

# I WAS JUST KIDDING!



## OVERVIEW

Students are asked to consider the difference between good-natured teasing and bullying through discussion of fictional scenarios and reflection on real-life situations. Students are provided with concrete guidelines that help them to understand when harmless joking has crossed the line to become disrespectful or mean.



## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to explain the difference between harmless teasing and verbal bullying. Students will apply their knowledge of teasing and verbal bullying awareness to real-life situations.



## AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Grades 6-12.



## THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

Chart paper/markers, pens, student handouts I Was Just Kidding! and Teasing or Bullying?



## TIME

45-60 minutes.

## PART 1 – INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)

Write the following phrases on the board:

- I was just kidding.
- I didn't mean anything by it.
- Can't you take a joke?

Ask students if they have ever had their feelings hurt or been talked to disrespectfully only to hear one of the above expressions in response to their disapproval. Invite a couple of volunteers to share an incident and to describe how it felt. Ask if, in retrospect, they were overly sensitive or if the comments “crossed the line.” Challenge students to articulate how they know when a comment is mean or offensive rather than funny. List these measures or standards on a sheet of chart paper and discuss for a few minutes.



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### **PART 2 – JUST KIDDING SCENARIOS (15 MINUTES)**

Distribute the handout, *I Was Just Kidding!* Ask students to work with a partner to read each scenario and to discuss whether the incident described is “harmless teasing” or “hurtful,” or to identify additional information needed to make a decision. Students should be specific as they list their reasons and articulate particular criteria used to evaluate each situation. When students have responded to all three scenarios, discuss their conclusions as a class and add key ideas to the list you started in Part 1 of the lesson. Ask students to share their responses to the final question on the handout: “Teasing has crossed the line to become hurtful when...”

### **PART 3 – REVIEWING GUIDELINES (10 MINUTES)**

Distribute the handout, “Teasing or Bullying?”, which provides very specific guidelines about types of teasing that are “off limits.” Review the information with students to reinforce their understanding of the difference between good-natured teasing and hurtful language.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION**

Younger students or students that need extra assistance, can work through the examples in part 2 in a small group setting with teacher guidance. Previewing the scenario and the handout before the lesson can also encourage participation. Older students or students that need a challenge can answer additional prompts about how they would address the situations to interrupt the bullying or create their own.

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

Students can continue to refer to the handout “Teasing or Bullying?” throughout the year, and it can be used as a silent reflection when conflict arises. Students can take these suggestions and ideas and expand upon them to create a story, skit, poem, song, or poster to keep the ideas and strategies present in the classroom culture.

### **OTHER LESSONS TO EXPLORE**

[Learning Empowerment and Self-Identification](#), Challenging Assumptions, Creating an Anti-Slur Policy, Instant Replay.

### **TAGS**

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



## HANDOUT

### I Was Just Kidding!

When teasing or name-calling leads to hurt feelings, “I was just kidding!” is a common response. Most of us enjoy good-natured teasing that is done in fun. And some people just don’t know how to take a joke, right? So, how do we know when we have crossed the line? When are we no longer “just kidding,” but actually participating in mean and harmful behavior?

Read the scenarios below. With a partner or in a small group, discuss whether or not you think each situation is an example of harmless teasing or hurtful language. Explain how you came to your decisions or what additional information you need to make a decision.

1. Manuel (he/him) and Ky (he/him) are in the locker room changing after baseball practice. Ky shares with Manuel that his mom is really sick and he starts to cry. Manuel holds Ky to comfort him while he’s crying. Their teammates come into the locker room and start to laugh at the two boys, and comment “What are you two doing? That’s so gay!”

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

2. Simone identifies as fat, male, Black, and disabled and uses he/him pronouns. He is really proud of his identities and speaks to the school about his rights surrounding accessibility needs and body positivity. He sometimes wears dresses on days that restrictive clothing is painful, which has resulted in other students making comments asking Simone if he is a boy or a girl. Someone even told Simone that if he’s trying to be a boy, he shouldn’t be wearing dresses that show off his curves.

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

3. Bex (she/her) and Hanuel (they/them) have been best friends for years. Bex and Hanuel have been working on a project together for their science class on fermentation. Bex has a bad habit of forgetting things which she makes fun of herself for all the time. She was supposed to bring their homemade Kimchi project for their presentation the next day and she forgot it at home. When she told Hanuel, they giggled a little, rolled their eyes and said, “You, my friend, have the brain of a goldfish. It’s okay, you can bring it tomorrow and I’ll text to remind you.”



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Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

4. Farzana identifies as a pansexual transfemme Muslim, and uses they/them pronouns. Farzana has recently come out to their friends as transfemme and asked some of their friends to remind people to use the right pronouns. One of their friends corrected a boy in their class when he used the wrong pronouns. The boy laughed and said “What do you mean, he can’t even be gay, he’s Muslim.”

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?





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## HANDOUT

### Teasing or Bullying?

Most of us enjoy teasing that is done in fun. Sometimes, though, our joking goes too far. We all need to be sensitive to topics and behaviors that may not be appreciated by others. Use the information below to help evaluate when teasing is good-natured and when it has crossed the line. Remember, everyone deserves the right to feel safe and to be left alone.

### GOOD-NATURED TEASING...

1. Involves a playful back-and-forth between both parties.
2. Is accompanied by a friendly tone of voice and laughter.
3. Is accompanied by affectionate gestures or expressions.
4. Brings people closer and encourages friendships.
5. Sometimes helps to lighten a tense or angry situation.
6. Does not lead to physical confrontations

### HURTFUL TEASING OR BULLYING...

1. May be accompanied by an angry tone of voice.
2. May be accompanied by angry body language, such as clenched fists.
3. Continues even when the person being teased shows distress.
4. Continues even when the person teasing knows the topic is upsetting to others.
5. Is sometimes accompanied by showing off in front of others.

THINK FIRST! Consider the following three areas before engaging in what may seem like good natured teasing. If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you may be crossing the line.

### THE PERSONALITY AND EXPERIENCES OF THE OTHER PERSON

1. Are you aware that the person has not appreciated teasing in the past?
2. Are you aware that certain subjects are touchy for the other person?
3. Are you aware of a factor in the other person's life that may make them especially sensitive to teasing?





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### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND THE OTHER PERSON

1. Is the person a stranger or someone you don't know very well?
2. Do you have a history of social problems with the person?
3. Is he or she likely to misunderstand your intentions or sense of humor?
4. Are you bigger and/or older than the other person?
5. Are there gender, race or other differences between you that may make some topics inappropriate?

### THE TOPIC OF THE TEASING

1. Is the teasing about identity (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender)?
2. Is the teasing about appearance (body size/shape, complexion, clothing, physical attractiveness)?
3. Is the teasing about ability (intelligence, physical strength or skill)?
4. Is the teasing about social status (friends, family, class)?
5. Does the teasing compare someone with an object or animal in an offensive way?
6. Does the teasing have sexual content?

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).