

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the Alpine County Superintendent of Schools)



February Focus:

Avoid Personal Questions and Respect “No”

It seems many of us have an inexhaustible curiosity about the business of others. Unfortunately some of this curiosity may be perceived as intrusive by the recipients of questions. Some areas of particular sensitivity include questions around religion (Do you believe in God?), politics (Who did you vote for?), money (How much do you earn?), personal relationships (Are you two still together?), health (What was the result of that medical test?) and physical appearance (Do you dye your hair?). Most of us shelter parts of our lives from disclosure. We might feel embarrassed or unsettled about revealing too many details about personal issues. Of course, most people aren't intentionally probing for gossip reasons and are instead genuinely curious or concerned. If you receive questions that feel too personal to answer, you can civilly respond by saying: "I don't feel comfortable talking about this," "This isn't the best time to discuss this," or "I prefer not to discuss money matters." The key is polite evasion.

In a similar vein, respecting the "no" of another person is one of the most elementary rules of respect and civility. For example, when someone declines an invitation, asking why is both intrusive and guilt-inducing. If a guest refuses your offer of meatloaf, insisting he or she try it will cause discomfort.

Sometimes we must recognize a subtle or unstated "no" such as when a stranger sitting next to you is intently interested in reading his or her book and less interested in engaging in any attempted conversation on your part. Also, there is the possibility that a person you are interested in getting to know may not be interested in getting to know you. If he or she declines your advances, be ready to accept that. You can be wonderfully civil and charming without making a nuisance of yourself.