

# Tolerance Toolkit

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## Q1: WHAT ARE CONCEPTS?

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Concepts are the mental or cognitive tools we use to classify and order our experiences in and of the world. At a basic level, having a concept means being able to recognise something and distinguish and/or compare this concept with other things.

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Concepts are abstract ideas. They are not straightforward and cannot simply be answered like a fact. For example, one may think that: “A person who objects to anyone expressing an opinion about racial difference is intolerant.” To examine this claim we need to first look at what counts as **tolerance**. We are then able to evaluate our claim in the light of our understanding of the concept of **tolerance**.

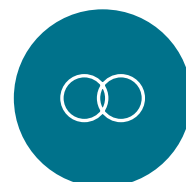
Concepts are abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – with sufficiently large brains. But some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child deriving the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience, together with appropriate reinforcement from someone already familiar with this concept. This is, in part, a process of trial and error – excluding other four-legged creatures that for example, miaow instead of bark. Still, this concept is an abstraction - I can pat my dog but I cannot pat – i.e. interact physically with – my concept or idea of a dog.

Other concepts – including those, like good, bad, right(s), wrong, responsibility, freedom, justice, that are central in the field of Ethics – are more abstract still, in that it is more difficult to describe or imagine precisely what kinds of items in the world fall under them.

There are two different points to notice here. First, even if there were complete agreement as to what such concepts mean, the words which stand for them function more like adjectives or adverbs than nouns. I can observe, hear, pat, play with and smell cats and dogs, but – so it seems – I can only observe, witness or perform actions – or, perhaps, people – that are good, bad, responsible, free, etc.

Secondly – and this point is acknowledged in the Ethical Capability Framework – there rarely is complete agreement as to what such concepts mean. What counts as right or wrong, or free or just is often quite contestable or controversial, both in general terms – precisely what the words “right”, “wrong” and “free” mean – and in specific instances – whether or not a particular action or person, state, regime, etc. is actually right, good or free. Trying to be clear about what certain terms or concepts actually mean is a key part of thinking and inquiry in ethics.

Concepts related to the philosophical branch of Ethics promote deep questioning and lead to contestable answers. Philosophical concepts such as fairness, equality and respect can overlap with topics in most general subject areas. Therefore, it is easy to see how one can add a philosophical dimension to every unit of work. By discussing such concepts, students will learn to become autonomous thinkers, while also applying their subject knowledge to their own personal existences and the world around them.



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## Q2: WHAT ARE BIG IDEAS

Philosophical concepts, which we call Big Ideas, are distinguished by having the following three characteristics:

1. **Common:** The concept is shared by everybody. It is a word commonly used by students (depending on their age), however they might not be very clear about what such concepts really *mean* or signify; and even if they are clear, others might well disagree (because these concepts are contestable)
2. **Contestable:** The concept will arouse argument and disagreements. Students may hold different understandings of what the concept means, and how it can be used in varied situations. This is how some concepts can rely on necessary conditions.
3. **Central:** The concept is important to use in how we live our lives and understand the world around us. In an ethical context, concepts like person and human being are very important, as are many others such as *right, justice, duty, happiness....*

### HOW DO I SCAFFOLD STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING OF CONTESTABILITY?

**A:** Concepts can be difficult to understand as they are mental tools and can sometimes be understood in different ways in different situations. Sometimes, that makes it tricky to agree to a standard meaning to any one concept. Let us consider the concept of fish. We all know what a fish is and what a fish is not. We know that the word fish is a noun and therefore denotes a thing. Therefore, a simple concept like 'fish' is easy to understand and communicate to others. But, let us consider an important concept that is more abstract like **tolerance**. **Tolerance** is an abstract noun, therefore it is not a thing, it is an abstract idea. As part of a critical investigation, we first ask these three questions to identify if a concept is indeed an important concept.

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. Is the concept used in our common day-to-day communication? | Yes/No |
| 2. Does the concept play an important role in our lives?       | Yes/No |
| 3. Is the concept contestable? Can its meaning be debated?     | Yes/No |

If you have answered 'Yes' to all three questions, the concept is an important one and there is an opportunity to investigate the complexity of the concept. Let us test the concept of **tolerance** against the above criteria questions. **Tolerance** is used in our common day-to-day conversations, and it plays an important role in our lives, and it can have different meanings to different people in different situations. Therefore, **tolerance** is an important concept and there is an opportunity to investigate its implications to our lived experiences and the way we use it to communicate to others. Remember, people are very complex and how we communicate with each other is very complex. We cannot assume everyone understands or experiences **tolerance** in the same way. However, the concept of fish is used in our common day to day conversations, and it may or may not play an important role in our lives, but the concept of fish is not debatable. We do not argue over the understanding of what the word fish means. Therefore, the concept of fish is not an important philosophical concept, but **tolerance** is an important philosophical concept. That is why we think **tolerance** is a **Big Idea**.



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## Q3: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THESE CONCEPTS?

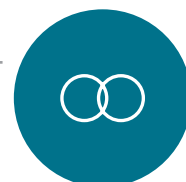
### HOW IS TOLERANCE A CONTESTABLE CONCEPT?

In general terms, to be tolerant is to “put up with”, endure or accept a situation or individual when there is something about it/him/her which we find objectionable or unlikeable. Tolerance is not necessarily a conscious attribute, as when someone with a high tolerance to pain can put up with a considerable amount of it before it becomes unbearable. But from an ethical perspective, tolerance is a type of judgement: a decision to accept what many would find unacceptable. Tolerance has been defined in positive terms as “harmony in difference” or even as “the virtue that makes peace possible”. In this sense, tolerance is seen as a moral good in much the same way as patience is: faced with something or someone that others cannot bear or accept, a tolerant person chooses acceptance over reacting angrily or violently. Along similar lines, a tolerant society is one which accepts – and, presumably, includes – a broad range of views, habits and life-styles even while recognizing that some (perhaps many) of its members do not agree with or endorse them.

Even if the idea of tolerance is reasonably clear, its importance as a constructive moral concept can be contested. At best, it suggests an attitude of reluctance or grudging acceptance of something or someone that we would prefer to do without. Someone who tolerates loud music, a messy house-mate, or neighbours of a certain ethnicity may well have strong negative feelings toward those individuals or practices, but they somehow manage to put up with them. What makes this puzzling from an ethical perspective is that it can involve feelings, attitudes or beliefs which might well be described as “unethical” (“I really don’t like those type of people in the neighbourhood!”), but such feelings fall short of provoking the kind of behaviour that might, in turn, be described as unethical. From a strictly logical point of view, this might seem inconsistent or dishonest, because it reveals a clash between what we might wish to do, based on our feelings, and what we actually do. However, this is too simplistic a view of what makes someone an ethical or moral person. Perhaps in an ideal world, true acceptance should be “heart-felt” as well as reflected in our behaviour: as long as what others do does not actually cause me harm, I should allow my respect for them to override my negative feelings. But as human persons, we naturally have a range of feelings and emotional responses to what and whom we encounter during the course of our lives. What matters, ethically speaking, is how we behave in response to them. Student responses to this admittedly complex issue can help to determine whether or not tolerance is a form of virtue (good character).

In between what we think or feel on the one hand, and what we actually do on the other, is what we say. Unless someone is being dishonest or insincere, the issue raised in the previous paragraph can be the subject of an interesting dialogue among students. In particular, they could evaluate the ethical differences between: acting out their negative feelings toward something or someone; putting up with (tolerating) that which they find distasteful, even disgusting; and working on changing their attitudes and feelings. Along the way, they can discuss whether or not even expressing negative views is, itself, a form of intolerant behaviour.

It has been argued that the principle of tolerance is *self-contradictory* because it has no limits: to be tolerant is to be tolerant of *everything*, including intolerance itself! If I am a consistently tolerant person, I must tolerate even your intolerance, which seems absurd or, at least, self-destructive, since I cannot expect that you will, in turn, tolerate me. In practical terms, therefore, too much tolerance can destroy the world because it has no way of stopping those who are truly intolerant.



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## Q4: WHAT ARE CONCEPT GAMES, AND HOW DO WE PLAY THEM?

Although each concept game will deal with a different concept, there is a standard process you can use for them all.

### 1. CONTESTED CONCEPT

Decide on your contested concept, For example: **Tolerance**

### 2. SET-UP

Set up the room so you have an area on the floor with a label indicating what each area represents. Often A4 cards are made with the category title. You can also use a hoola hoop to place the cards in.

For example:



The students should sit in a circle around the categories. It is important that every student can see each person in the group, as well as the three categories.

### 3. PROCEDURE

#### Part 1:

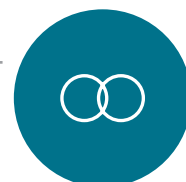
Begin by getting the students to write a **DEFINITION** of the contested concept.

By thinking about a definition of a term, the students will have to consider a range of scenarios that relate to that concept. Often they will find it challenging to write a definition that fits with every scenario.

- In small groups or individuals, students write down their definition of the concept
- As a class read out each definition and begin to write a **CRITERIA LIST** for that term
- If there are points in your criteria list that clash with one another, discuss to come to a resolution
- It is quite normal for your definition to change and evolve throughout the course of a lesson

#### Part 2:

- Get the students to return to their groups
- Each group is given a set of **EXAMPLES**. These may be words, pictures or scenarios.
- Students examine the examples one at a time, and decide which hoop they will place each example.
- An example cannot be placed without students identifying the **REASONS** they are placing it there.
- Nominate a scribe to keep a running list of these reasons.



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## Part 3:

- As a class come together go through each example
- Discuss any examples that are contested
- It is useful to write the students ideas on the board. This is important to give them a sense of purpose and progress
- While you are organising the reasons:
  - Eliminate repetitions
  - Identify contradictions
  - Seek out any necessary conditions (if appropriate)

## Part 4:

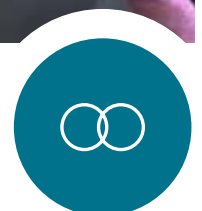
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss come to a final definition

## Part 5:

- Always leave time at the end of your lesson for **REFLECTION**
- Students can reflect on what they have learned, clarified or discovered so far
- They can also reflect on their own thinking and contribution to the class

## Tips:

- Always ensure the students give reasons for their choices.
- Challenge the students to think of counter-examples that could show how an idea is incorrect.
- Try to combine multiple ideas into one unified concept, or show there are several different concepts in play.
- Write down student questions on the board. This provides a starting board for your next lesson.



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**Q5:** WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

**TOLERANCE**

**?**

**NOT  
TOLERANCE**

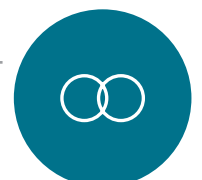


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## WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME: SET 1

<b>Spinach</b>	<b>Bacteria</b>
<b>A boring teacher</b>	<b>A person's bad dress sense</b>
<b>Singing out of tune</b>	<b>Visiting the dentist</b>
<b>Pain</b>	<b>Temperature</b>
<b>Bad habits</b>	<b>Different thoughts to your own</b>
<b>Different cultures to your own</b>	<b>A person you dislike</b>
<b>Rudeness</b>	<b>Bad behaviour</b>
<b>Stealing</b>	<b>Lying</b>



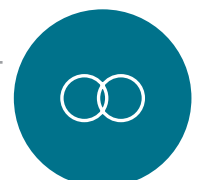


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## WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME: SET 2

<b>Acceptance</b>	<b>Rejection</b>
<b>Patient towards</b>	<b>Impatient towards</b>
<b>Approving</b>	<b>Disapproving</b>
<b>Open-minded</b>	<b>Close-minded</b>
<b>Sympathy</b>	<b>Unsympathetic</b>
<b>Like</b>	<b>Dislike</b>
<b>Love</b>	<b>Hate</b>
<b>Disgust</b>	<b>Revulsion</b>
<b>Aversion</b>	<b>Understanding</b>



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## WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

The members of government coexist even though many individuals have different ideas related to the best way to run the country.

When studying abroad, foreign students must adapt to the culture and norms of the country they are in, even if they conflict with their own.

You dislike people with tattoos.

I am too scared to talk to people who are older than me.

While some women use pain medication when giving birth, others choose to deliver their babies naturally.

In some countries a person from one religion may not be allowed enter a country that believes in another religion.

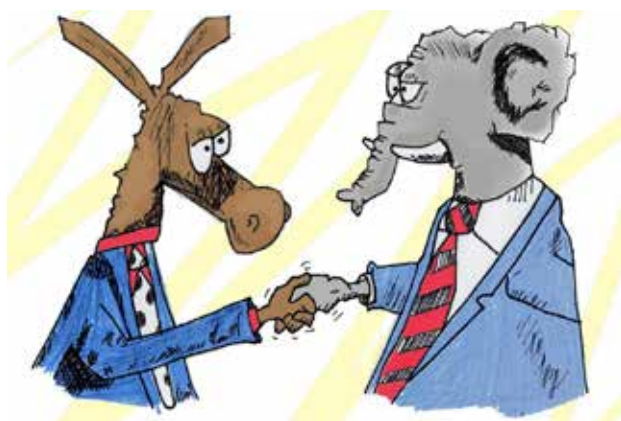
During the Stolen Generation, Indigenous Australian children were forced to convert to Christianity.

After forgetting to bring their homework to school for three days in a row, the teacher gave the student a detention.



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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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## Q5: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS AND HOW DO I USE THEM?

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When conducting discussion, it is useful to have prepared some questions in advance. Discussion plans will help provide direction and structure in discussion. They may also be used to direct the students' attention to a particular aspect of the topic being examined.

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Discussion plans can be sequential – that is, each question builds upon the previous question, or non-sequential, where the questions devised could be asked in any order. The latter plan allows for you to explore the topic from different angles.

Questions asked should reflect the shift from more “concrete” to more “abstract” thinking in relation to the concept of fairness. In thinking about concepts and their meanings, students are encouraged to offer their own thoughts and opinions in response to questions or comments made by others. However, discussion is transformed into inquiry when and only when participants engage in such procedures as:

- Providing reasons and/or evidence (including examples and counter-examples) for their views;
- Building on one another's ideas in the interest of developing a deeper understanding of the issues;
- Balancing a sense of passion for or commitment to their own ideas with an open-mindedness that allows them to rethink issues and change their minds when it is appropriate to do so;
- Showing a commitment to getting to the truth of things while being aware of questions and issues that remain unresolved.

When conducting a philosophical discussion, the teacher should be seen as a facilitator of thinking, rather than the source and evaluator of knowledge. One of the teacher's key roles in guiding discussion and inquiry is to encourage all students to participate without fear of being judged. Teachers should model and encourage the sense that good thinking matters whereas sloppy or careless thinking is to be avoided where possible. Rather than focusing on the “correct” answers, the teacher should place their attention on the students' thinking.

The point of working as a community of inquiry is to develop an understanding that the ups and downs that will inevitably occur over time (a breakthrough “Aha!” moment, or a discouraging dead-end, for example) are owned by the community as a whole – and, thereby, by each and every member – and not simply by individuals who have no connection with one another.



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## DISCUSSION PLAN FOR TOLERANCE

### DISCUSSION PLAN 1: "TOLERANCE"

#### What are your limits?

1. You can eat all kinds of food, so long as it tastes good!  
Should you reduce your tolerance for food types?
2. You can only eat very special meals. Should you build up your tolerance for food types?
3. You rarely get sick, not even a cold. Should you reduce your tolerance for bacteria?
4. You have lots of allergies (??). Should you build up your tolerance for bacteria?
5. You are happy when Mum returns from the hair dresser with the same hair do she always has.  
Should you build up your tolerance for change?
6. You are happy when your Mum gets a punk haircut.  
Should you reduce your tolerance for change?
7. You forgive your neighbor for not returning your book.  
Should you reduce your tolerance of those who neglect you?
8. You snub your neighbor for not returning your book.  
Should you build up your tolerance of those who neglect you?
9. You forgive your friend even if she lies to you.  
Should you reduce your tolerance for being deceived?
10. You would never forgive your friend for lying to you.  
Should you build up your tolerance for deception?
11. You forgive the government for not looking after the refugees.  
Should you reduce your tolerance for human rights abuses?
12. You protest against the government for not talking care of the refugees.  
Should you build up your tolerance for human rights abuses?



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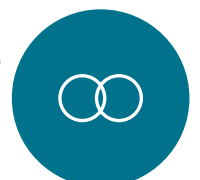
## DISCUSSION PLAN 2: "TOLERANCE"

1. You dislike people with a tattoos
2. You are disgusted when you see people without teeth
3. People who talk loudly make you angry
4. People who swear
5. People who lie disgust you
6. A friend who lies to you
7. A person who speaks in a foreign language
8. A person you do not understand when they talk to you.

## DISCUSSION PLAN 3: "TOLERANCE"

### What are your limits of friendship?

1. Your friend gets a tattoo
2. Your friend lies to you
3. Your friend is smelly
4. Your friend steals from the school
5. Your friend steals from you
6. Your friends wakes you up regularly with late night texts.



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## Q6: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

### LINKS AND RESOURCES:

**Chrysanthemum** by Kevin Henkes

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/Chrysanthemum>

**The Crayon Box That Talked** by Zuha Shaikh

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/TheCrayonBoxThatTalked>

**Who Is the Beast?** By Keith Baker

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy>

### IAPC RESOURCE

Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. (1977). *Ethical inquiry Instructional Manual to Accompany LISA*. 2nd ed. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, Montclair State College  
ISBN-13: 978-0916834210

Lisa, a classmate of Harry Stottlemeier, experiences a range of physical, aesthetic and ethical awakenings as she puzzles over issues of animal rights, sexism, racism, justice, divorce and death with her classmates. As Lisa and her friends begin to recognize the ethical dimensions of their experience, they delve into the philosophical concepts as the right, the fair, the good, perfection, and naturalism. Lisa's struggles with identity and thinking for oneself leads her to recognize her interdependence with others and with nature. This novel explores the complexity of ethical concerns and the multiple capacities involved in making sound ethical judgments.

Grade Range: 7-12. Target Grades: 7-8



Leading Idea No. 11: Living with others and living with ourselves.....	P 218
Exercise: Sexist words .....	P 313
Leading Idea No. 2: Intergenerational communication, Discussion Plan: Improving intergenerational communications.....	P 228
Exercise: Intergenerational communication .....	P 229

