

How should we deal with the range of different opinions in today's world?

INTRODUCTION

Today's young people are growing up in a world where they will regularly come into contact with people who disagree whole-heartedly with them about some of the most fundamental ultimate questions. From questions about the age of the earth, to the nature and purpose of morality, differences of opinion are rife. This one-off session is designed to get students to consider the best way to deal with these disagreements by offering them a range of possible alternatives.

Explain that today's session will be built around the idea that there are lots of people who believe that they are right and that other people are wrong. Lots of contemporary students really struggle to get their heads around this so it is worth showing them two videos featuring men who fundamentally believe it is their duty to tell the world that they are right and other people are wrong.

ACTIVITY

Firstly, play the first ten minutes of the following video featuring the creationist Kent Hovind: www.youtube.com/watch?v=szBTI3S24MY

Highlight the fact that Kent Hovind stresses the fact that evolution is the 'dumbest religion of all time' and that his aim in the presentation is to convert people to Christianity or strengthen their faith if they are already Christians. Then, without discussing anything with the students immediately play from 21' 20" to 28' 50" of Richard Dawkins' programme 'The Root of All Evil' in which he argues with Pastor Ted Haggard, Chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals, about evolution: www.youtube.com/watch?v=20M9nO2p2ps

Once the students have watched this video ask them to respond to such questions as:

- *What is your immediate reaction to these two videos?*
- *Are you surprised that there are such opposing views?*

Once these discussions have come to an end really focus in on this question:

- *How do you think we should react when people like Richard Dawkins and Kent Hovind disagree so strongly?*

If this discussion hasn't already elicited the options below then explain

that there are a number of possible ways to react to these differences of opinion:

1. Try to persuade people like Dawkins and Hovind that they should stop trying to influence other people and adopt a 'live and let live' approach.
2. Choose the side that you think is true and go out into the world and promote the arguments of the person you agree with.
3. Ignore these sorts of people and just get on with your own life.

ACTIVITY

Ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of these three approaches?*
- *Are there times when one approach is best, and other times when a different strategy is needed?*
- *Why do you think that Dawkins and Hovind refuse to accept the 'live and let live' approach?*
- *Why do you think Dawkins and Hovind refuse to just 'get on with their own lives'?*

Really emphasise the fact that Dawkins and Hovind hate the idea of 'live and let live' because they are convinced that the other side in the debate is WRONG and that they are causing great damage. There is no room in either of their worldviews for accepting the views of people who are, in their view, just plain wrong. Instead they believe that these people need to be educated into accepting the truth, or at least that others need to be warned about the dangers of accepting the alternative view. Dawkins has even openly said that there needs to be 'less respect' in the modern world in that it is utterly wrong to respect the views of people who are outright wrong. However, he is quick to clarify that *people* need to be respected whereas their *views* do not.

ACTIVITY

Ask the students to imagine that there is a person going around gaining popularity by claiming that they, i.e., the students themselves, and the members of their family and their friends, are responsible for a lot of the evils in society. Then ask them to respond to such questions as:

- *What is the best way of dealing with people who tell lies about you and your family?*
- *What do you think of Dawkins' view that there should be 'less respect' in the modern world?*
- *Do you think it is possible to respect a person whilst disrespecting their beliefs?*

CONCLUSION

Ask the students to reflect on the following questions:

- *How do you intend to deal with people whose views you disagree with in the future?*
- *Has this session made you change your mind?*