

# 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's not OK to use that phrase."
  - "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?"
- If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don't, make time later.

## EDUCATE:

- If you have been hearing the phrase "That's so gay" used to mean that something is bad or stupid, take the time during a class meeting or group time to make sure that your students know what "gay" means and know why it is hurtful to use it as an insult.
- Be clear with students that when they use the word "gay" in a negative way they are being disrespectful. Also be clear that using the phrase "That's so gay" is hurtful to other students who may have parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, neighbors, friends or other family members who are gay.
- In lessons on respect, stereotypes or prejudice include information about discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

## BE PROACTIVE:

- Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your class and school.
- Establish clear schoolwide and classroom policies against name-calling and hurtful teasing.
- If you have been hearing the phrase "That's so gay" in the school, be explicit that rules against name-calling include that phrase and other anti-gay put-downs.

## Why Stop Anti-Gay Comments...

**In a nationwide survey, children feared anti-gay harassment more than any other kind of name-calling.**

-Joseph A. Drake, James H. Price & Susan K. Telljohann, "The Nature and Extent of Bullying at School," *Journal of School Health*, May 2003 (pp. 173-180)

**Middle-school students who were called anti-gay names reported increased anxiety, depression, personal distress and a lower sense of school belonging.**

-V. Paul Poteat and Dorothy L. Espelage of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and published in *The Journal of Early Adolescence* (May 2007; Vol. 27, No. 2; pp.175 -191)

**Students who experience acceptance at school and at home are more highly motivated, and engaged in learning and committed to school.**

- K. F. Osterman (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research* 70(3), (pp. 323-367)



# WHAT DON'T YOU SAY TO 'THAT'S SO GAY'...

## What is *Welcoming Schools*...

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

- Embrace family diversity
- Avoid gender stereotyping
- End bullying & name-calling

**“The Welcoming Schools Guide is an innovative tool providing invaluable assistance to educators in creating safe, inclusive learning environments for all students. This is a wonderful complement to existing anti-bullying programs and a welcome addition to any school’s toolbox for preparing students for today’s diverse world”**

-Dennis Van Roekel, President,  
National Education Association

For more information on *Welcoming Schools*,  
visit [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org) or  
e-mail [welcomingschools@hrc.org](mailto:welcomingschools@hrc.org).

## 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 in handling it.

## DON'T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR:

- Saying “Josh doesn't really know what it means,” or “Sarah was only joking,” excuses hurtful behavior.

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

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

## DON'T BE IMMOBILIZED BY FEAR:

- Making a mistake is far less serious than not acting at all. You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.