

The 24 Spiritual and Moral Dispositions

First launched in 2007 by Birmingham City Council and the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE); the dispositions were updated in 2022.

This ground-breaking framework explores key values from religiously specific and more universal standpoints, and consider their transformational potential.

These form the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, which transformed the traditional concept learning 'about' faith, into learning 'from' faith, and illustrated what values faith had to offer.

Developing Creativity

How should we imagine and express what matters?

Developing Compassion

How and why should we care?

Developing Choice

What should we stand for?

Developing Community

How and where should we contribute and relate to others?

Developing Commitment

What ventures should we undertake?

Developing Contemplation

How do we come to understand what matters?

1. Being Imaginative and Explorative
2. Appreciating Beauty
3. Expressing Joy
4. Being Thankful
5. Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment
6. Sharing and Being Generous
7. Responding to Suffering
8. Being Merciful and Forgiving
9. Being Fair and Just
10. Living by Rules
11. Being Accountable and Living with Integrity
12. Being Temperate, Self-Disciplined and Seeking Contentment
13. Being Modest and Listening to Others
14. Creating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging
15. Creating Unity and Harmony
16. Participating and Willing to Lead
17. Remembering Roots
18. Being Loyal and Steadfast
19. Being Hopeful and Visionary
20. Being Courageous and Confident
21. Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge
22. Being Open, Honest and Truthful
23. Being Reflective and Self-Critical
24. Being Attentive to the Sacred, as well as the Precious

1. Being Imaginative and Explorative

Developing the ability to look at things differently, together with the capacity to see the promise and potential of the individual and the world about us.

Religiously: Seeking out where holiness and signs of God may be found. Or considering how to put your faith into practice.

Considerations: Are there times when it is not right to be imaginative and exploratory? Do people ever think in an unrealistic wishful way?

2. Appreciating Beauty

Developing a deep sense of awe and wonder for the world about us, and an awareness of how people respond to it.

Religiously: Showing awareness that the world is created and responding with respect and reverence. Humans respond to this sense through their own works of creative expression.

Considerations: To what extent is beauty determined by cultural contexts? What about when the beauty is superficial? Can beauty be determined by individuals themselves?



How should we imagine and express what matters?



3. Expressing Joy

Being aware of a range of human emotions, particularly happiness, and being able to express joy and share it with others, for example, in music, in language, or via body language.

Religiously: Finding joy through being aware of blessings and gifts, and knowing how precious each person is to God. Responding to God individually, and in community, through festivals, music, dance etc.

Considerations: Are there times when it's appropriate to express sadness? Do people ever find pleasure in the misfortune of others?

4. Being Thankful

Being conscious that individuals are not self-sufficient but are dependent upon others and the resources of the natural world.

Religiously: Being aware of God's gifts in creation and expressing gratitude, growing an appreciative heart.

Considerations: When is mere thankfulness insufficient? E.g. if we are just glad for the good things we have and don't give any thought to those without.



How should we imagine and express what matters?



5. Caring for Others, Animals and the Environment

Being aware of that which is around us, recognising that others, animals and the environment matter, and having the will to do something about them.

Religiously: Sensing that concern for other people, animals and the planet, beyond oneself is not a matter of self-interest, but a divine duty laid upon people.

Considerations: When is compassion for others ever inappropriate? Do people ever ignore their primary responsibilities? E.g. neglecting one's own children while supporting an orphan abroad, or saving an animal at the expense of a human being?

6. Sharing and Being Generous

Considering the needs of others in relation to our own. Desiring for others to benefit from our resources even when these are limited.

Religiously: It is because God gives freely that people feel inspired to do likewise. (Because God is generous, people follow this loving example).

Considerations: Is there ever a point when we should stop giving? Eg giving to a drug addict or an alcoholic in a way that worsens the addiction



How and why should we care?



7. Responding to Suffering

Recognising the pain of self and others, nurturing the will to help, and maintaining one's solidarity with and empathy for others.

Religiously: As the reality of suffering is part of the human condition many followers recognise God being alongside them as they face it. Many followers feel that God can transform pain and suffering, giving the strength that helps them, and gets them through, so that they learn from the process.

Considerations: Are there any circumstances when we can take the suffering of others too much to heart? Do people ever respond to the suffering of others in a way that has negative consequences for their own friends and family? Is it possible to embrace suffering for a perceived greater good, but one which is not accepted by wider society?

8. Being Merciful and Forgiving

Acknowledging that our making mistakes is a part of human life, and allowing for the restoration of relationships, even though it may be costly.

Religiously: The desire for reconciliation is often accompanied by an awareness of powerlessness to bring it about. Reconciliation needs divine initiative and mercy, and a human response of mercy and forgiveness of others.

Considerations: Is there any offence that we should not forgive? Who has the right to forgive? Are there occasions when being merciful could lead to injustice not being challenged? Does the promise of eternal forgiveness ever encourage bad behaviour?



How and why should we care?



9. Being Fair and Just

Recognising that human beings deserve to be treated equally, and being prepared to take action where this is not the case.

Religiously: Getting on with each other is based on divine notions of fairness and justice.

Considerations: What do we do if we see that being 'fair and just' comes into conflict with what our tradition says? Do we ever demand what is owed to us, in a strict interpretation of equality and justice, while ignoring all negative consequences for others? Should we recognise that, as society changes, what we think of as fairness and justice needs to be constantly reviewed?

10. Living by Rules

Recognising authority and the needs of shared life.

Religiously: Human beings were created to live in accordance with divine rules as received by particular faith communities. Religious traditions have codes about how people should live in obedience to these divine laws. Ignoring these laws is seen as disobedience and seen to impair the relationship with the divine.

Considerations: Should we follow the rules of a community even if they can be shown to be wrong? When do laws challenge religious people? Is it possible for people to follow letter the of the law while ignoring the spirit of the law? How can our conscience be informed by teachings in sacred texts?



What should we stand for?



11. Being Accountable and Living with Integrity

Being willing to be answerable to oneself and others for one's actions. Having integrity requires that one would always act in such a responsible way even if one would not be held publicly to account

Religiously: To God, everything is transparent and no motives are hidden. Some followers anticipate a future judgment for their actions, which influences their behaviour in the present

Considerations: Can there be times when concern for our own integrity is greater than our compassion? Do people ever prioritise their own integrity at the expense of that of others? Can integrity be affected by fear of punishment, rather than pleasing God?

12. Being Temperate, Self-Disciplined and Seeking Contentment

Enabling one to be content with what one has, rather than striving for more. Learning to be responsible for ourselves – and the importance of holding ourselves in check even in difficult situations.

Religiously: Embracing one's circumstances in the light of confidence and trust in God, and recognising the need for personal change. This can be a willingness to see that one's situation is not simply 'a cup half full', but 'a cup that runs over'.

Considerations: Are there times when we are too trusting in our own sufficiency? Is there a danger that acceptance of circumstances leads to injustices being perpetuated? Are there times when passion and action are called for?



What should we stand for?



13. Being Modest and Listening to Others

Recognising our own dignity, and valuing the worth and dignity of others, to judge how much of a contribution to make, while avoiding false humility on the one hand, and boastfulness on the other.

Religiously: By developing attentiveness, putting aside one's own wishes, and by seeking to live in a way that pleases God, it is possible to gain a sense of one's true worth, and to have proper relationships with others. It is also recognising that God may speak through anyone who listens, whoever they may be.

Considerations: When is it not right to be modest and listen to others? Is everyone to be modest, or just some groups, e.g. women, or children? Who should be encouraged not to be modest? punishment, rather than pleasing God?

14. Creating Inclusion, Identity and Belonging

Learning to appreciate others as individuals, then exploring similarities and differences, enables true respect and understanding between different groups. Deliberately excluding others prevents each from developing relationships through which they can thrive.

Religiously: The worship of God is both a personal and a communal activity. Many religious people believe that the whole of creation, human beings and the natural world are interconnected, interrelated and interdependent and has its origins in God's plan.

Considerations: Are there times when we give priority to those inside our group, at the expense of those outside? Are we ever guilty of treating as 'outsiders' those who do not belong in our group? Do we ever favour people within our own religion, nation or area at the expense of others?



How and where should we contribute and relate to others?



15. Creating Unity and Harmony

Desiring good relationships and being able to restore broken relationships, as well as bridge-building and peace-making in order to achieve more by being together.

Religiously: The importance of good relationships with God and others flows from the belief that all people are created by God. They can be achieved by becoming aware of the divine presence in oneself, or even aligning oneself with the divine attributes within, as well as recognising God in others.

Considerations: Are some relationships beyond repair? Is recognising this sometimes an appropriate option? Do we seek peace at the expense of addressing genuine concerns and grievances of individuals? Can we make unity more important than individuality?

16. Participating and Willing to Lead

Awareness of what one can contribute to shared life, together with a willingness to be proactive in it.

Religiously: Standing before God, as equally-created beings, implies a relationship and responsibility for the well-being of all.

Considerations: Can some people be too willing to lead and participate at the expense of those who are more modest and humble? Does the value of leadership and participation depend upon the context?



How and where should we contribute and relate to others?



17. Remembering Roots

Recognising how the past can shape the present and the future, it is a reminder of human duties, obligations and opportunities.

Religiously: People of religious tradition are shaped by the stories and practices of their community, drawing from a past that helps shape life in the present and the future.

Considerations: When should living in the present take priority over remembering the past? Are our memories ever unhelpfully selective when thinking about the past and making choices about the future?



What ventures should we undertake?

18. Being Loyal and Steadfast

Always being willing to offer people support in good times and bad, showing responsibility, integrity and care.

Religiously: Choosing to follow God is trusting that God's ways are right. This faith should be held onto despite any distractions, problems or difficulties one may face, including opposition from others. This is a response to God's enduring loyalty to us.

Considerations: What happens when loyalty doesn't appear to be rewarded? When does loyalty to another, or to a tradition, have to take a back seat to justice? When you do something that is wrong, is it acceptable to give the excuse that you were following orders?



19. Being Hopeful and Visionary

Being hopeful, and having a vision of the future should be based on some realistic expectation, rather than upon luck or chance.

Religiously: Hope is based on the promise offered by God and God's power to transform the world. It contrasts sharply with the mood of despair.

Considerations: When is hope misplaced? Do people ever embrace hope to escape from reality?

20. Being Courageous and Confident

Acting selflessly with a commitment to the good, and the well-being of others. Acting in this way is not the same as foolishness, or cowardice.

Religiously: It is a courage based upon confidence in God, believing that doing the right thing sometimes matters more than our reputation and personal welfare but trusting in the safety of being in God's hands, no matter what may happen.

Considerations: Are there ever times when being self-reflective and critical is wiser than being courageous and confident?



What ventures should we undertake?



21. Being Curious and Valuing Knowledge

Valuing knowledge for its own sake. Humans foster enquiry into new insights.

Religiously: Believing in a good creation, the pursuit of knowledge and the fostering of curiosity together have the opportunity to draw us deeper into the life of God.

Considerations: Can one be so focused on studying, working, on one's own career that one does not have time or attention for the needs of others?



How do we come to understand what matters?

22. Being Open, Honest and Truthful

Recognising the inherent value of others as separate individuals who should not be manipulated or exploited. Acknowledging that desiring truth and the well-being of others requires openness and integrity.

Religiously: Being responsible to God, religious people are called to an ethic of truthfulness and honesty as a model for how human beings are intended to relate to each other, and to God.

Considerations: Are there ever times when concern for truthfulness is in conflict with compassion? Do people ever 'tell the truth' to another in a way that is deliberately hurtful?



23. Being Reflective and Self-Critical

Being clear-sighted about our own strengths and weaknesses, right and wrong actions.

Religiously: To live before God is to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses, and to desire to change for the better.

Considerations: Are there times when being self-critical stops us from participating and being willing to lead? Can self-criticism undermine people's self-confidence resulting in inactivity?

24. Being Attentive to the Sacred, as well as the Precious

In the midst of everyday life, having the ability to observe and focus on things that really matter, which one would consider sacred or precious. This is helped by making time for reflection and by learning to be mindful, i.e. clearly aware of the present moment without being clouded by a distracted or preoccupied mind.

Religiously: Being attentive to the spiritual part of one's being, and living in a way that constantly recognises God's presence in the world. This awareness can be nurtured day by day, through prayer and silent meditation, through reading, singing or listening to sacred teachings, as well as through the experience of serving others selflessly and engaging in creative activity.

Considerations: Can this lead to a misunderstanding? When should silence be ended and speaking begin again? Do people ever concentrate too much on the sacred and not enough on taking responsibility for the care of others?



How do we come to understand what matters?





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