

THE DO'S AND DON'T'S OF NAME-CALLING

There is not one way to deal with all incidents of name-calling but there are a variety of responses one can use. Educators must develop a “Zero Tolerance” to create schools where all students are respected and safe. This requires a consistent disruption of namecalling and homophobic comments, such as **“That’s so gay!”** When dealing with an incident, it is essential to focus on the name calling incident, harassment or intimidation and not on the real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of any student being targeted.

DON'T

- ◆ Ignore incidents
- ◆ Excuse it or minimize them
- ◆ Become fearful of dealing with name calling and unable to act
- ◆ Re-victimize targets of name calling by discussing specifics of the incident with other students or staff.

DO

- ◆ Stop it-Stop it in the moment. Disrupt the behaviour in a way that ensures no one will get hurt. Get help if needed.
- ◆ Name it-Describe the behaviour (“That is a homophobic remark.”) Point out that it may be hurtful or embarrassing to others. Remind all involved of the expected behaviours and rules of the school.
- ◆ Educate about it. Provide immediate support, reassuring students this is a safe place, set a compassionate tone, provide basic information and model taking a stand. Be careful to save face for both aggressors and targets so that the incident does not escalate.
- ◆ Assess it- Get views of the aggressors, targets and bystanders. Find out about the history and intent of the incidents. Has this happened before? Same aggressor students? Same person being targeted?
- ◆ Report & Record it- Document what happened and who was involved. Report to Administrators if appropriate. Follow regular reporting and disciplinary procedures in your school.

- ◆ Resolve it-In the moment, request a change of behaviour or help students mediate a resolution. If it is a one time event that may be enough. If it is a recurring event, notify and involve the parents of both students and/or groups of students.
- ◆ Follow it up-Check to make sure the resolution was successful. Determine counselling or other needs. Follow up with parents, other teachers (if applicable) and administration to help prevent repeat incidents.

When responding to **“That’s So Gay”**, many students will comment with the following:

- ◆ “We don’t mean anything by that”
- ◆ “It’s just a word we use.”
- ◆ “Everyone says it”
- ◆ “We were just joking and we always do that.”
- ◆ “I don’t care if s/he says that, it doesn’t bother me.”

It is important to point out that it does mean something and that it is being used in a negative way.

Possible Responses:

- ◆ What do you mean by that?
- ◆ How do you think a gay person would feel about that?
- ◆ Is that a compliment?
- ◆ So if the connotations are negative, you’re saying it’s a bad thing?

Benefits:

- ◆ Students realize that you won’t dismiss it or ignore it.
- ◆ Puts the responsibility on the student.
- ◆ Not accusatory, more curious.
- ◆ Can open discussion.

Challenges:

- ◆ Student may not say anything.
- ◆ Student may not be willing to take ownership of their behaviour.
- ◆ Student may still minimize or dismiss it.