

GUIDE 4. WORKING INCLUSIVELY WITH GROUPS

During their teenage years, young people develop a greatly sharpened awareness of their own and others' appearance, and tend to make more judgements based on appearance. Appearance, style and fashion can seem to be of overwhelming importance and feeling that you do not look right is often a major source of anxiety, with consequences for self-esteem and school performance¹. It is important to include learning activities about appearance and difference in secondary education, even if you do not have a student with a visible difference in your school at this time. Being able to relate to people who may look different is an important aspect of learning about diversity.

If a student who has a visible difference is to join the school it may be thought that it will be helpful to talk to all the students about this – perhaps just before the young person joins the school, or before they return after an injury or illness which has altered their appearance. However, even if the message aims to encourage students to behave inclusively and pleasantly, research has shown¹, surprisingly, that talking to a group of young children about a young person tends to reduce students' inclination to initiate social interactions, i.e., they are less likely to be sociable. Please refer to the guides on [Starting secondary school](#) and [Having something to say](#) for more effective approaches to enabling a student with a visible difference to become part of an inclusive school community.

These are tricky issues to deal with. At Changing Faces, we have produced several resources that might give you some ideas for activities to carry out with your class. These can be found at [A World of Difference](#).

However, if the student themselves decided to run an assembly to talk about their visible difference or want the school to run one, then that can be beneficial for the student and their classmates. Do however ensure that the student is consulted about the content and if they want to be present or not – it's the student's right to choose.

¹ Lovegrove, E. (2002) Adolescents, appearance and anti-bullying strategies, PhD Thesis, University of the West of England, quoted in Frances, J. (2004) Educating Young children with Facial Visible difference – Creating Inclusive School Communities, RoutledgeFalmer, London, p3.