

# NAME-CALLING IN OUR SCHOOLS



## OVERVIEW

Students are provided with the opportunity to objectively observe the way in which name-calling and other types of disrespectful language are used in school over a three-day period. Students are asked to reflect on their observations, to look for patterns of behavior, and to begin to consider ways in which the problem of name-calling might be addressed in their school.



## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to describe the extent and nature of name-calling and verbal bullying in school

Students will reflect on the problem of name-calling and develop strategies to address it  
Students will be able to observe, record and analyze behavior in their school



## AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Grades 6-12.



## THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

Pens, notebooks, student handouts: Name-Calling in Our School and Name Calling Log.



## TIME

30-40 minutes or one class period to introduce the activity; 3 days of observations; 45 minutes or one class period to debrief

## PROCEDURE: PART 1—INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (15-20 MINUTES)

Ask students to raise their hands if they have never been called a name or talked to in a mean or disrespectful way. Most likely there will be very few or no students raising their hands. Note the pervasiveness of name-calling in their lives and how it is often taken for granted as natural or normal. Write one or more of the following phrases on the board:

- Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.
- Boys will be boys.



# NAME-CALLING IN OUR SCHOOLS

- Teasing is just a natural part of growing up.
- It's just a joke—everyone says it.

Ask students if they agree with the above sentiments, all of which are commonly used to explain or respond to name-calling. Ask if they think name-calling is a problem in their lives or just a natural part of growing up that everyone must endure. Allow some time for discussion. Inform students that they will be participating in some observation over the course of three days to objectively examine the extent and nature of name-calling in their schools, and to further consider whether it is inevitable or a problem they can do something about.

## **PART 2 – OBSERVING AND RECORDING NAME-CALLING IN SCHOOL (15-20 MINUTES)**

Give each student a copy of the Student Handouts, Name-Calling in Our School and Name Calling Log. Review the following steps, which are included in their handout:

### **Step 1: Prepare**

Make a few copies of the attached chart or get a notebook that you can use to record your observations. Keep your charts or notebook with you at all times while you are at school or on your way to/from school over the next three days.

### **Step 2: Plan**

Think about the most appropriate times and places to observe. In addition to writing down what you see and hear as you go about your regular day, you may want to spend extra time in the gym, cafeteria, hallways or other locations. Check with your teacher to make sure your plan is okay.

### **Step 3: Observe**

Keep your ears open and your mouth zipped. As a researcher, your job is to watch, listen, and write down all examples of name-calling, verbal bullying or other examples of disrespectful language. Try to observe only and to stay out of name-calling situations that you encounter. If a student looks like they need support, ask an adult for help.

### **Step 4: Write**

You will be trying to record the information below for each incident. Try to keep your notes brief so that it doesn't take too long to capture each incident.





## NAME-CALLING IN OUR SCHOOLS

**Who:** Record information about the name-caller and the person on the receiving end, but no names please! Write down your best guess about the age/grade of the people involved, their gender (boy, girl), and other important characteristics.

**When and where:** The time of the incident and the location (classroom, cafeteria, hallway, yard, gym, bus, etc.).

**What:** The exact words that are said.

**How:** The tone in which the comment is made (angry, joking, upset, etc.).

**Response:** The response of the person(s) being targeted, if any.

**Response:** The response of bystanders to the incident, if any.

### PART 3 – DEBRIEFING AND NEXT STEPS (30-45 MINUTES)

At the end of the three days of observation, ask students to reflect upon their observations and answer the following questions. This can be done as a homework assignment, in-class writing assignment, or small group discussion:

What types of name-calling are most common (names about looks, behavior, intelligence, physical ability, friends, family, race, ethnicity, sexual comments, curses or other cruel words, etc.)?

- Who is most likely to get bullied and to do the bullying? (No names—just characteristics)
- Where/when did most incidents of name-calling take place? Were adults or other students around?
- What was the intent of the name-calling in most cases (to tease, joke, hurt, get revenge, etc.)?
- How did the targets of name-calling respond?
- Did an adult or other student get involved? If so, how?
- How do you think the problem of name-calling should be addressed in your school?

Revisit the question with which you began this lesson—is name-calling inevitable or a problem we can do something about? As a follow-up, students may be asked to write a report that summarizes their observations and what they have learned about name-calling in their school.





## NAME-CALLING IN OUR SCHOOLS

They should include their ideas for ways to reduce or end name-calling in their school community. Their reports can be presented to the school principal, guidance staff, or others in a position to help implement change. As a class, select one or more ideas that you will work on collaboratively to put into action.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION**

For younger students or students that need more assistance give them a specific class period that they should observe at least once in the next three days (ex: recess or gym class). For older students or students that need more of a challenge you can give them GLSEN's [Quick Guide to Meeting With Decision Makers](#) and have them plan out how they would present their findings to decision makers.

### **FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSIONS**

#### **OTHER LESSONS TO EXPLORE**

[Learning Empowerment and Self-Identification](#), Challenging Assumptions, Creating an Anti-Slur Policy, Blow the Whistle on Name-Calling.

### **TAGS**

No Name-Calling Week, identity, anti-bullying



## HANDOUT

What was the response by others?					
What was the target's response?					
What was the tone (angry, joking, upset, etc.)?					
What was said?					
Who was the target (age, etc., but no names)?					
Who did the name-calling (age, etc., but no names)?					
Location of incident					
Date and time					



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**Response:** The response of the person(s) being targeted, if any.

**Response:** The response of bystanders to the incident, if any.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!  
EMAIL US AT [EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG](mailto:EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG).

