



## How Do We Define 'Respect'?

In this discussion, we will encourage students to question how they are using the word respect when they say things like "I want to be respected as an LGBTQ person."

When people demand respect, they often mean different things. There is a great deal of room for miscommunication, disappointment, and anger if people work with different understandings of what the word respect truly means. Through this discussion, we aim to help students gain clarity in their understanding and usage of the word respect.

Below you will find a list of sentences that all use the word respect in different ways. Ask students to consider the following questions in relation to each individual sentence.

Ask students to read the following sentences and reflect on the different meanings of respect that they present. After each sentence ask students to discuss how the word respect is being used in the sentence and whether that is the kind of 'respect' they want from other regarding their sexual orientation. Ask your gay straight alliance: **Is this person showing respect? Why or why not?**

- I respect your decision to home-school your child, but I would not have made the same choice.
- I respect your legal right to get a divorce, but I do not think you are doing what is morally right.
- I respect President Obama's intelligence, but I disagree with his healthcare initiative.
- I respect Ernest Hemingway's talent as a writer, but I do not like his books.
- I respect that you are gay because I know it is not your fault—you can't help being that way.
- Given the information you had, I respect the decision you made. I believe if you had had the correct information, however, that you would have made a different decision.
- I can respect your point of view, but let's just agree to disagree. I don't really want to talk about this.
- I respect Patti Smith because she is a true, authentic artist, something I aspire to be.
- I respect the law by following it at all times.

### Debrief:

End this exercise by asking students to define respect. This may be done in small groups or as a large group exercise. Ask: When we say we want respect for the LGBTQ community, what does that mean?

Share with students the list below of various definitions of the word respect. Ask them which comes closest to what they mean when they say they want to be respected for who they are as an LGBTQ person. Ask them what the implications of utilizing that particular definition of respect might be.

### Definitions of Respect:

- Respect: Esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or ability, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or ability.
  - **Do people have to admire someone or appreciate their ideas, abilities, etc. in order to show them respect?**
  - **As members of the LGBTQ community, should we demand that our identities be celebrated as excellent? Is that asking too much or not enough?**
- Respect: Deference to a right, privilege, privileged position, or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges.
  - **Do people have to believe someone deserves certain rights or privileges in order to show respect?**
  - **As LGBTQ people, should we demand that we be recognized as having certain rights? Is that asking too much or not enough?**
- Respect: Proper acceptance or courtesy
  - **Do people have to be polite to someone in order to show respect?**
  - **As LGBTQ people, should we demand that people be polite to us? Is that asking too much or not enough?**

If we are going to ask that the world respect us as LGBTQ people, it is important to have a strong, working understanding of what kind of respect we are asking for. It is important for us to be patient with people as they try to grow in their respect for the LGBTQ community. A culture in which everyone is respected will not come quickly or easily; it is something that must be patiently worked towards. During Respect For All Week, let us also try to respect that it is hard to let go of old behaviors or beliefs and acknowledge the work people are doing to change their own minds and hearts.