not getting a job?

Suggested response:

Explain that anger is a natural and valid response when something seems unfair/unjust. However, explain that there are more productive ways of channelling negative feelings and turning them into something positive. Explain that people are justified in feeling upset or angry about a situation but it is important to remember that it is not possible for someone to steal another person’s job. Ask- is violence a positive way of dealing with anger or can you think of other ways to help your dad perhaps?

Potential questions or comments during plenary:

Question 2s: Should I ever retaliate if I am being verbally or physically harassed because of part of my identity?

Suggested response:

Ask pupils what the outcome may be if someone were to retaliate. Discuss ideas around an individual putting themselves in danger, putting themselves at risk of being in trouble with the law, creating further aggression and not resolving the situation in future. Ask pupils what the best course of action would be and discuss.

Workshop 3- Online Resilience

Question 3a: What if one of my friends is being bullied online or is upset at something online?

Suggested response:

Explain to pupils that it is important that they reassure their peers if they are anxious but it is important to still share the issue with a trusted adult in case their friend becomes more upset or puts themselves in danger.

Question 3b: What if I have no evidence of someone using hateful or offensive language towards me?

Suggested response:

Pose the question back to pupils. Discuss taking note of usernames or any details they can remember about the individual and when/where they came across this. If it is a case of there being no written evidence (i.e. verbal threats/aggression via video or headset chats), encourage pupils to block the user instantly and not to retaliate. Stress the importance of pupils reporting any troubling material or interactions online to a trusted adult who can help look after them and take further action if necessary.

Question 3c: What if I come across something which is upsetting or confusing on an older sibling or relative's device?

Suggested response:

Explain to pupils that it is still important that they share this information with a trusted adult, even if they are worried that their sibling or relative may be upset with them for doing so. Reiterate that not only is it important to share worries for their own wellbeing but also to help prevent others from putting themselves at risk.