

Bias crimes

Offense: Assault, battery, or other forms of harassment, based on the other person's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or physical or mental disabilities

Usually thrill seekers who want to belong, not extremists

Contrary to popular belief, most hate crimes are not committed by hardened extremists. Rather, a surprisingly large number are youthful thrill seekers. Often, the perpetrators hope their acts of violence will earn them respect from their friends - a feeling that explains why so many hate crimes are committed by gangs of young men. Being unsure about oneself and needing desperately to belong to a powerful group are factors in both hate crimes and gang membership.

Some "reactive" offenders

The second most common perpetrator of hate crimes is the "reactive offender" who feels that he or she is responding to an attack by a group the the victim is a member of. It may be a perceived insult, being overlooked for a job, interracial dating, or the integration of a neighborhood. Often, the "reactive offenders" imagine that the very existence of lesbians and gay men - or having to compete with women on the job - is an assault upon their values or their own identity. The least common offender is the hard core ideologue.

Lack empathy

If teens are surrounded by a community filled with prejudice toward particular groups and if they have no personal experience of people different from themselves, they may be unable to empathize with potential victims. They may see them as objects, stereotypes, not as human beings. Thus a key goal in intervention with bias offenders is to develop empathy and strengthen or establish their connection with the wider community. The best way to prevent hate crimes is to prevent prejudice and to promote respect for all of the similarities and differences among people.

Restorative justice

Once a bias offense has been committed, restorative justice requires both taking responsibility to make things right, including repairing damage, and re-connecting the offender with the community, usually through an apology.

Goals of intervention

Youth will:

- Examine and understand their own life experiences and action
- Build skills in managing feelings and controlling impulses
- Develop greater appreciation for the experience of others
- Make things right
- Re-connect to a caring community, or begin connection to community

A suggested scope and sequence

SKILL TOPICS

Identifying with others

Perspective taking
Appreciating diversity

Getting respect

Resisting peer pressure

Knowing yourself

Finding power
Identifying strengths

Controlling impulses

Stop reactions
Predict consequences

Managing feelings

Physical sensations
Internal triggers
Outside triggers
Letting go

Re-connecting with others

Restorative justice
Taking responsibility
Apologizing

CHALLENGE TOPICS

Anger
Bias incidents
Blurting out
Bullying
Depression
Discrimination
Ethnic slurs
Gay bashing
Hitting
Prejudice
Racial conflict
Religious offense
Sexual harassment