Welcoming Schools

A PROJECT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

What Do You Say to 'That's So Gay'?

STOP IT:

Keep it simple with quick responses. You could say:

- "Remember, we don't use put-downs in this class."
- "It's not OK to say 'That's so gay.'"
- "It is not appropriate at this school to use 'gay' disrespectfully or mean something is bad."
- "What did you mean by that?"
- "Do you know what 'gay' means?"
- "You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word 'gay' to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful."
- "Do you know why it is hurtful?"

EDUCATE:

If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don't, make time later.

- If you have been hearing the phrase "That's gay" used to mean that something is bad or stupid, take the time during a class meeting to make sure that your students know what "gay" means and know why it is hurtful to use as an insult.
- Be clear with students that when they use the word "gay" in a negative way they are being disrespectful. Be clear that using the phrase "That's so gay" is hurtful to other students who may have family members and friends who are gay.
- Provide accurate information. For the youngest students, keep it simple. For example, "the word 'gay' describes a man and a man who love each other, or a woman and a woman who love each other."

WHY STOP ANTI-GAY COMMENTS?

"In a nationwide survey, children feared anti-gay harassment more than any other kind of name-calling."
— J.A. Drake, J.H. Price and S.K. Telljohann, 2003

"Both children who are targeted and children who exhibit bullying behavior have lower academic achievement in school."
— J. Juvonen, Y. Wang and G. Espinoza, 2011

"The pervasiveness of anti-gay language in schools suggests that most school environments are hostile for LGBT students and create negative environments for their heterosexual peers as well."
— D. Espelage and V.P. Poteat, 2012

BE PROACTIVE:

- Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your class and school by using inclusive language, books and other materials.
- Establish clear schoolwide and classroom policies against hurtful teasing and bullying.
- In lessons on respect, stereotypes or prejudice include information about discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
- If you have been hearing the phrase "That's so gay" in school, be explicit that rules against name-calling include that phrase and other anti-gay put-downs.

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DON'T IGNORE IT:

- Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse.
- If other students do not see action, they get the message that there is nothing wrong with it.
- Harassment does not go away on its own.
- Don't be afraid of making the situation worse. Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling isn't always easy. With experience, you will become more comfortable handling it.
- You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

DON'T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR:

- Saying, "Josh doesn't really know what it means," or "Maria was only joking," excuses hurtful behavior.
- If you think that a student didn't mean to be hurtful, you might say, "I know you didn't say that statement to be hurtful, but those words can really hurt. Here is why. . ."

DON'T TRY TO JUDGE HOW UPSET THE TARGET IS:

- We have no way of knowing how a student is really feeling. Often, students who are targeted are embarrassed and pretend that they were not offended or hurt.
- Saying "Jorge didn't seem upset by Lily's remark" trivializes the student's feelings. It tells the harasser that it is OK to make hurtful comments. It teaches not only the student targeted, but also anyone in hearing range that they will not be protected from harassment.

WHAT IS WELCOMING SCHOOLS?

A comprehensive guide for elementary schools with tools, lessons and resources to:

- Embrace family diversity
- Create gender-inclusive environments
- Prevent bias-based bullying & name-calling

"Welcoming Schools helps schools move toward equity and excellence."
— Maureen Costello, Director of Teaching Tolerance

To find out what students really know about gay men and lesbians, what they hear at school and what they would like teachers to do, view *Welcoming Schools* short award-winning film, *What Do You Know? Six to twelve year-olds talk about gays and lesbians.*

welcomingschools.org/whatdoyouknow

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