

# THE ESCALATION OF HATE

## Lesson for Middle and High School Students

### Purpose:

To provide an opportunity for students to examine the escalating nature of hate and to consider the difficulty of stopping the progression once it begins.

### Materials Needed:

*Terms and Definitions*, *The Reality Behind the Words Worksheet* and *The Pyramid of Hate* (one of each for each student); board/smart board or chart paper and markers

### Time:

20–30 minutes

### Directions:

1. Distribute the *Terms and Definitions* handout to each student. Ask them to read the definitions, consider the meaning of each, and think about how they differ from one another.
2. Distribute *The Reality Behind the Words Worksheet* to each student and ask them to find a partner.
3. Working in pairs, have students take 5–10 minutes to:
  - a. Match the examples on the right to the corresponding term on the left side.
  - b. Identify if more than one term can be applied to any of the examples and be prepared to explain their responses.
4. Reconvene the group and have students discuss the answers to the worksheet, clarifying any definitions as needed.

(ANSWER KEY: 1. Stereotype; 2. Bias-motivated violence; 3. Genocide; 4. Discrimination; 5. Prejudice; 6. Hate crime; 7. Scapegoating).
5. On the board/smart board, draw a large triangle and draw four horizontal lines so that the triangle is divided into five sections. Starting at the top, label the sections as follows: Genocide; Acts of Bias-Motivated Violence; Acts of Discrimination; Acts of Prejudice; Acts of Bias.
6. Distribute the *Pyramid of Hate* handout to each student. Explain that the *Pyramid of Hate* is a good way to understand how prejudice and hate can escalate when no one speaks up or takes action.
7. Briefly review each level of the pyramid starting with the bottom level entitled Acts of Bias. (See “Presenting the Pyramid of Hate” at the end of the activity).
8. For each level of the pyramid, ask students to provide one or two additional examples from their own experiences, situations they have heard or read about or in history that also exemplify the level.
9. Lead a brief whole group discussion, using some or all of the questions that follow.
  - a. What are some of the factors that make it more likely that hate will escalate? (e.g., hate behaviors are tolerated; the media reinforces stereotypes; friends or family members may communicate agreement with one another’s prejudices)

- b. Once the actions of a person involved in a bias incident began to escalate, do you think it's difficult to stop? Why or why not?
- c. What are some things that might stop the escalation of hate? (e.g., education; new laws; enforcement of existing school policies and laws)
- d. At what level of the pyramid do you think it would be easiest for someone to intervene? What are the possible consequences of waiting until behaviors escalate to take action?
- e. What are some actions people can take to interrupt the escalation of hate? What can communities do?
- f. In what ways does this understanding of the tendency of hate to escalate relate to [the current incident being discussed]?

# TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

## **Bias**

An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

## **Discrimination**

Unfair treatment of one person or a group of people because of their identity (e.g., race, religion, gender ability, culture, etc.). Discrimination is an action that can come from prejudice.

## **Genocide**

The act of or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire religious, racial, national or cultural group.

## **Hate Crime**

A criminal act against property, a person or group where the victim is intentionally targeted because of their actual or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, gender/gender identity or ethnicity.

## **Prejudice**

Judging or forming an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (e.g., race, religion, gender, etc.)

## **Scapegoating**

Blaming a person or group for something, when the fault actually lies elsewhere. Scapegoating includes hostile words or actions that can lead to verbal or physical violence; a person or group is blamed for something because of some aspect of their identity, but they usually lack the power or opportunity to fight back.

## **Stereotype**

The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

## **Bias-motivated Violence**

An action that emotionally or physically harms a person or group and that is motivated by the identity of the person or group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.).

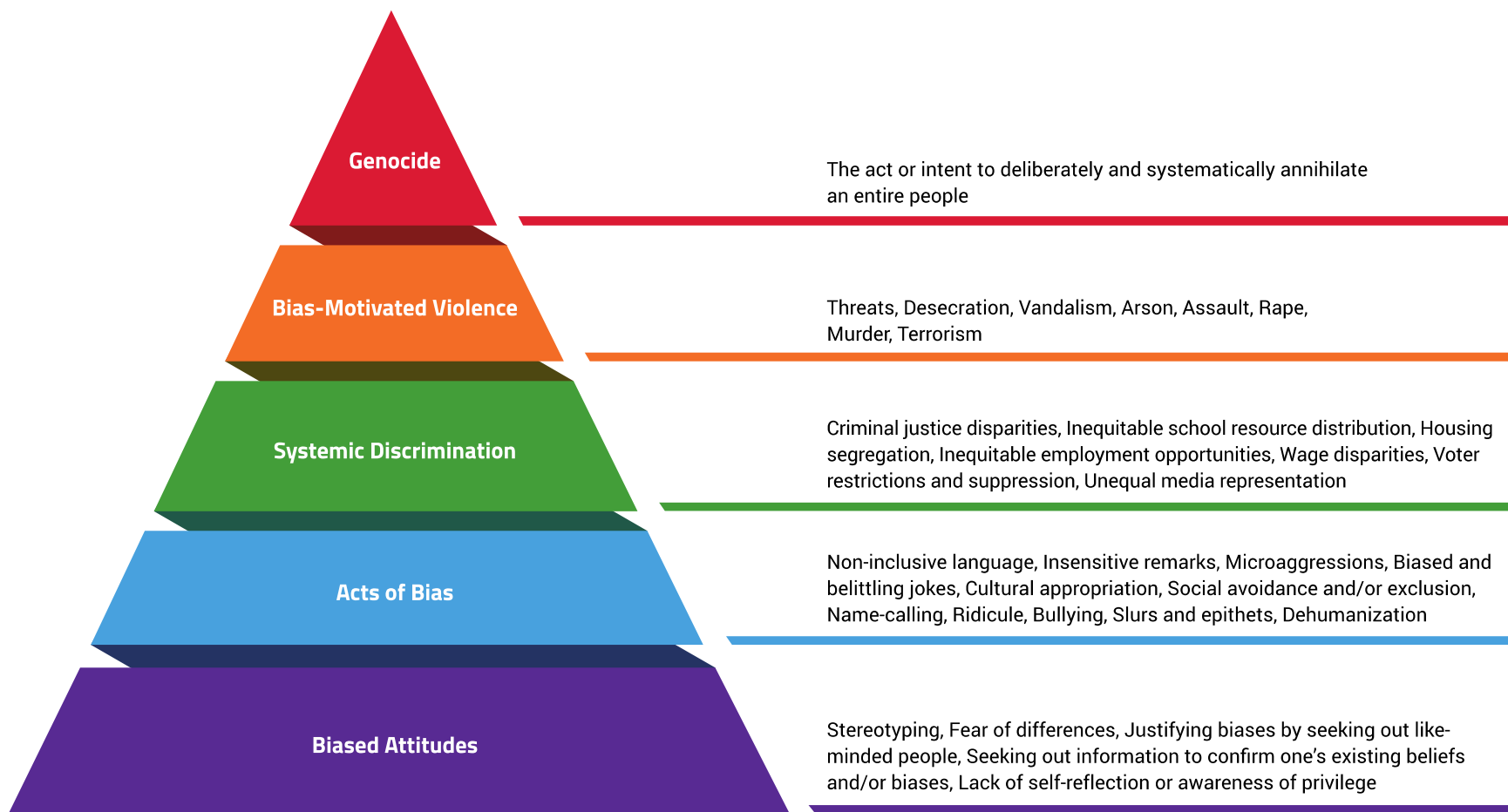
# THE REALITY BEHIND THE WORDS WORKSHEET

**Directions:** Match the example on the right with the correct term on the left by either drawing a line from the term to the matching example or writing the number of the example in the space provide for the correct term.

| Terms                                | Examples   |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| _____ <b>Discrimination</b>          | 1. Fashion magazines rarely include photographs of plus-size models in a positive way.   |
| _____ <b>Genocide</b>                | 2. A group of LGBTQ teens who attend a peaceful rally in support of same sex marriage are taunted and violently attacked by a group of teens.  |
| _____ <b>Hate Crime</b>              | 3. In Rwanda in the 1990s, the ruling majority Hutus engaged in efforts to systematically destroy their nation's Tutsi population, brutally killing 800,000 Tutsi through violent executions, murders with clubs and machetes and massacres in churches and hospitals.                                       |
| _____ <b>Prejudice</b>               | 4. An employer does not hire a male candidate who is otherwise qualified because the candidate is wearing a turban as part of his religious tradition.   |
| _____ <b>Scapegoating</b>            | 5. A teacher doesn't recommend one of her top students for a leadership program in Washington DC because she believes the family couldn't afford the required expenses.  |
| _____ <b>Stereotyping</b>            | 6. A synagogue in a Midwest city is spray-painted with swastikas and hateful graffiti about Jews.  |
| _____ <b>Bias-motivated Violence</b> | 7. A school installs a metal detector by the front entrance of the school because of a perceived increase in students' carrying weapons to school. Many of the students are upset with the new procedures this creates and blame Muslim students at the school because of people's concerns about terrorism. |

# PYRAMID OF HATE

The **Pyramid of Hate** illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society. It is organized in escalating levels of attitudes and behavior that grow in complexity from bottom to top. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. Bias at each level negatively impacts individuals, institutions and society and it becomes increasingly difficult to challenge and dismantle as behaviors escalate. When bias goes unchecked, it becomes “normalized” and contributes to a pattern of accepting discrimination, hate and injustice in society. While every biased attitude or act does not lead to genocide, each genocide has been built on the acceptance of attitudes and actions described at the lower levels of the pyramid. When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.



# PRESENTING THE PYRAMID OF HATE

The *Pyramid of Hate* presents a visual image to demonstrate how the seeds of hate, once planted, can quickly grow from biased ideas to hate violence. The following is provided to assist in presenting the concept of the tendency of hate to escalate when unchecked.

## Level One: Biased Attitudes

The base of the pyramid describes biased attitudes we see and hear every day in schools, workplaces, communities and even at the dinner table. These include things like non-inclusive language, stereotypes, microaggressions or insensitive remarks. One might regard these attitudes as “not a big deal” or they don’t necessarily hurt anyone. But biased attitudes that begin with a simple stereotype about a group, if left unchallenged, can easily grow into sustained feelings about that group. These attitudes serve as the foundation of the pyramid, supporting more extreme levels of hate.

## Level Two: Acts of Bias

Based on biased attitudes, we then form prejudicial FEELINGS about a group which can lead to actions like bullying, scapegoating, biased jokes, ridicule, and name-calling. ACTS of bias move the biased ATTITUDE that “All those people are lazy and stupid” to ACTS that perpetuate that “I don’t like or trust those people.”

## Level Three: Systemic Discrimination

Once biased ATTITUDES and ACTS of bias have taken hold, DISCRIMINATION can follow. Discrimination moves the biased ATTITUDE “I don’t like or trust those people” to DISCRIMINATION, “I won’t hire those people to work in my store” or “I won’t let those people live in my neighborhood.” Once hate has progressed up the bottom three levels of the pyramid, it is not a far step to move from ACTIONS to Acts of Violence....

## Level Four: Bias-Motivated Violence

When discrimination is unchecked, acts of bias-motivated VIOLENCE can occur in schools and communities, including desecration of property, threats and assaults, but also arson, terrorism, vandalism, assault and murder.

## Level Five: Genocide

The top level of the pyramid is Genocide, the act of or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people. During the Holocaust the Nazi’s committed genocide against the Jewish people, Gays, people with disabilities, Roma and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The *Pyramid of Hate* demonstrates how ideas, feelings/attitudes and actions can form a basis for the denial of justice. Although not every act of bias will lead to genocide, it is important to realize that every historical instance of genocide began with the acts of bias described on the lowest level. The most effective opportunity to take action is when we witness behaviors that fall within the lowest level of the pyramid. We can safeguard our schools and communities by modeling respect, promoting respectful behavior in others and engaging in efforts to stamp out hate.