

# Building Tolerance Amid COVID and Social Injustice

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Have you noticed people seem less tolerant of each other in recent months? Do you notice you are less tolerant of others and that by the end of your workday, because you gave so much of yourself to others, you have less of yourself to give to your family and friends? Could this rise in intolerance be due to a lack of connection and fear of the virus that continues to dominate headlines, policy making, and our collective minds over these last ten months? Or is it due to the social injustices that have been occurring decade after decade, and are (again) at a boiling point in this country? Perhaps it is due to a combination of both.

I have lately wondered about the collision of these two ills at this point in our human existence. Feeling the pressures of working more by Zoom and experiencing only a pseudo-connection to others, I recognize that I am lacking the pheromonal connections experienced when we are face-to-face. As a counselor and a student of human behavior, I feel the need to make sense of this and to search for solutions to improve our tolerance for others.

Are we, as a society, experiencing less tolerance in part because we are not stopping to take the time to learn about others? Are we just seeing them as the “other person” and not looking to understand and respect the elements of self that make them who they are? To build tolerance for differences is to stop focusing on what you think you

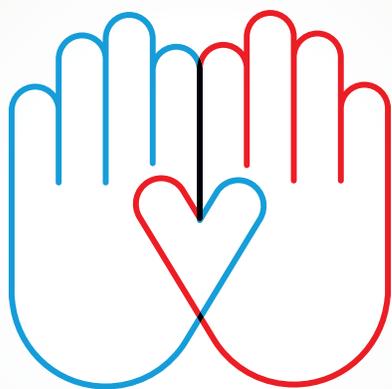
*To build tolerance for differences is to stop focusing on what you think you know and instead dig deeper into the person in front of you.*

know and instead dig deeper into the person in front of you. We must examine our own biases to begin to understand others. To build tolerance for differences or perceived differences, we must slow down, and listen, learn and integrate what we thought we knew about a person, to open ourselves up to change our mind, and re-learn and re-integrate what we are able to learn by really connecting with that person’s individual and unique story.

This is not new information; as counselors we know these concepts. It is, however, important to remind ourselves to practice this important contemplation and reflection as we deal with our exhaustion, frustration, and fear. We must stop when we feel intolerance creeping in and ask ourselves, what do I want to do here in this moment? Do I want to build up this person, or keep the conversation level, or tear this person down? Taking a moment to ask these questions allows us to suspend our feelings of fear and intolerance and to change the course of the conversation by examining our own biases, experiences, and motivations and those of the one with whom we’re interacting, to come to a place of deeper understanding and a respect of the humanness of another.

In these challenging times, it is vital that we pay attention to how our thoughts about ourselves, our familial experiences, and our relational experiences impact our present. It is vital that we take the time to learn from others how their experiences, including within their families, communities, and society, impact their present. And as we learn and reflect, we will become more tolerant and continue our work toward a healthier and happier self.

Together, we can – and do – make a difference!



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