

I WAS JUST KIDDING – TEACHERS GUIDE

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?

----- *This situation is more than likely “harmless teasing.” Although this teasing is about appearance, the students are friends and it is unlikely that anyone else heard the teasing.* -----

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?

----- *This situation is ‘hurtful language.’ The student is using a homophobic remark to talk about the sweater and it clear that other students heard the comment (it is public). This situation is creating an unsafe environment for a student who is GLBT or cares about someone who is.* -----

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?

----- *This situation is ‘hurtful language.’ The student is making fun of Rob’s gender expression or could be making a comment about his sexual orientation. Maria is challenging his masculinity. It is clear that other students have seen the comment (it is public). If this situation continues, it could be considered serious harassment.* -----