

LESSON for GRADE 6: I WAS JUST KIDDING!

OVERVIEW: Students are asked to consider the difference between good-natured teasing and harassment 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:

- To help students understand and articulate the difference between harmless teasing and verbal harassment
- To provide students with an opportunity to apply this awareness to concrete situations
- To help students understand how public teasing or harassment impacts the community

TIME: 45 minutes or one class period

MATERIALS: Chart paper/markers; pens; Student handouts: *I Was Just Kidding!* & *Teasing or Harassment?*

PROCEDURE:

PART 1—INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)

Write the following phrases on the board:

- I was just kidding.
- I didn't mean it like that.
- Can't you take a joke?
- I wasn't even talking to them.

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 good natured teasing. List these measures or standards on a sheet of chart paper and discuss for a few minutes.

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 Harassment?*, 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. After reviewing, go back to the scenarios and redo using the information from the handout *Teasing or Harassment?*. Talk about their responses as a class and ask what they learned.

I WAS JUST KIDDING

When teasing or name-calling leads to hurt feelings or consequences, “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 participating in mean 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. Sonia is 5 feet 8 inches and towers over most of the students in her sixth grade class. While looking for a place to sit during lunch, her friend saw her looking for a seat and went up to her and said, “Hey, shorty, come sit with us!” Sonia laughed and decided to sit down with her friend’s group. Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

2. At the lunch table, Angel says to his best friend Dave, "Dude, what's up with your sweater. It's so gay." Dave chuckles and replies, "I know, right? My mom bought it for me and said I had to wear it at least once." Some kids at the table laugh, some don't. Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

3. On Monday afternoon, Rob posted his student council campaign poster online, which read, “Vote Rob for Student Council President.” On Tuesday, Rob found out that another student had altered the posting and forwarded it to other students. On the new version, “President,” was replaced with “First Lady.” One of Rob’s classmates indicated that Maria had altered the poster and forwarded it to others. Rob glared at her and she responded, “It’s just a joke.” Maria laughed. “Lighten up—I’m gonna vote for you.” Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

Based on your conversation, list three ways to complete the following sentence.

Teasing has crossed the line to become hurtful when...

TEASING OR HARASSMENT?

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...

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

HURTFUL TEASING OR HARASSMENT...

- May be accompanied by an angry tone of voice
- May be accompanied by angry body language, such as clenched fists
- Continues even when the person being teased shows distress
- Continues even when the person teasing knows the topic is upsetting to others
- Is sometimes accompanied by showing off in front of others
- Can be seen or heard by others who may find it offensive even if both parties consider it teasing?

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:

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

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND THE OTHER PERSON:

- Is the person a stranger or someone you don't know very well? (Such as someone on a social networking site?)
- Do you have a history of social problems with the person?
- Is he or she likely to misunderstand your intentions or sense of humor?
- Are you bigger and/or older than the other person?
- Are there gender, race or other differences between you that may make some topics inappropriate?

THE TOPIC AND LOCATION OF THE TEASING:

- Is the teasing about identity (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender)?
- Is the teasing about appearance (body size/shape, complexion, clothing, physical attractiveness)?
- Is the teasing about ability (intelligence, physical strength or skill)?
- Is the teasing about social status (friends, family, how much money you have)?
- Is the teasing being done in public where other people might misunderstand your intentions or feel unsafe because of what you said?
- Does the teasing have sexual content?^{1*}

^{1*} *The following book was used as a resource for this fact sheet: Teasing and Harassment: The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents by John H. Hoover and Glenn W. Olsen, National Education Service (2001). Lesson was adapted from No-name Calling Week Resource Guide, Copyright 2004 GLSEN, Inc.*