



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH *WHAT DO YOU KNOW?*: DISCUSSING LGBTQ TOPICS WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Showing this film as part of a training helps educators understand the need for addressing LGBTQ put-downs and family diversity in elementary school. The film shows that students know more than we give them credit for and that they are already having these conversations regardless of whether adults participate. Students need and ask for adults to mediate these conversations for their physical and emotional safety so they can focus on learning.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

*What Do You Know?* DVD or stream online at [www.welcomingschools.org/whatdoyouknow](http://www.welcomingschools.org/whatdoyouknow); TV or screen; computer or DVD player; LCD projector, copies of handouts such as *What Do You Say to 'That's So Gay' & Other Anti-LGBTQ Comments?*, *What Does Gay Mean?* or *Defining LGBTQ Terms for Elementary School Students* (see appendices.)

### PRE-SCREENING ICEBREAKER: STAND UP/SIT DOWN (5 MINUTES)

This is an opportunity to get a sense of who is in the room and what some of their experiences have been. Read the questions and ask participants to either stand up or raise their hands if the answer to the question is “yes.”

- Have you taught a child who was called names because other students thought that they did not act enough like a boy or like a girl?
- Have you taught a child who has two mothers or two fathers?
- Do you think that most students you work with have heard the word “gay” or other LGBTQ terms? Do they know what they mean?
- Have you heard students use LGBTQ words in a negative way? (Using phrases such as “that’s gay” or “are you a homo or something?”)
- Have you taught or worked with a gender-expansive or transgender child?
- Have you helped a student who was excluded or put down because of some aspect of their identity? Ask for volunteers to share a few examples of what they did and what was effective.

### INTRODUCE THE FILM

- We all hear messages about LGBTQ topics from many sources, but we’re not always sure what kids have heard and what kinds of conversations they are having. This film was produced by *Welcoming Schools* to let us hear directly from students about what they hear at school, and what they’d like teachers and adults to do.
- The film features 6 – 12 year-olds from Alabama and Massachusetts. All, but one, of them attend public schools.

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- The conversations reflected in the film were not rehearsed, but reflect the kids own thoughts, feelings and experiences.
  - To give some more background on the children, you could say:
    - Nineteen are being raised by moms and dads.
    - Six are being raised in families with step-moms and step-dads due to divorce.
    - Three have lesbian or gay parents.
    - Three are being raised by single moms.
    - Two are adopted.
    - Six have parents who were born outside of the U.S.

I wish more teachers could elaborate on it [LGBTQ topics] and talk about it more, instead of like, two sentences and then dismiss the subject.

### **SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHILE WATCHING THE FILM**

- Take note of what surprises you or stands out for you.
- Do you see any implications for your own work with students?
- What can we learn from these children?

### **SHOW THE FILM**

#### **POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

Depending on the size of the group and time available, you could use some of the following prompts to create a discussion among the entire group, or in smaller clusters that break out and then report back.

- What surprised you or stood out to you from this film?
- In the film, several children mentioned they had heard the word “gay” by kindergarten and several students mentioned that they have only heard LGBTQ words in negative contexts in school. What have you heard in your school?
- Several students describe how they act as “allies” by asking other students not to say “that’s so gay.” In what ways can we as adults model and encourage and support ally behavior?
- In the film, one student says, "My teacher talked about how we should not say ‘that's so gay’ because it could hurt someone's feelings." Could you imagine having that kind of conversation with your students? How do you think they would react? What concerns would you have? In what contexts, might you expand the conversation beyond “That could hurt someone’s feelings?” What else might you say and why?
- One girl says, “My brother was five and six in kindergarten and first grade and he would get teased for being gay because he was a little bit more feminine. I really wish they would have stopped it.” Discuss ways you have and/or could address gender-related teasing and bullying.
- Are there themes in what the students said that make you think about how to address LGBTQ or gender-related topics in your school or classroom?
- How would you summarize the messages that you heard from the students?

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## CLOSING

To help participants focus on next steps in creating more welcoming schools or communities, end with these questions. You may want to record responses on a piece of easel paper so the group has a record of its likely action steps.

- Did a student say something in the film that encourages you to want to change something you do in the classroom, or to want to change something your school does as an institution?
- What are next steps that will help your school or community move forward?

My Kindergarten teacher explained what gay and lesbian were after this kid had been teased about his moms — him having two moms.

He just laid down a few things. It was like, “No teasing about who your parents love. Love is love, and you shouldn’t turn love into hate.”

## FOLLOW-UP PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

*Responding to Questions About LGBT Topics: An Interactive Skill-Building Exercise* is an excellent professional development activity that gives participants the chance to practice talking about LGBTQ topics with students, colleagues and parents or families. This activity can take 30 – 60 minutes depending upon the number of question and response role-plays you include. Practicing responses will help educators feel more confident in their classroom and school.