

We Dine Together

High school students lead movement of solidarity

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. If you choose 2 sessions you can use the discussion questions, journal writing and extended activities designated by session (A) and session (B). Instructors should feel free to use whichever activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- appreciate the scope of the problem of social isolation among students and what this isolation means for individual students
- develop a sense of empathy and compassion for those who suffer from social isolation
- realize their individual responsibility to reach out to others who are socially isolated by spending time with them and establishing a true sense of solidarity
- realize that they can successfully address problems like social isolation through caring, taking initiative and being creative and wise as modeled by the We Dine Together program

Primary Virtues

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Solidarity: being present with others; unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; mutual support and loyalty within a group

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Secondary Virtues

Responsibility: accepting and meeting the demands of our duty in life – in this case caring about the well-being of our fellow students, being accountable, pursuing excellence

Respect for Others: showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by "the golden rule": do unto others as you would want done unto you

Leader Introduction

At its best, school is a place where we learn and grow in many different areas of our lives, and where we connect with friends through school projects, clubs, sports and even during simple activities like having lunch. However for too many students, school is a place where they feel ignored, purposefully left out, and even bullied. According to the US government survey* of high school students throughout America, 20% of school students reported being bullied in the past year and 30% reported feeling sad or hopeless every day for at least two weeks. Instead of accepting this sad reality a group of students has decided to change it through a very simple yet powerful program.

* From the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System published by the US Department of Human Services

Film Clip:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/videos/at-one-high-school-no-one-eats-lunch-alone/>

Leader Summary

Dennis' decision to reach out to those who feel isolated started with his own personal experience, but we can see how fueled by his strong sense of empathy and compassion for others he has now built a student led movement of solidarity. Let's talk about how Dennis' story speaks to us and our own school community.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion let's read over the virtues and their definitions *(included within the online lesson as a separate document)*.

1. What experience in Dennis' life prompted him to reach out to students who are isolated within his own school community? (Dennis immigrated to the United States from Haiti. When he began school, he felt different, isolated and alone.) (A)
2. One student in the video clip commented that lunch was sometimes the "hardest part of the school day". What did she mean by this comment? (Lunch is a time for socializing with friends and feeling that you belong; you are cared for as a person and feel accepted by your peers. If you have no one with whom to share lunch, it can be very lonely.) (A)
3. In the video Dennis stated, "If we don't try to go make that change then who's going to do it." What virtue is Dennis living out in this statement and especially through his actions? (responsibility in taking it upon himself to make the change.) (A)
4. Why do you think Dennis was able to attract so many classmates to join him in his effort to bring about a more inclusive school community, and what virtues are these other volunteers living out? (Possibly most of us have felt at one time or another that we were not accepted in a group, so many volunteers likely feel a true sense of empathy for students who are isolated, as well as the desire, the compassion, to help others in this situation.) (A)

5. The former football player who stopped playing to spend more time with We Dine Together said he did it because “This is what I really want to do.” Why do you think this student found more satisfaction from being a volunteer in We Dine Together than playing a sport? (possibly helping others gives him a greater sense of satisfaction)

What virtue does this student live out in making his decision? (wisdom in assessing from his own experience what is effective, good, and lasting) (B)

6. In the video, how did Dennis approach and speak with the student who was alone? (Dennis was casual and not demanding in his approach, saying, “I will be around tomorrow if you want to have lunch with me.”)

What is attractive and wise about this approach? (Dennis demonstrated he cared for his fellow student, while also respecting his right to make his own decisions. Sometimes we can make the well-intended mistake of trying to force students to participate instead of allowing them to make the decision.) (B)

7. Why do you think student/peer leadership is often more effective in developing an inclusive, caring environment in a school community, than only a teacher or adult led program? (Students are often more responsive to their peers as they feel more comfortable with individuals their own age. They may also feel the invitation to be more sincere if it comes from a classmate). (B)

8. What can we do in our own school community to reach out to students who may feel isolated or invisible? Can we launch a program similar to We Dine Together as well as other strategies you can think of? (B)

Journal Writing Options

1. Has there been a time when you have felt invisible in your school community?

Reflect on how you felt in that situation. (A)

2. Write about how you have approached students who are socially isolated, and how you want in the future to now approach and to engage these students. (A)

3. Sometimes we are not intentionally ignoring students who are alone. We just do not “see” them. Write about what you can do to become better in noticing and reaching out to those who are hurting. (B)

4. Reflect on the statement “small acts of kindness can be life changing, one person can make a difference.” What acts of caring and kindness can you contribute to your school community? How can you make a difference? (B)

Extended Activity Options

1. Divide your group into teams and ask each team to come up with an idea for a club in your school that will focus on reaching out to those who are alone. Have each team present its idea to the group, and then as a group discuss what idea / combination of ideas would work best in your school, and can actually be launched as a club.

2. Encourage students to take individual responsibility for ending social isolation within your school. Students can begin by speaking to their friends about this problem, noticing who is not a part of the group and then inviting them to join them at lunch or after school activities.
3. Ask students to take the pledge of “Beyond Differences”: “ I will not exclude others, I will reach out to someone new, and I will start tomorrow.”
4. Encourage students to read the book “Wonder” or see the movie.
5. Ask students to search for positive examples of inclusion and to then present them to the group at your next session. Each story should include a discussion of at least two virtues that the person/s lived out in striving to include others.

Resources

Organizations focused on alleviating the effects of social isolation

1. We Dine Together <https://www.wedinetgether.org/>
2. No One Eats Alone – national day Feb. 9, 2018 – <https://www.nooneeatsalone.org/>
3. Call It Out – national day April 27, 2018 (end social isolation) <https://www.callitoutday.org/>
4. Know Your Classmate – usually have a national day in Oct. but not set yet for 2018
5. Beyond Differences <https://www.beyonddifferences.org/>

Character Action Media

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www.characteractionmedia.com

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