

RESPONDING TO ACTS OF HATE...

Helping young people deal constructively and Biblically with expressions of hate toward those who believe differently to us.

When faced with the events in Christchurch on March 15th it's important that we as Christians help our young people to process and respond Biblically. This resource is designed to help. Read and reflect on it asking the Holy Spirit to guide you in how to best use it with the young people in your care.

Some General Suggestions

1. Do not ignore what has happened and conduct your programmes as though nothing has occurred. This is too important. Silence on your part may communicate a lack of care and compassion. You may not feel it's necessary to devote a whole programme to the topic but at very least you should pause and spend time in prayer together.
2. The event itself is horrific enough, but it also raises issues about loving people who are different from us – people who look different and have different beliefs. These are issues many of our young people face regularly at school and as such are worth discussing. Challenge them about what it means to love people who are different from them.
3. Get a sense of what questions are likely to be raised in young people's minds after the events of March 15th. How could God have allowed this to happen? What should our attitude be to people who don't believe what we believe? How can we on the one hand show love and understanding while on the other hand continue to affirm our beliefs are right and theirs are wrong? These are questions young people may be wondering about. Perhaps you could even ask them what questions they have and discuss together how you would answer these questions.
4. Our young people are all different and will be responding differently. Some will process what happened internally or in their families and will move on. Others will want to talk about it and how it affected them. Some of your young people may have clicked on the link that was circulating on social media and watched the video of the shooting unfold. I pray not, but if that's the case there may be a particular depth of trauma they are struggling with. Be sensitive to all these factors and offer the opportunity to talk individually or in small groups with you and your leaders if it's helpful.

Study Scripture Together

Here are some examples of Scripture passages you could read and talk about together.

1. Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42): Here we see Jesus interacting publicly with a woman different from Himself both ethnically and religiously. (Do some research on just how shocking and contrary to Jewish religious teaching this would have been). What do we learn from His words and the manner of His response?

2. Jesus and Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10): Jesus reaches out to a man who had effectively abandoned his Jewish convictions and joined with “the enemy” in order to serve his own selfish interests. As such he was hated and excluded by fellow Jews, but Jesus dealt with him quite differently.
3. Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16–34): Paul here witness the presence of idols to Greek gods and engages Greek philosophers in conversation. Note his approach. What can we learn from him?

In examining these verses discuss how we can hold steadfastly to what we believe to be true without hating those who differ from us. Use them as part of a wider discussion on tolerance and truth.

It might also be useful to read some psalms of lament together as a way of expressing grief. Help young people discuss what these psalms are saying and how they react to what they read. Psalms 10, 46, 57, 86 or 61 may be helpful places to start.

Understand other religions

Some may find it objectionable to look at Islam and other beliefs at youth group. However, via the internet our young people are able to research these for themselves and won't necessarily come to correct conclusions. There are plenty of voices that tell them “all religions are the same”. Help them to see this is not the case in a way that doesn't judge or condemn other people. Understanding these differences should lead to a greater appreciation for what we believe and what God has done through Christ.

I encourage you to do your own research but here are some links to get you started:

- [A brief overview of what Muslims believe](#)
- [Understanding the differences between Christianity and other religions](#)
- [How Christians Should relate to Muslims \(and those of other religions\)](#)

Support young people

Here are some useful links with good advice for supporting young people hardest hit:

- The Parenting Place: [How to Talk to Your Kids About Trauma](#)
- Focus on the Family: [Understanding and Coping with Trauma](#)
- Parenthetical: [Talking About Terrorism and Mass Violence with Teens](#)

Positive Response

One of the most constructive ways for helping young people come to terms with a tragedy such as this and move on, is to help them find constructive ways to channel their response. Some may have attended public vigils. Perhaps your church or youth group could plan their own response that incorporates prayer and some expression of love and support for your local Muslim community.

The following link contains some useful ideas: [How to Support NZ's Muslim Communities](#). The following article gives some insight into how to comfort grieving Muslims: [Customs for Mourning in the Muslim Community](#).