

## Hate Symbols

*Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events*

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### Topic Summary

We see symbols every day in all aspects of our lives. Symbols are used to convey ideas, qualities, emotions, material objects/products, opinions and beliefs. Unfortunately, symbols are also used to convey hate and bias. Lately, we have seen a lot of hate symbol graffiti in public spaces and specifically the swastika, which in most circumstances is understood as an expression of anti-Semitism. There has reportedly been an increase in anti-Semitic incidents, including the display of swastikas on school and college campuses, sidewalks, places of worship, online, on doors, buildings, dorm rooms, buses, school and public bathrooms, vehicles and other places. The proliferation of other hate symbols is also of increasing concern.

The swastika has served as the most significant and notorious of hate symbols about anti-Semitism and white supremacy for most of the world outside of Asia. White supremacy encompasses many forms of hate including anti-Semitism, racism, anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ, etc.

Here are some recent examples of swastikas in schools:

- A group of high school students were suspended after administrators discovered that they had lain down on a field on the school's campus and formed a human swastika.
- At a college, there were five swastikas discovered in campus restrooms. At that same university, a Jewish professor at the school revealed that someone left human feces in front of his office a few days after the presidential election.
- In one school district, there were a variety of incidents involving swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti. There were swastikas found in the boys' bathroom and locker room, carvings of a swastika and other anti-Semitic graffiti into a wooden bench in the locker room and two other swastikas written on that bench.

A [recent news story](#) illustrates ways that individual people can make a difference. In February 2017, a group of New York City commuters banded together to clean up a subway car that was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti and Nazi symbols. Upon seeing the swastikas and other graffiti on windows, doors and advertisements, the group of passengers used hand sanitizer to wipe it all off.

To learn more about the origin and current use of hate symbols, see ADL's [Hate on Display: Hate Symbols Database](#). If your child is interested in learning more about hate symbols, be careful and only allow them to visit websites that you monitor or are familiar with. Be mindful that your child doesn't inadvertently visit hate group websites.

### **Questions to Start the Conversation**

- What are symbols and how do they play a role in your life?
- What hate symbols have you seen in your community, online or heard about? What are your first thoughts and feelings when you see them?
- Have you ever seen a swastika or other hate symbol at your school? What happened?
- How do you think hate symbols make others feel, especially those who are targeted by them?
- Have you ever seen or heard about someone getting rid of a hate symbol or doing something else about it?

### **Questions to Dig Deeper**

- What do you think we should do about hate symbols—either as individuals or as a community?
- What impact do you think hate symbols have on our society?
- How can we prevent hate symbols from being written or drawn?

(The "Related to this Resource" provides articles and information that address these questions.)

### **Ideas for Taking Action**

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Help to organize an educational forum in school to talk about hate symbols and what can be done about them, especially in school. Talk more generally about how to address bias and identity-based bullying in school.
- Write a letter to your school, local or national newspaper that expresses your views about the swastika or other hate symbols, the power those symbols

have and what we can do about it.

- Use social media to speak out about hate symbols and create some of your own symbols that convey a message of love and inclusion.