



## COMMUNITY BUILDING AND EDUCATION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS AN EVENING SCREENING OF THE FILM *WHAT DO YOU KNOW?* *SIX TO TWELVE YEAR OLDS TALK ABOUT GAYS AND LESBIANS*

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**Suggested Level:** Parents/guardians and educators.

**Length of Time:** 60-90 minutes in the evening.

### Goals

- To bring parents/guardians in your school community together.
- To help parents and educators see the level of knowledge that students already have about gays and lesbians.
- To help people feel more comfortable answering children's questions about gays and lesbians.
- To see that students want adults to intervene in gay put downs and hurtful behavior.

### Keys to a Successful Event:

- The more people you work with to organize the event, the more people will come.
- If you are an educator, involve the parents and guardians in your school.
- If you are a parent/guardian, involve the educators and administrators in your school.
- Reach out to all kinds of families in your school to organize the event and attend it.
- Make sure it is well publicized.
- Provide childcare.
- Serve food!

**Materials Needed:** *What Do You Know?* DVD, *Facilitation Guide* included on the DVD  
(This activity is based on the *What Do You Know? Facilitation Guide*.)

### Planning for a Screening Event

- Form a committee of parents/guardians and staff to plan the event. It is helpful to have the evening sponsored by an established group within your school — the PTO/PTA, a Site-Based Council, Anti-Bullying Committee, Diversity Committee, etc.
- Work with the administrators in your school. Show them the trailer or the complete 13 minute film. Work with them to begin or augment plans for making your school more welcoming.
- Select a date and reserve your space. Ensure that the space has a screen and DVD projector and that someone knows how to use it!
- Develop a plan to publicize the event. Carry out your plans to invite people to your event. This is key to a successful event.
- Ask someone from your committee or your school to be the moderator. This could be the school principal, a teacher, a school counselor or parent with experience leading group discussions.
- Offering child care allows more people to attend.
- Having food and refreshments at the event encourages people to come.

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## Night of the Screening

### Introduce Your Committee

Let people know who was involved in organizing the evening and why you wanted to hold this event at your school. Talk briefly about why developing a welcoming school is important to you and to the students in your school.

### Pre-screening Icebreaker: Stand up/Sit down

You can introduce this activity as an opportunity to get a sense of who is in the room and what some of their experiences have been in relation to the topics covered in the film. Ask participants to either stand up or raise their hands if the answer to the question is “yes.” These are examples of questions that you could use or develop your own based on your school and the audience you will be expecting.

- Have you seen students excluded or put down because of some aspect of their identity, or because of the composition of their family? (Ask for some examples.)
- Have you heard a child be told to act differently or be called names by students or adults because they thought that child was not acting enough like a boy or like a girl?
- Do you know a child who has two mothers or two fathers?
- Do you think that most students these days have heard the words gay or lesbian? Do you think they know what the words mean?
- Have you heard students use the words such as gay or lesbian in a negative way? (Using phrases such as ‘that’s gay’ or ‘don’t act so gay.’)

### Introducing the Film

Before screening the film, you may want to introduce this film with some of the following thoughts:

*We all hear messages about gays and lesbians from many sources, but we’re not always sure what kids have heard and what kinds of conversations today. This film was produced by the Welcoming Schools project to let us hear directly from students about what they already know about gays and lesbians, what they have heard around school and what questions they might have. It was initially designed as a tool for professional development training. The students in the film come from Alabama and Massachusetts and all but one of them are from public schools. None of these students were coached on what to say. These are their stories.*

Let people know that there will be time for discussion after the film. Ask people to listen for stories that may be familiar to what they’ve heard, as well as stories they haven’t heard yet.

### Post-Screening Discussion Prompts

- As you were watching the film, what stood out for you or was surprising?
- Did anything in this film raise concerns for your child or your child’s classroom?
- A number of children in the film mentioned they asked their mom what gay meant. Raise your hand if you have discussed these issues with your child. What did you sense worked well in the discussion, and what do you wish you had done differently?

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- We hear students in the film suggest strategies to make schools more safe and welcoming for children with gay and lesbian parents and relatives. What ideas do you have to improve the school environment?
  - Several students describe how they ask other students not to say “that’s gay.” What do we need to do to support children who are trying to interrupt other children’s negative behaviors? Can you recall interrupting anti-gay comments or jokes yourself? Describe the experience. What was in place to support you?
  - How can you, as a member of the school community, support your school in being a safe and inclusive place for all kids to learn and grow?

### **Role Play Activity**

Break group into pairs, having each person take a turn playing the parents and the child. Use can use some of the following prompts for everyone to do the same role play and then discuss.

- Child: What does ‘gay’ mean? I heard someone called that today.
- Child: I met someone with two moms. How could they have two moms?
- Child: My teacher said it is wrong to say the word ‘gay?’ Why can’t I say it?
- Child: My friend is going to a wedding where his cousin, who is a girl, is marrying another girl. Can they do that?
- Child: I know a boy who wants to take ballet lessons. My best friend says that makes him gay. Does it?
- Child: Other kids keep calling my friend gay. It bothers me and I want them to stop. What can I do?
- Parent: Do you know what the word ‘gay’ means?

### **Suggested Books for Parents/Guardians and Students**

Check out the book recommendations available through the *Welcoming Schools* website:

- Books For Students Inclusive of Gay Family Members and Characters
- All Kinds of Families: Picture Books
- Books to Engage Elementary Students on Bullying and Diversity
- Recommendations: Looking at Gender Through Books
- Bibliography for Educators & Parents/Guardians