

Educators Guide to Teach 9/11 with Compassion

Create safe classroom spaces

San Diego County is home to a diverse community that includes first responders and victims who may have directly experienced the terror attacks on 9/11 and their aftermath. Muslim Americans fall into both categories. With the 20th anniversary of 9/11 upon us, employees, families, and students may struggle to process the milestone. To create a safe space in the classroom and to work through this topic in a healthy and productive way, avoid singling out Muslim students and children of first responders or members of the military to “carry” this topic. By teaching 9/11 through a culturally responsive lens, teachers have an important opportunity to clarify misconceptions about their Muslim students and promote relationships, self-analysis, self-discovery, conscious decision-making, and respect for individual differences and across cultures.



Use accurate resources

School districts often provide educators with resources such as video clips and documentaries about 9/11 to share with their students. The content is often inaccurate, which makes Muslim students feel blindsided and attacked by what they watch. Consider using resources such as [AllSides](#), which curates news stories based on the article’s ideological position (left, right, center) and can help teachers and students develop media literacy, and [Origins](#), which provides current events through a balanced, historical context.



Use appropriate terminology

While discussing the 9/11 attacks, avoid terms such as “Islamic extremists” and “radical Islam.” Adding “Islamic” implies that there is something inherently Islamic about terrorism or extremism. Instead, it is more appropriate to refer to al-Qaida as a terrorist organization.

Describe many faces of terrorism

When explaining terrorism, educators are advised to include examples, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 and the killing of Black worshippers in Charleston in 2015, each of which involved the murder of innocent civilians to further a political agenda. Providing examples makes it clear that perpetrators of terrorism are not confined to any one race or religion.



Muslims as victims and first responders

It is also recommended for educators to include names of Muslim Americans as victims and first responders. Mohammad S. Chowdhury, a waiter at Windows on the World restaurant on the top floor on the World Trade Center’s North Tower, died in the 9/11 attacks. Mohammad Salman Hamdani, who died while helping the victims, was part of New York Police Department’s cadet program, in addition to working at Rockefeller University as a lab researcher. On his way to work, he saw the flames at the World Trade Center and rushed downtown to try to help using his police identification to get a ride through the restricted traffic.

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