NAME-CALLING AND FEELING SAFE IN SCHOOL

Suggested Grade Level: 1-4

Length of Time: Two 30-minute sessions or one one-hour session.

Goal

- 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.

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 it feels to be put down because of name-calling.

Academic Standards

- Social Studies: Provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship.
- Health: Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, and media.
- Health: Demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

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. Write these words down and organize them by where they were said. Make sure all of the different kinds of name-calling you hear are addressed. Listen for examples of what children might give as reasons for not playing with another child. These reasons might relate to race, gender, family structure, class or physical appearance. If you hear anti-gay name-calling, make sure to include it as students may not bring it up themselves.

Materials

Chart paper, markers, pencils, paper, or note cards.

Activities, Part I) Identifying Safe and Unsafe Areas in the School
Introduction

- Introduce the idea that you want to find our where the school students feel safe or comfortable and places where they do not feel safe or places where they feel less comfortable or uneasy.
- It is important to acknowledge that students feel safe and unsafe at school. You could do a quick brainstorm on chart paper or a white board.

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 of the list and pick two to three places where they feel safe. Also, ask them to pick two or three places where they feel less safe or where they have heard name-calling, hurtful teasing or seen bullying. 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.

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.

Places in the school, around the school, on the way to school	Feel safe	Feel unsafe	Sometimes safe/sometimes unsafe

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?

Action Steps

After the discussion, lead a brainstorm of action steps. Label a piece of chart paper, "What can we do about the places where we feel unsafe?" Remember that adults need to take responsibility for safety too. Students may want to make a list of what they need from adults in the community as well as from their classmates, from other students in the school and from themselves.

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.

Activities, Part 2) Looking at How Name-Calling Makes the School Feel Unsafe – A Brainstorm of Words or Names Students Hear

Begin 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, gender, family structure, 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 or other name-calling at your school, make sure to include those words.)

> **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

Finish the discussion with a look at what can be done to stop the name-calling. Use some of these questions to prompt the discussion. Make a list on chart paper.

- How can you help someone who has been called a name?
- What can students do to help stop the name-calling?
- What can teachers do to help stop the name-calling?
- What can others in the school (administrators, lunch and recess monitors, bus drivers…) do to help stop the name-calling?

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", "fag" 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.

- "Ratting" 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 "ratting" on another student for the purpose of getting him/her 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 "rats" (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

- *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 on 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 implem4nt 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.

- *Math*: Students can use the completed charts to determine what percentage of students feels safe or unsafe in specific areas. Students can also make graphic representations that depict where in the school students feel more or less safe.

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.

Suggested Books for Students

Because of Anya, Margaret Peterson Haddix

Crow Boy, Taro Yashima

The Liberation of Gabriel King, K. L. Going

Muskrat Will Be Swimming, Cheryl Savageau

No Castles Here, A.C.E. Bauer

Nothing Wrong with a Three-Legged Dog, Graham McNamee

One Hundred Dresses, Eleanor Estes

Say Something, Peggy Moss

Teammates, Peter Golenbock

Wings, Christopher A. Myers

Handouts from Welcoming Schools

- Teasing or Bullying?
- Think Before You Act
- Take a Stand and Lend a Hand
- What Do You Say to “That’s So Gay!”