

GUIDE

Talking to students about the Ten Commandments display

Step 1: AFFIRM students religious freedom.

Step 2: HIGHLIGHT the many faiths that are represented in our country and in our schools.

Step 3: FRAME the conversation around the historical context of the document and move away from it being a moral document that students must follow.

Step 4: SPEAK HONESTLY. If you don't know the exact right answer, that's okay. Most students value honesty and transparency.

Tip for all age groups:

If a student asks a content-specific religious question (i.e. "Is it a sin if I do X?"), the best response is: "That is a deeply personal question. Please talk to your family or your faith leader (**priest/rabbi/pastor/imam**) about that."

Potential questions and answers for different age groups

Note: You know your students best and how to talk to them. Use these answers as a guide, not a script.

Elementary School (K-5th Grade)

Remember: Keep it simple, vague, and inclusive

Q: *What is that poster?*

A: This poster shows ten rules that are important to one specific group of people. In our country and our school, we have friends who believe many different things, and these are just one group's rules.

Q: *Who is God?*

A: People have many different names and ideas for what they believe in. In our classroom, we focus on how we can all be kind to one another, no matter what our families believe.

Q: *What do these big words (adultery, covet) mean?*

A: Those are some very old, big words that people use to express their faith. If you're curious about the specific meanings or how they fit into your family's beliefs, that is a great thing to talk about with your parents or caregivers at home.

Middle School (6th–8th Grade)

Focus: Provide historical context and define boundaries

Q: *“Why do you have to put that up now? It wasn’t here last year.”*

A: Texas passed a new law that requires this specific poster to be in every classroom. It’s a new requirement for all public schools in the state, which is why it was recently added.

Q: *Is this going to be on the test? Do we have to learn these?*

A: No, the Ten Commandments are not part of our curriculum, and you won’t be tested on them. The poster is on display because of a mandate by the state, it is not there for a lesson plan.

Q: *My family doesn't believe in this. Do I still have to look at it?*

A: In this classroom, we respect everyone’s freedom of belief. This poster represents one specific tradition. You are not required to agree with it or follow it to be a successful student here.

High School (9th–12th Grade)

Focus: Provide historical context, define boundaries, engage in learning around the First Amendment

Q: *Can you refuse to hang it? Is that allowed?*

A: As state employees, teachers are generally expected to follow state laws and directives from the district. However, several districts are currently part of 'injunctions,' which are court orders that pause the law while its constitutionality is being tested. It is a very complex legal situation for school staff.

Q: *If the government can put this up, can you make us pray now?*

A: No. Even with this law in place, public schools cannot coerce students into religious activities. I cannot lead you in prayer or pressure you to participate in religious rituals. Your own private religious expression is still protected.

Q: *I’m not Christian, but does the government want me to be? I thought me and my family had the freedom of religion?*

A: You and your family absolutely still have the freedom of religion, it is a fundamental right protected by the First Amendment. My job is to make sure every student, regardless of their faith or background, feels respected and included in this classroom. This display is a legal requirement for the school building, not a requirement for what you personally have to believe.

Q: *I am a Christian. I know about the Ten Commandments and my family follows them. People seem so mad about this though and I don’t know if I’m allowed to talk about my faith anymore?*

A: You are absolutely allowed to have your beliefs and talk about your faith. Your religious freedom is protected just like everyone else’s in this room. The reason you see people having strong feelings isn’t necessarily about your personal faith; it’s a debate about the First Amendment and whether the government should mandate religious documents in public spaces. In our school, we have students from many different backgrounds, some who follow these commandments, some who follow different religious texts, and some who don't follow any religion at all. My goal is to make sure this classroom is a place where you feel safe in your identity, while also respecting that other students have the right to feel the same way about theirs.