Rationale

A stereotype is a general, fixed notion about a person, a group, or an idea. Stereotyping is a form of labeling something or someone, of blurring or ignoring individual characteristics and assuming that all members of a group are alike. We may give people either negative or positive labels, based on the groups to which we think they belong. Negative stereotyping often leads to avoidance and conflict. Positive stereotyping can lead to unfair expectations and disappointment. Negative or positive stereotyping can keep us from getting to know each other as individuals and interfere with our relationships.

Guidelines

Often we do not even realize that we are reacting to someone based on a stereotype. Using the following guidelines will help us recognize—and avoid—stereotyping.

✔ Think carefully about the characteristics you or someone else attribute to a person, a group, or an idea. Ask yourself if a whole group is being judged by what just a few members do or say.

✔ Remind yourself that each person is a unique individual who might not share any of the positive or negative characteristics sometimes attributed to his or her “group.”

✔ Be alert to “red flags” that often signal stereotyping—words like all, none, every, always, never that usually are used to exaggerate or generalize and words like dumb, lazy, cruel, sneaky, corrupt that stir the emotions when applied to a group or a member of a group.

✔ Be aware of consistent use of a positive or negative tone to refer to a person, group, or idea.

Applications Options

TEACH

TEACH ACTIVITY, OPTION 1

What Is Stereotyping?

Distribute 4.1 Stereotyping: What It Is and How to Recognize It

Go over it with the students. Ask students to suggest examples of stereotypes. Then discuss the following questions:

• In what ways can stereotyping people lead to misconceptions?
• How can stereotyping lead to conflict?
• How can stereotyping affect people’s lives?
• How can stereotyping keep us from benefiting from what they have to offer?
• What are some ways we can avoid stereotyping or labeling people?

TEACH ACTIVITY, OPTION 2

Guess My Label

Write each of these phrases on a separate headband: Listen to Me, Ignore Me, Criticize Me, Agree with Me, Praise Me, Interrupt Me. (As an alternative, write the labels on index cards and tape them to hats that students wear.) Ask six volunteers to sit in the center of the room and tape a headband on each. Do not let the volunteers read their own headbands, and ask the rest of the students not to tell the volunteers what their headbands say. Tell the volunteers they have 10 minutes to decide how to spend $3,000 to improve the community. During the discussion, the volunteers are to react to each other based on the headbands. Ask the class to watch for ways the headband labels influence the team’s interactions.

After the group discussion and before the volunteers read their headbands, ask each volunteer to explain whether he or she felt his or her opinions were valued during this discussion. Then have the volunteers guess what is written on their headbands. After all the volunteers are aware of what was written on their headbands, discuss the following questions with the entire class:

• How did group members with negative headband labels respond after others criticized, ignored, or interrupted them?
Recognizing Stereotypes

• How did members with positive headband labels respond when teammates listened to, praised, or agreed with them?
• What are some ways the instructions on the headbands changed the group’s interactions?
• How are the instructions on the headbands similar to stereotypes based on age? On gender? On race? On nationality?

**TEACH ACTIVITY, OPTION 3**

**Stereotype Brainstorm**

Organize the class into small groups and have each group think of two or three common stereotypes. Then have each group think of three or four guidelines that would combat the stereotypes they just identified and help someone avoid stereotyping. Ask members from each group to take turns reading one of their group’s guidelines. Combine similar guidelines to create a master list. Suggest that students include the guidelines that accompany this skill. Have the students copy the master list into their Learning Logs.

**ENRICH**

**ENRICH ACTIVITY, OPTION 1**

**Stereotype Quotations**

Read aloud or write on the board the following quotations and discuss what they say about stereotypes and prejudice.

*Frailty, thy name is woman.*
—William Shakespeare

*We hate some persons because we do not know them and will not know them because we hate them.*
—Charles Caleb Colton

*Our minds thus grow in spots; and like grease spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can.*
—William James

*He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favor of two.*
—Charles Dickens

*When I ran against a Prejudice
That quite cut off the view.*
—Charlotte Perkins Gilman

**ENRICH ACTIVITY, OPTION 2**

**Overcoming Stereotypes**

Watch a movie in which someone overcomes stereotyping, such as *Forrest Gump*. In response to comments about his intelligence, Forrest often says, “Stupid is as stupid does.” Discuss the message behind the story.

**REINFORCE**

**REINFORCE ACTIVITY, OPTION 1**

**Our Characteristics, Our Stereotypes**

Ask students to name characteristics, other than racial or ethnic background, by which people may be stereotyped. Examples include physical or mental limitations, height or weight, grace of movement, attractiveness, posture, and speech or accent. Choose a category that does not apply to any students in the class and discuss common stereotypes about people in that group. For example, fat people are lazy; people with glasses are smart; tall people are good basketball players; muscular men are athletic. Discuss how limiting and unfair these labels can be.

**REINFORCE ACTIVITY, OPTION 2**

**Media Stereotyping**

Give students several days to gather examples of positive or negative stereotyping in a television show, including its commercials. As students share their examples, discuss which stereotypes are actually held by many people in real life and ways they contribute to conflict and injustice.