

9/11 MEMORIAL

Guidelines for Discussion about 9/11

Discussion about the events of 9/11 has the potential to inspire strong emotions and trigger intense memories for some students and educators. The challenge is complicated by the diversity of students, their respective ages, and their various associations with, and prior knowledge of, 9/11. For example, high school students may need opportunities to discuss their questions and concerns, while upper elementary and middle school students may have less knowledge of the basic facts and how 9/11 is relevant to their lives.

To Structure Classroom Conversations:

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE VARIOUS GOALS FOR ANY CLASSROOM DISCUSSION ABOUT 9/11:

- To acknowledge the anniversary of 9/11.
- To provide students an opportunity to discuss their memories of 9/11.
- To offer students a safe environment to ask questions about the events of 9/11.
- To help students recognize, articulate, and perhaps channel strong and complicated feelings that surround the anniversary of 9/11 into productive and meaningful actions.

PREPARE FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION.

- Be aware of your own reactions to the subject matter, and recognize any images and/or words that you find distressing or meaningful.
- Think about how you want to acknowledge your own memories and emotions in discussion with students.

CREATE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE EVENTS OF 9/11

- With students, define the scope of what happened on 9/11. Not every student will have clear memories of the event, and many will have basic factual questions.
- Our website, www.national911memorial.org, has information about the events of 9/11, including a brief film (9/11: Stories of Survival and Loss) that offers first-person testimony about the events of the day. In addition, there are features on the historical origins of the attacks and expert analysis of ongoing issues. Please visit our website to find downloadable timelines, webcasts, images and articles to support teaching about 9/11, in addition to recommended links to other 9/11 teaching resources.
- Be honest about what happened: nearly 3,000 people died - on the planes, at the Pentagon and at the World Trade Center in NYC; of the approximately 17,400 people who were in the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, approximately 15,000 people evacuated safely; there are signs everywhere of safety measures and emergency planning procedures that were put in place after the events of 9/11.

BE PREPARED TO LISTEN TO STUDENTS AND LET THEM ASK QUESTIONS

- Young adults appreciate the opportunity to talk about their feelings and concerns. They welcome respectful discussion about serious topics, and value the thoughtful perspectives of adults and peers.
- Reactions among students may vary from no evident response to intense emotion. Use simple discussion prompts to initiate conversation: What do you remember of the days surrounding September 11, 2001? What are your thoughts about the events of September 11, 2001? Why do you think people choose to honor this day?
- Some students may simply welcome the opportunity for discussion prompted by the stories on the film or in the news; in other classrooms, this may be the beginning of further units of inquiry and/or classroom activity.

- While some groups may respond with spontaneous conversation, others may prefer to engage through writing, drawing or other activities.

BE AWARE THAT STUDENTS WHO HAVE A HISTORY OF TRAUMA ARE MOST VULNERABLE.

- Students who witnessed the events of 9/11 firsthand, who were close to a victim or a survivor of the attacks, who have a parent or family member in the military, whose daily routines were disrupted, or who have a history of violence or abuse may experience extreme emotions around the anniversary or as a result of discussion.
- While reactions among students may vary, pronounced aggression, indifference, or withdrawal may indicate that a student is feeling overwhelmed.
- Students need reassurance and support. They may need time to compose themselves and they may need teachers and peers to reinforce their sense of being in a safe environment for strong emotions.
- Erratic behavior, energy level and school performance are often associated with adolescents, but extreme behavior that persists beyond a week may indicate acute distress. If this is this case, contact both the school counselor and the child's parent or guardian to ensure that the student is further assessed.