



Islamic Speakers Bureau Tips for Teachers #2

Understanding Concerns and Problems of Students of Middle Eastern and Muslim Background During Times of Political Conflict

Some of your students of Middle Eastern or Muslim background may feel or exhibit the following feelings or symptoms due to current events involving regions of the Middle East and the Muslim world. Merely being aware of these feelings may help your interaction with these students and potentially guide your discussions on current events in the classroom. Not all students of Middle Eastern or Muslim backgrounds will exhibit these feelings, but if you sense that one of your students does, then we encourage you to please exhibit the appropriate sensitivity towards that student and to provide him/her with the best possible learning environment under the circumstances.

Symptoms to Watch for in Students of Middle Eastern or Muslim Background

1. Students may feel generally overwhelmed by current events. Many students of Middle Eastern and Muslim background feel personally embattled in schools when persons of their own background perpetrate acts of violence or cause harm to the United States.
2. Students may be afraid to come to school and their parents may be afraid to send them because of fear of teasing or harassment.
3. Students from recent or even second-generation immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries may come from a family where current events eclipse all other concerns when the child is at home. If bombing of foreign countries is in progress, many families attempt daily or very frequent phone calls to relatives at all hours of the night, causing some relief but often much anxiety.
4. Students may have relatives who died as a result of current wars or current events, and may have a hard time discussing their loss due to a fear of being connected with the "enemy." Choose appropriate words of comfort when consoling them.
5. Students may be suffering from social withdrawal, isolation, fear, depression and lack of sleep in reaction to current events.
6. Students are generally afraid of being different and may be very reluctant to express personal views on the situation. Other students may feel an obligation to engage every person in their class in discussion on the issue.
7. Students may be afraid that their teacher or principal may academically punish them academically for their views or simply due to their ethnic or religious background.
8. Students and parents of Middle Eastern and Muslim background often assume or expect that teachers, staff and administrators will treat them unfairly.
9. Students may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or degraded by statements or responses to current events by peers, teachers, and the school or government officials.
10. Students may think that their own feelings and views do not matter to peers, teachers, and school officials and may develop feelings of alienation because of current events.
11. Students may be afraid of physical violence against them from fellow students. Following these steps will hopefully ensure that this does not happen, and that if it does, the student will feel safe reporting the incident. Strict follow up and severe consequences will serve to assure other students that this is not acceptable behavior.

The Islamic Speakers Bureau is a program of ING, a nonprofit, educational organization founded in 1993 that promotes interreligious understanding, tolerance and harmony by increasing religious literacy. Through the Islamic Speakers Bureau program, more than 700 educational presentations about Islam and Muslims are delivered annually to schools, universities, law enforcement agencies, healthcare facilities, corporations and other institutions.

To schedule an educational presentation for your students, simply complete the online form at www.ing.org/speakers/request.asp or email ING at scheduler@ing.org. Please allow up to two weeks to schedule a presentation.

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