

# CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS



## OVERVIEW

This lesson provides students an opportunity to experience what it's like to be labeled in a negative way, and as a result, develop empathy for those who others label, even though those labels don't fit.



## OBJECTIVES

Students will describe the pitfalls of making assumptions about other people  
Students will be able to identify assumptions we make in the development of groups  
Students will be able to describe how we sometimes use simplistic ways of viewing others  
Students will be able to reflect on times when they may have felt singled-out



## AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Grades 6-12.



## THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

Index cards, pens.



## TIME

60 minutes.

## PART 1 - ESTABLISH A SAFE SPACE

Start the conversation with students by letting them know that they will be discussing some sensitive topics in class today. Ask them to brainstorm a list of guidelines for the class discussion. Some examples may include confidentiality, respect, and one person speaking at a time. Write the student's responses on the board and reference them throughout the conversation.

## PART 2 - FORM-A-GROUP (10 MINUTES)

Directions for Form A Group:

This activity is about forming groups of people based on common interests. Start by clearing a

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space large enough to move around. The idea is to form different groups of people as quickly as possible when the teacher calls out a common interest. For example, if the teacher says “find people with the same color shirt as you” students would group themselves by shirt color. Ask inclusive questions quickly in order to keep everyone involved and moving.

- What is your favorite color?
- What is your favorite candy?
- How many pets do you have?
- What do you usually do right after school?
- What color shoes are you wearing today?
- How many people are there in your family?
- What is your favorite school subject?
- What is your least favorite school subject?

### **PART 3 - ASSUMPTIONS (15 MINUTES)**

Handout 3x5 cards and ask the students to write answers to the following questions. Make sure that they do not share their responses with others until later.

1. What wouldn't we know by just looking at you?
2. What is your favorite book?
3. What goal are you working towards?
4. What is your most positive personality trait?
5. What personal experiences do you have, if any, with discrimination?

Collect the cards, Shuffle the cards and pass them out randomly, ensuring that no one has their own card. Ask the students to find the owner of the card based on the answers.

#### Discussion Questions

- How accurate were the assumptions you made about people you don't know very well?
- Did you learn anything about your classmates that surprised you?
- What are the dangers of making assumptions?
- What is a stereotype?
- How can assumptions about groups lead to stereotypes?
- What can we do to prevent stereotyping?

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### **PART 4 - SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (10 MINUTES)**

Divide the students up into different groups by counting off 1 through 5.

Once everyone is seated with a new group, pose the following questions and ask students to engage in a small-group discussion in which each student has the chance to share an experience with the group:

- Can you remember a time when you were called a name or put down for being different from others around you?
- How did it feel?
- What did you do?
- Can you remember a time when you called someone a name because they were different?
- How do you think it made them feel?
- Give groups approximately 1.5 minute per group member to share their experiences.

### **PART 5 - LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)**

Draw the class together and ask students to share any connections they see between the various stories their classmates told. Record the similarities that come up on the board for students to refer to in the next portion of the lesson.

Challenge students to use the experiences they just shared about their individual experiences with being called names for being different, and the similarities they found among their stories to generate a group discussion. Let students know they will be discussing their experiences and as a group, developing simple ways to stay SAFE when name-calling or bullying occurs. Ask students to be honest when expressing their feelings and experiences with name-calling and bullying, and to show respect to other students.

Ask the students to share their experiences with the larger group. Lead the students in a discussion using the following questions:

- How did it feel to be called a name or put down for being different?
- Did you know how to end the situation?
- What was it like working in groups today with people that were both similar to and different from you?
- How do our differences help us do good work?
- What can you do when you are being called names or bullied?



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Let students come up with their own ideas before presenting them with the SAFE guidelines. Provide the students with the No Name-Calling Week Pledge and the Staying SAFE Guidelines.

Ask the students to sign the pledge, agreeing to end name-calling and bullying. Review the Staying SAFE guidelines with the students.

If you are being called names or bullied, remember the four ways to stay SAFE:

**Say What you Feel:** Tell the person who is bullying you or calling you names the way their actions make you feel.

**Ask for Help:** Sometimes you can't handle the situation yourself, and it's ok to ask for help. Find a teacher or other school staff member to talk to.

**Find a Friend:** Hanging out with people who make you feel good about yourself is important, and the person calling you names might think twice before picking on you when you're with your friends.

**Exit the Area:** While it may feel like you aren't doing anything at all, sometimes walking away from someone who is picking on you is the best way to end things.

### TERMS TO KNOW (OPTIONAL)

**Staying Safe:** If you are being called names or bullied, remember the four ways to stay SAFE:

Say what you feel

Ask for help

Find a friend

Exit the area

What does SAFE mean?

1. Say what you feel

Telling a person who is teasing you or calling you names the way that their words or actions make you feel can be a great way to let that person know that you don't like what they are doing. You can start your sentence by saying something like "When you say/do \_\_\_\_\_ to me, it makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_." Being angry or sad when someone is bullying you is ok, and it is ok to let that person (or someone else) know what you are going through.

2. Ask for help



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Sometimes you can handle name-calling and bullying yourself (possibly by using one of the other SAFE strategies). But sometimes you need to ask for help, and that's ok. If a person who is calling you names is making you feel scared that you might get hurt, you can talk to a teacher or other adult about what is going on.

Asking for help is not about tattling – it's about taking care of yourself and staying safe.

### 3. Find a friend

Some people who call names or bully others like to pick times and places when no one else is around because it makes them feel safer. That's why sometimes you can end a bullying situation just by finding another person or people to be around or spend time with. Hanging out with people who make you feel good about yourself is important, and the person calling names might think twice before picking on you when you're with your friends

### 4. Exit the area

While it might feel like you aren't doing anything at all, sometimes walking away from someone who is picking on you is the best way to end things. Some people who tease want you to get upset, and while it's perfectly normal to feel hurt, angry or sad if you are being called names, sticking around the person hurting you may just make things worse. So, if you can, find a way to exit the area where the teasing is happening.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION

For younger students or students that need extra assistance give them the “assumption” questions beforehand so they can write their answers before coming to class. Begin by reviewing SAFE to set up a foundation for the students to know what they can do in a situation of bullying or name-calling. Additionally, small group work can be done in pairs and the large group discussion can be done or previewed in small groups. Older groups or students that need a challenge can brainstorm a moment where they would implement the SAFE strategy in the small group discussion, and demonstrate SAFE or create a scenario for the class that puts this idea into practice.

## FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSIONS

Other Lessons to Explore: [Learning Empowerment and Self-Identification](#), Challenging Assumptions, Beauty is Skin Deep, Creating an Anti-Slur Policy

## TAGS

No Name-Calling Week, policy, identity, anti-bullying.



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## HANDOUT

### NO NAME CALLING WEEK PLEDGE

I, \_\_\_\_\_ believe that bullying and calling others hurtful names is wrong. I pledge to do my best to:

- Not bully others or call them hurtful names.
- Intervene, if I safely can, in situations when students are being called names.
- Support efforts to end bullying and name-calling.

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).

