



NAME-CALLING AND FEELING SAFE IN SCHOOL

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 8

LENGTH OF TIME: Two 30 minute sessions or one one-hour session

GOALS

- To help students begin to take responsibility for creating emotional safety in school.
- To help students identify places in the school where they feel safe or unsafe.
- To help educators learn areas in school settings where students do not feel safe.

OBJECTIVES

- The students will discuss and consider ways to make their school safer.
- The students will identify areas of the school that feel unsafe and where name-calling occurs.
- The students will list and discuss put-downs and how using put-downs causes people to feel excluded and unsafe.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1,; Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also 4.1 and 5.1)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

Spend a few days listening for the kinds of name-calling that take place in the classroom, at recess, in the hallways, in the gym, etc. By listening ahead of time, you can then make sure that all of the different kinds of name-calling you hear are addressed when you do the lesson. Listen for examples of what children might give as reasons for not playing with another student. These reasons might relate to race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, family structure, disability, class or physical appearance. If you hear anti-gay name-calling, make sure to include it, as students may not bring it up themselves.

This lesson is featured in the Welcoming Schools film [*What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, & Bystanders*](#) (streaming online).

MATERIALS

- Chart paper
- Markers, pencils, paper or note cards

ACTIVITIES:**PART 1) IDENTIFYING SAFE AND UNSAFE AREAS IN THE SCHOOL****INTRODUCTION**

- Introduce the idea that you want to find out where in the school students feel safe or comfortable, where they do not feel safe and where they feel less comfortable or uneasy.
- It is important to acknowledge that students will have different feelings about the same spaces.
- Discuss what makes students feel safe and unsafe at school. You could do a quick brainstorm on chart paper.
- Remind students that there are different ways to feel safe—physically and emotionally. Make sure they understand that you are also talking about the emotional ways people feel safe.

IDENTIFYING WHERE STUDENTS FEEL SAFE OR UNSAFE

- With your students, brainstorm a list on chart paper of all the places in the school that students go to or walk through. Make sure all of the different places in the school are included, such as hallways, stairwells, bathrooms, classrooms, learning centers, cafeterias, different parts of the playground, the nurse’s office, the principal’s office, etc. Also, include walking to school, on the bus and at the bus stops.
- After the list of places is identified, give your students a minute to look over the list and pick two to three places where they feel safe. Also, ask them to pick two to three places where they feel less safe or where they have heard name-calling, hurtful teasing or seen bullying behavior. Tell them there may also be places where they feel safe sometimes and not others. Have them pick two to three of those as well.
- While your students are reviewing the list, add three columns to the chart: “Safe,” “Unsafe” and “Sometimes Safe/Unsafe.”
- Allow the students to go up to the chart and make tally marks in the appropriate columns.

PLACES IN THE SCHOOL, AROUND THE SCHOOL, ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL	FEEL SAFE	FEEL UNSAFE	SOMETIMES SAFE / SOMETIMES UNSAFE

MODIFICATIONS

- All students may not feel comfortable placing the tally marks in front of the whole class. If you suspect this is the case, have students write on paper or note cards where they feel safe, unsafe and sometimes safe/unsafe. Then you can make the tally marks on the chart.
- Another alternative is to do this exercise in small, self-selected groups that report back to the whole group and complete the chart.

DISCUSSION

After the chart is finished, ask your students the following questions:

- Which areas of the school have the most “Safe” tally marks?
- Which areas have the most “Unsafe” tally marks?
- What makes you or others feel safe in these areas?
- What might make someone feel less safe in areas?
- What makes a place feel safe sometimes and less safe other times? What is different?

PART 2) LOOKING AT HOW NAME-CALLING MAKES THE SCHOOL FEEL UNSAFE – A BRAINSTORM OF WORDS OR NAMES STUDENTS HEAR

- Begin by asking students for words, names or comments they have heard that can make people feel unsafe. Again, pay attention to what students might give as reasons for not playing with another child. These reasons might relate to race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, family structure, disability, class or physical appearance.
- Add any additional names or comments that you have heard or prompt the students to say additional names that you have heard. (For example, if you have heard anti-gay, skin color-based, or gender-based slurs at your school, make sure to include those words. Students may feel uncomfortable saying these at first but then often feel relieved that someone has actually mentioned them.)

Note: Be careful not to do this in a way that might make one student stand out. For example, if there is only one Latina student in the class and she has been targeted because she speaks with an accent, don't hold this situation up as an example.

- Using the chart of the areas of the school, ask students where they hear name-calling.

DISCUSSION

Lead a discussion about name-calling with the following questions as guidelines:

- How does it feel when someone calls you a name?
- How does it make you feel when you hear someone else called a name?
- Why do people call others names?
- Why does the name-calling happen where it does?

ACTION STEPS

Look at what can be done to stop the name-calling and help your school feel safe and welcome for all students. Use some of these questions to prompt the discussion. Make a list on chart paper.

- What can we do about the places where we feel unsafe?
- How can you help someone who has been called a name?
- What can students do to help stop name-calling and help others feel safe and welcome?
- What can adults in the school (administrators, lunch and recess monitors, bus drivers, etc.) do to help stop the name-calling and help students feel safe and welcome?
- **Note:** If it comes to your attention that an area of the school seems particularly unsafe, you or some of your students should report this to the administration, along with developing an action plan to make that area safer.

EDUCATORS' NOTES

- If name-calling such as “that’s so gay” comes up, ask the students what is meant by this. Find out what the intention was. Explain that “gay” is a word that describes individuals or a group of people. Define the words “gay” or “queer” if students have mentioned them. Explain that when you use that word to mean something is bad or stupid, not only does it hurt the feelings of the student who is taunted with the word “gay,” but it hurts the feelings of anyone who is gay or who may have a parent, relative or friend who is gay, because it implies that “gay” is bad.
- “Tattling” and “reporting”: It is important to create a climate where kids have a common understanding that reporting an incident that is harmful to themselves or others is different from “tattling” on another student for the purpose of getting them in trouble—that there is value in each person taking responsibility for making the school feel safe for all people.

MODIFICATIONS

There may be a situation in a class where it is very important for children to maintain anonymity as they answer questions about safety in school. We don’t want to create a situation where kids will feel like *tattle tales*. It is possible to create a true/false questionnaire about the safety of areas of the school. Students can hand these in and then you can tally them. Also, doing this exercise in small, self-selected groups might create a level of safety in reporting to and discussing with each other.

EXTENSIONS

- **Schoolwide Evaluation Tool:** Over the course of a week, have many classes in the school use this lesson to get a schoolwide perspective of the safe and unsafe areas.
- **Literacy:** Have students write about an area of the school in which they feel safe and an area in which they feel unsafe. What could help make the “unsafe” area feel safe?

-
- **Write a letter to the principal** stating that a particular area feels unsafe with suggestions for actions that can be taken to make it safe. It might be best for small groups to each address one area and write a letter specific to that.
 - **Creating a Safer School:** Review the list of action steps. Decide on one to three actions that students could take to make your school feel safer. Develop and carry out a plan to implement those actions. This could be done as a whole class or students could work in small groups to plan and carry out one of the actions.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Come back to the chart in a few weeks or months and see if there are any changes in the safe and unsafe areas.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

- [Children's Books to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying](#)
- [Lesson Plans to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying in School](#)
- [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying – School Resources](#)
- [Welcoming Schools Professional Development Trainings](#)

Part of this lesson was based on ideas in Where I Feel Safe/Unsafe in: Merle Froschl, Barbara Sprung, and Nancy Mullin-Rindler with Nan Stein and Nancy Gropper. Quit it!: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use with Students in Grades K-3. www.wcwonline.org