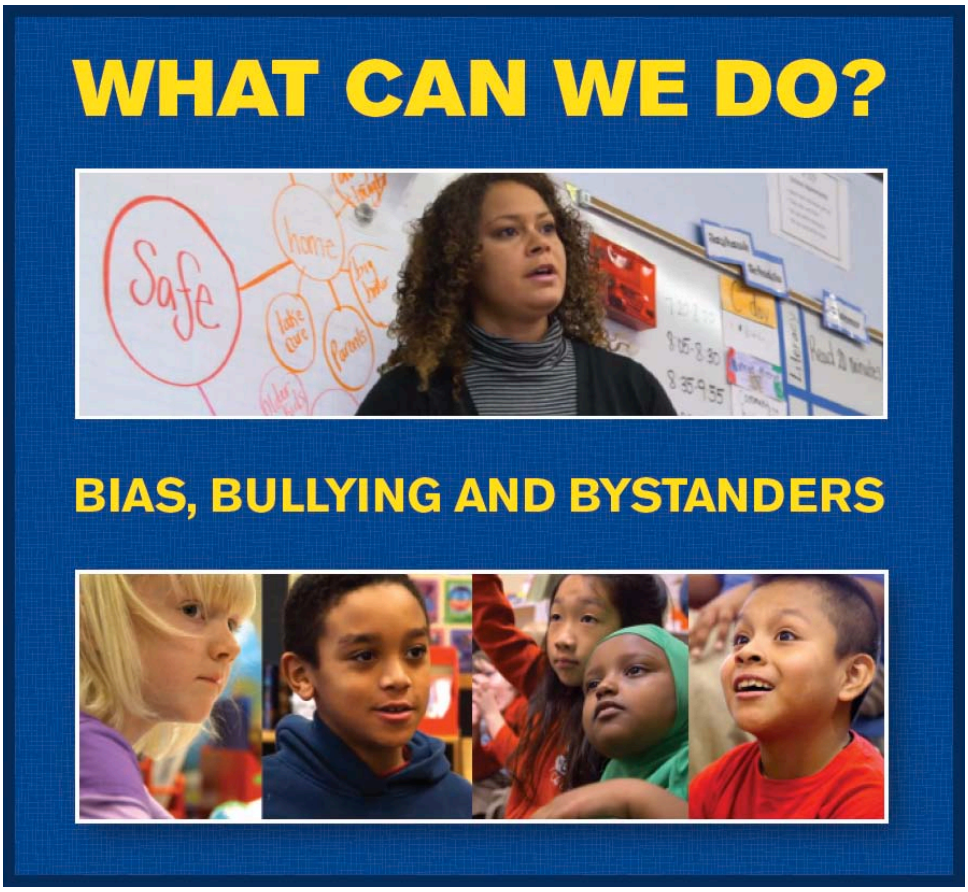
Welcoming Schools



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Welcoming Schools

Welcoming Schools is a comprehensive, LGBT-inclusive approach to creating respectful and supportive elementary schools for all students and their families. It is grounded in research that clearly links improved academic achievement, better social-emotional well-being, and an inclusive school climate.

Welcoming Schools addresses:

- **Respecting family diversity** including adoptive families, foster families, children being raised by grandparents, single parent families, and LBGT headed families.
- **Avoiding gender stereotyping** including stereotypes related to gender roles and expectations, gender identity and expression, and gender expansive children.
- **Ending hurtful name-calling and bullying** including the many types of bias-based comments and harassment that students experience.

Welcoming Schools provides tools and resources including:

- Professional development training for administrators, educators and all adults in the school community.
- Educational materials for school leaders, educators, parents/guardians to make teachable moments and intervention more effective.
- Lesson plans aligned with Common Core Standards.
- Engaging short films that feature students and teachers highlighting what they hear in school, what they need, and what can be done to create a more welcoming school environment.
- Technical assistance to meet the specific needs of school districts, schools, and community based organizations.
- Guides for school, community, and family engagement sessions.
- Extensive annotated bibliographies addressing family diversity, gender identity and stereotyping, LGBT topics for students, and bullying.

75% of students who were harassed report that it they were targeted because of their identity, including, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.

CA Healthy Kids Survey 2009-11

BEFORE WATCHING *WHAT CAN WE DO?* SIX KEY POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Safe students are more successful students.** Research clearly shows that there is a connection between social and emotional well-being, school connectedness and improved academic achievement.
- **Some words DO hurt more than others.** Bullying and hurtful name-calling based on identity has more severe effects than other kinds of bullying.
- **It takes more than a few good lesson plans to create safe schools.** Programs that involve the entire school community including administrators, teachers, other school staff, parents and guardians, and students are most effective in creating a school environment that reduces hurtful, mean behavior and allows students to thrive.

When students report a more severe bullying climate, school-wide passing rates on standardized tests are up to 5% lower.

Virginia High School Safety Study, 2008

- **Young students see and know more than we think.** Most educators underestimate the amount of bullying and name-calling that students experience. Students are counting on the adults in the school community to help them figure out what to do about it.
- **There are many ways to be an ally.** Students can learn to support someone who is hurt by bullying behaviors by speaking out, seeking support from an adult, listening to someone who has been hurt, talking to those involved, and learning about and appreciating differences.
- **Noticing differences is natural. We can learn not to make negative judgments on the basis of difference.** When a student notices differences, adults' responses can set in motion that student's understanding and acceptance of difference – or the opposite. These times can be valuable "teachable-moments."

Compared with students harassed for other reasons, students who report they were harassed for their race, religion, ability, perceived sexual orientation, or gender:

- have higher rates of depression and drug use;
- are up to twice as likely to have thought about or attempted suicide;
- are more likely to have lower grades and skip school;
- are twice as likely to have their personal belongings stolen or deliberately damaged at school; and
- are up to 4 times as likely to have been threatened with a weapon at school.

Stephen Russell et al., 2012, *American Journal of Public Health*

WHY THIS FILM?

"You're Gay." "Your skin is too brown." "Fatty." "Your religion is fake." "Estúpido."

- These are the actual words of students in the film.
- These are the kinds of words and phrases that elementary school students say they hear their peers use to hurt one another.
- Students want adults in the school community to help them out.
- Educators want to know what they can do.

> Both children who are targeted and children who exhibit bullying behavior have lower academic achievement in school.
>
> Joseph Drake, 2003
> *Journal of School Health*

Schools everywhere are working to address bullying and harassment in meaningful and effective ways. We hope this film will stimulate staff and classroom conversations that directly address the kinds of hurtful language that students use and overhear every day. It saddens our hearts to highlight these words and phrases but the film also restores our faith by demonstrating caring, proactive teachers working to understand and stop the bullying and bias in their schools.

While all educators want their students to feel safe from bullying many feel nervous talking about diversity – race, ethnicity, gender, gay slurs, etc. – with students. The teachers featured in this film, model ways to engage students in these conversations by using Welcoming Schools lesson plans with their students.

What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, and Bystanders illustrates:

- Elementary school students are capable of talking respectfully about differences.
- Elementary students understand the power of words that target a person's identity.
- Elementary school students want to be allies to their peers.
- Professional development for staff and engaging lesson plans for students are critical components of creating safe and welcoming schools.

> Students who experience acceptance at school are more highly motivated, engaged in learning and committed to school.
>
> Karen Osterman, 2000
> *Review of Educational Research*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN THE *WELCOMING SCHOOLS* APPROACH

- **Be an Upstander Yourself**. You are a role model for students. They watch what you do and will follow your lead. They notice whether you stop hurtful name-calling or comments based on skin color, gender, religion, weight, ability, family structure etc. They notice what topics you never talk about. They worry they might be the next targets of a mean remark.

> Adult models of intervention are more effective than peer modeling with third graders; by sixth grade peer models are more effective.
>
> Aboud & Joong, 2008

- **Practice. Practice. Practice.** Improving your skills at anything takes practice – including stopping hurtful bullying and teasing. Practice with colleagues what you could say to students to stop bullying comments and let students know that you expect respect and accept diversity. Practice responding to students' questions about differences. It's ok to not be perfect or perfectly comfortable before you start this in your classrooms. You will have many opportunities over the course of a school year to get it right. Ignoring the situation won't make it go away. (See *Cultivating Conversations About Difference* and *Responding to Student's Questions Professional Development* activities on the website.)

- **Teach your students how to be allies.** Work with your students so they know what they can do if they witness bullying – including talking with or befriending the targeted student, confiding in an adult, talking with the student who is being mean, causing a distraction to help stop the harassment, or speaking up in the moment. (See *Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander* lesson on the DVD or website.)

- **Involve families.** Show the film or trailer at an evening event for parents/guardians to spark discussion on bullying and bias, and help them see how they can be part of the school community effort to develop a welcoming school. Host a family night with a panel of diverse families from your school community. Hold a book night with students or teachers reading from books that show a range of diversity – including racial, ethnic, religious, economic status or family structure. (See *Community Building and Education for Parents/Guardians: An Evening Screening of What Can We Do?* On the DVD or website.)

- **Engage your students**. Read books about bullying prevention such as *One* by Kathryn Otoshi or *Benjamin and the Word/Benjamin y La Palabara* by Daniel Olivas to spark discussions on hurtful teasing and ways to be an ally to classmates. Discuss with students the real putdowns they hear, paying close attention to the ones that target a child or their families' identity. (See *Words that Hurt, Words that Heal* lesson and *Books to Engage Students on Bullying and Diversity* on the DVD or website.)

FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Preparing to watch the film:

Whether you watch this film alone or with a group, preparation helps to set the tone and space to get the most out of your viewing. Here are some suggestions:

- Take a look at the three lesson plans demonstrated in this video. (On the DVD and website.)
- Review additional materials on the DVD and WS website related to bullying, bias, and best practices for effective programs, definitions of bullying and bias.
- Familiarize yourself with your school or district policies and/or procedures regarding bullying and bias.

> Elementary school staff often underestimates the number of students involved in frequent bullying. While the majority of school staff estimates that less than 10% of their students were bullied in the past month, over 30% of students say they were frequently bullied.
>
> Catherine Bradshaw, 2007
> *School Psychology Review*

Before you watch *What Can We Do?*

- Brainstorm a list of all the ways you think students might be experiencing bullying and bias especially those things that are based on their identity or who they are.
- Consider which of these are the most difficult for you to address and why.

Introducing the Film:

- This was filmed in two public schools that worked with a Welcoming Schools consultant who provided ongoing professional development for the entire faculty.
- The film shows the first time that these teachers have taught the lessons. We thank them for being brave enough to allow us to film in their classroom. The film only depicts a portion of each lesson. Using the actual lesson plans as a guide, viewers can consider nuances of the lesson that may not have been depicted in this film.

While you watch, pay special attention to the following:

- What topics the lessons address.
- The issues that children are "dealing with." Notice all of the forms of bias or put-downs that the children mention in the film.
- How other students respond to and react to these issues.
- How the teacher addresses these issues.
- What preparation was needed by the teacher to implement the lessons.

> 57% of interventions by elementary age children stops the harassment within 10 seconds.
>
> D.Lynn Hawkins, 2001
> *Social Development*

Post viewing discussion – allow time for reflection and deeper learning

I. Sharing and Reflection: Initial Reactions to the Film

> Bystanders are more likely to act when they perceive they have the skills to do so.
>
> Aboud & Joong, 2008

- What stood out to you while watching the film?
- What moved you? What surprised you?
- What steps do you think your school would need to take to incorporate these lesson plans in your classrooms?"
- Did you notice the different forms of bias mentioned within the lessons, either by teachers or students? What were all the different kinds of comments mentioned by the students? How did this compare with your brainstorm list?
- What were some of the responses you noticed among the children when certain things were said?
- What kinds of biases are the students in the film especially looking to adults to handle?
- What did you notice about the teacher(s) in response to student comments and questions?
- How was what you saw in the film similar or different to the *Welcoming Schools* lesson plans?

2. What Can You Say to Stop Hurtful Language and Educate Students? Discussing and Practicing Sample Responses

Saying "don't use that word" is not enough. We need to educate students about why something is hurtful and not simply send them to the principal's office or assume they understand. Check out: *Bias, Bullying and Bystander: Tips for Elementary School Educators* and *What Do You Say to "That's So Gay"?* (Handouts are available on the DVD and website.)

Here are sample responses to things you might overhear students say. You can look for more samples within the handouts mentioned above. Also, you can start to develop and practice your own responses. Try these out…

- "Do you know what that means? It's a put down for someone's religion. There are many different religions in this world and in this school we have respect for all religions."
- "You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but saying 'that's gay' can hurt those around you. Do you know what that means? And if they say no, you can respond: "When used respectfully, it describes a man and a man or a woman and a woman who love each other. In our school we don't use words that describe people as putdowns."
- "That was a stereotype. Stereotypes are a kind of lie and they hurt people's feelings."

Some Scenarios From *What Can We Do?*:

- "He said if you touch the floor it will turn you gay." *How would you handle this? Is there a way to make clear that a person being gay is not a problem, but using the word "gay" as a putdown is not OK.*
- "He called him chocolate balls." *How might you respond to this and other slurs based on skin color? What do you think about the teachers sharing her own experience in* her *response? In what kinds of scenarios might you share some of your own experiences?*
- "Adults can just make it worse…" *Why do you think students think this sometimes? What can you and all adults do to offer support, be available, and not make it worse when children tell us something is going on? (See below for what some 5th graders said.)*
- In response to a *comment* about race one student states, "I would get an adult. Because if I would just do it myself, I'd probably get in trouble. Because I might start something, too. You never know." *What might you say to support the child in their decision? Keep in mind, a student who is self-aware and avoids conflict is probably showing good judgment – but also needs adult support.*

3. Engage Students in Deeper Learning:

Use open-ended questions during "teachable moments." We don't always have to discipline children who are using inappropriate language; often it is simply a matter of education. And, isn't that what schools are all about? Here are some sample questions to help students better understand why what they are saying may be inappropriate and even hurtful to others.

- Why do you think it is wrong for boys to wear pink?
- Has anyone called you a name that made you feel bad?
- What are the things that help you to feel safe at school?

4. Skill Building

Allow time for review and practice to improve your skills and comfort responding to bias in the classroom

- Give educators the opportunity to practice teaching these lessons with their peers.
- Have multiple books available as suggested in the lesson plans. Review and think about how they could be used in a classroom. Have participants match them to the lessons they are aligned with.
- Make sure teachers have the chance to debrief the lesson after they practice.
- Have educators determine where in the current curriculum these lessons would fit.

A boy in the film said he was told, "You're wearing a girl's shirt!" and he said, "OK, I'll change my shirt."

The shirt the boy referred to had this Paul Frank monkey on it:

THE LESSONS PLANS IN *WHAT CAN WE DO?*

- **Words that Hurt, Words that Heal** with the book "One" by Kathryn Otoshi: This lesson, appropriate for grades K – 3, illustrates the power of being an ally as well as the impact of bullying on students who are targeted as well as those who are bystanders. Generates discussion with students about ways they have experienced or witnessed bullying. Looks at ways classmates could stand up for each other.
- **Name-Calling and Feeling Safe in School**: A lesson appropriate for all grade levels that helps educators talk about the safe and unsafe places at school – both physical and emotional. A lesson like this, done school wide at every grade level, can help increase safety and inform staff if there are any safety issues that need to be addressed.
- **Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander:** This lesson for grades 4 - 6 helps students sort out their choices and consider how they will respond – do nothing, tell the person to stop, tell an adult or talk to the child being harassed – to different bullying or hurtful teasing situations.

According to the 5th graders in a study of over 13,000 students in grades 5-12:

Peer actions that make things better are:

- spending time or talking with them at school,
- helping them get away from the situation,
- making a distraction,
- and helping them tell an adult at the school.

Peer actions that make things worse are:

- blaming them for what happened,
- making fun of them for being teased or for asking for help,
- and ignoring the situation.

Adult actions that make things better are:

- listening, giving advice and encouragement,
- checking in over time to see if things got better,
- increasing adult supervision,
- and disciplining the student who was mean.

Adult actions that make things worse are:

- telling them to stop tattling,
- telling them to solve it themselves,
- telling the student that they should have acted differently,
- and ignoring the situation.

Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon, 2010, Youth Voice Research Project

A School-Wide Welcoming Schools Framework with *What Can We Do?*

The three lesson plans featured in *What Can We Do?* can help educators, parents and students become part of a full school approach to developing a more welcoming, caring and safe school. Here are some ideas to use these lesson plans and the *Welcoming Schools* approach as a way to jump start critical conversations with educators, parents/guardians, and students.

Professional Development

- Implement activities in the film and guide during professional development time or staff meetings for adult participation prior to introducing lessons to students. This will help educators become more comfortable with the activities and refine the lesson plans to best meet the needs of the school.
- Use the *Ally and Bystander* lesson as an activity in a training or at a staff meeting. Adults can respond as students or adults – providing insight into student experiences when bullying occurs and adult experiences when they are confronted with challenging behaviors from colleagues, parents, or students. Through this activity, adults will better understand what it means to be an ally.
- Use the *Words that Hurt, Words that Heal* lesson and the book, *One,* in a professional development session as a model for creating a unified school climate.
- Take the time to practice interrupting hurtful language. See: *Bias, Bullying and Bystander: Tips for Elementary School Educators* and *What Do You Say to "That's so Gay"?* (On the DVD)
- Allow time to review books and lessons to improve your skills and comfort responding to bias in the classroom.

Parent / School Community Engagement

After educators have participated in *Welcoming Schools* professional learning and have practiced or role-played the ***WCWD*** lessons, hold a community wide evening for parents, guardians, and care givers to discuss developing a more welcoming, caring school community. This helps provide a frame for unity, visibility and ownership by the wider school community.

- Have a key person in your school community provide a clear frame for why developing a welcoming school is important for all students.
- Show the trailer for *What Can You Do?* (which is almost like a 3 minute film) Use this a jumping off point to discuss steps you are taking to stop bullying and harassment.
- Include a dramatic reading by students or a teacher of the book, *One,* used in the film.
- Share student anecdotes of hurtful teasing or ways that students have stood up for each other.

- Do the activity version of the lesson, Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander. This gives people time to really think about how students and adults may respond to bullying and bias-based comments.
- Display some of the books that you may use in lessons as you develop a more welcoming school.
- For the event, have displays of student work visible for parents and guardians to see. Feature drawings or writing about family, being an ally, welcoming all to you school…
- If you have an existing anti-bullying program or social-emotional learning program, discuss how Welcoming Schools work integrates with those programs.

Student Engagement

The lesson activities featured in ***What Can We Do?*** provide structure for school-wide *Welcoming Schools* engagement including:

- integration of common language,
- recognition of various aspects of name calling and bullying and
- development of intentional action and process to create a caring school climate.

The Lesson: Words that Hurt, Words that Heal (Grades K-3)
In the earliest grades, work with students to identify hurtful actions and caring responses. Empower students by introducing language and intentional behavior, to create a compassionate and engaging climate. Be sure to stress that allies "stand up " for any target—not just friends. Tie the ally concept into discussing the importance of including and helping the person who acts with aggressive behavior so they also remain a part of the caring community.

The Lesson: Name-Calling and Feeling Safe in School (Grades K-5)
Through a mapping activity and discussion, students identify putdowns and locations where students are more vulnerable to name-calling and bullying.

- Over the course of a week, have many (or all) classes in the school use this lesson as a school-wide evaluation tool.
- Educators can share their individual classroom responses to generate a school-wide map of hot spots that need attention.
- The original mapping activity can serve as a pre-survey and an end of the year mapping activity can serve as a post-survey. Upper grade students can develop a report on assessment of data.
- With the each class review the list of action steps they developed during the lesson. Decide on actions students could take to make your school feel safer. Develop and carry out a plan to implement those actions.

The Lesson: Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander (Grades 4-6)
For the older elementary students this lesson helps them consider how they would respond when witnessing bias-based put-downs and mean behavior.

With thought provoking activities, this lesson provides opportunities for students to practice intervention and understand their roles as allies. This lesson can help develop common language and understanding across the classrooms in these grade levels.

School-wide activities

- Adopt school-wide terminology for allies, witnesses and bystanders. Include terms on word walls and vocabulary lists for each grade level. See *Definitions for Students* and *A Few Notes on Language on Bullying and Bias.*
- Hallway Displays: Each grade level or class could have a time that they are responsible for creating a Welcoming Schools bulletin board. As a follow-up to lessons, students could create visual or written work that represents: ways to be an ally, welcoming diversity, or welcoming all students and their families in your school.
- Ensure the school library and/or classrooms have books to engage students in discussions of how they can be allies to each other, understanding and respecting differences, and the impact of mean teasing or bullying. See the bibliography: *Books to Engage Elementary Students on Bullying and Diversity.*
- Develop a Welcoming Schools or Caring Community committee to assess the needs for your school. The committee could help develop plans improving school climate for an up-coming school year; plan for professional development; organize parent and school community meetings; assess school climate among students; and check-in over the course of the year on actions taken to create a caring community. Contact a *Welcoming Schools* regional consultant for advice.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON THE DVD

- Trailer for *What Do You Know? Six to Twelve Year-olds Talk About Gays and Lesbians*. Directed by Ellen Brodsky. Produced by *Welcoming Schools*.
- Before Watching *What Can We Do?* Six Key Points to Keep in Mind
- Bias, Bullying and Bystanders – Tips for Elementary School Educators
- What Do You Say to `That's So Gay'?
- Books to Engage Elementary Students on Bullying and Diversity
- Ice Breaker: A Reflection on Experiences with Bullying
- Practicing Responses to Students with Scenarios from *What Can We Do?*
- Ally – Bystander Activity for Educators and Parents/Guardians
- Bullying Facts – Read-Arounds: A Quick Way to Look at Research
- Terminology: Some Notes on Language About Bias and Bullying
- Acknowledgements and Film Credits
- *What Can We Do?* Discussion Guide and Handout References

WELCOMING SCHOOLS RESOURCES ON THE WEB

- **Home Page** www.welcomingschools.org/
- **Film: *What Can We Do?*** www.welcomingschools.org/what-can-we-do/
- **Film: *What Do You Know?*** *Six to Twelve Year-olds Talk About Gays and Lesbians.* See the trailer on the DVD. www.welcomingschools.org/what-do-you-know-the-film/
- **Teachable Moments** www.welcomingschools.org/teachable-moments/
  What Do You Say to "That's So Gay"?; Help with responding to students questions;
- **Cultivating Conversations About Difference:** A professional development session that helps adults turn student questions and concerns into teachable moments.
- **Resources** www.welcomingschools.org/resources/
  Bibliographies on family diversity; bullying, and gender; Legal information; Lesson Plans; Linking *Welcoming Schools* to Academic Standards.
- **Regional Consultants** www.welcomingschools.org/experts-in-your-area/
  Available around the country for professional development trainings; Planning for film screenings; Developing a respectful, caring school environment.
- **Bullying and Name-calling Resources** www.welcomingschools.org/bullying-name-calling/
- **Gender Stereotyping and Identity Resources** www.welcomingschools.org/gender-stereotyping/
- **Family Diversity Resources** www.welcomingschools.org/family-diversity/

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