

# Developing Empathy & Being An Ally

## Grade 4

### **About Developing Empathy and Being an Ally**

In this lesson students will begin to identify how hurtful name calling can be, and how important it is to become someone's ally.

Students will be introduced to an article by Robert, an 11 year old, whose family has 2 moms.

### **Materials:**

Student Copies of the article  
"My School is Accepting – But Things Could Be Better"  
by Robert

### **Lesson Purpose**

- Students will be able to identify ways in which name calling is hurtful.
- Students will learn the importance of being an ally in order to interrupt or stop name calling.
- Students will be able to identify helpful strategies in order to become an ally to another person.

### **Vocabulary Words**

Ally  
Empathy  
Name Calling  
Gay  
Lesbian  
LGBT

### **Time Suggested**

Two – 30- 40 minute sessions.

## The Lesson:

### Name Calling

- What hurts your feelings?
- What types of name calling have you heard or been a target of out in the playground?

### Empathy

- What does the word empathy mean? Can someone give me the definition? If not, define
- **Empathy** – is how a person feels when he or she can understand someone else’s feelings and motives in a certain situation OR  
**Empathy** – is when you understand another person’s feelings by remembering or imagining being in a similar situation

### Activity

1. Write “name-calling” on one side of the board and empathy on the other. Ask students to brainstorm everything they think about when they hear the word name-calling. Record their responses on the board. Help them identify any themes in their list such as: the way name-calling makes someone feel, motives for name-calling, or situations where name-calling might occur.
2. Ask the students to read/or read to them the short essay by Robert, an 11 year old boy who lives with his family.

After students have read the short essay have them meet in small groups of four to five students. Make sure to have one person in each group be designated as the recorder who will write down all their ideas. Another person could be designated as the reporter to report back the group’s ideas. Write the following questions on the board and ask each group to answer them:

- How do you think Robert feels when he hears people say things like, “this is gay” or “You’re so gay?”
- Do you have empathy for Robert? Why or why not?
- As the groups are meeting, go from group to group to check for understanding and to make sure they are staying on track
- Ask each group to report back the feelings they think Robert had.

3. Lead a class discussion about whether your students have ever felt similar to how they imagined Robert felt. Consider prompts to generate discussion such as:
- What situations led to those feelings?
  - How did you respond?
  - What made you feel better?
  - If you were Robert what would you do when people said things that felt hurtful?
  - Do you have empathy for Robert because of these situations that you've experienced?

#### 4. Being an Ally

**Ally-** A person who does something to help or stand up for another person. For example, if a friend of yours was being teased, you would be an ally if you asked the person doing the teasing to stop being mean.

- Ask students to number on a piece of paper:
  1. I would be VERY UNCOMFORTABLE
  2. I would be A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE
  3. I would be PRETTY UNCOMFORTABLE
  4. I would be VERY COMFORTABLE
- Tell students you are going to read some statements about ways they could be an ally to Robert.
- When you read each statement they will quietly and individually think which statement most pertains to them. They may stand up next to the statement that best describes how they would feel taking the action. Tell the students that there is not a right or wrong way to respond. After you read each statement and the students have chosen where they want to stand ask for some volunteers to say why they chose to stand where they did. Engage in discussion about what makes it hard or easy to stand up for someone. Repeat this for each statement.
  - Talk to Robert individually and tell him that you are sorry that people are calling him names and using phrases like, "this is so gay".
  - Talk to Robert and ask him what he thinks would help people stop name-calling, Offer to help him.
  - When you hear a person say something like, "That's so gay" say, "It's not OK to say that. Using the word gay like that hurts people's feelings."
  - Tell a teacher or another adult that you're bothered by the kind of words you're hearing other students use. Ask this adult to do something about the situation.

## **Summarizing the Lesson**

- Ask the class to share out what they have learned about name-calling and about how to be an ally for someone. Write all of these suggestions on the board/chart paper.
- Ask students if they can suggest new class rules related to name calling and being an ally.

## **Reflect**

Discuss how being an ally to someone who feels targeted can/will change both of your lives in a positive way.

## ***Handout***

### ***My School Is Accepting – But Things Could Be Better***

By Robert

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My name is Robert I'm eleven years old, and I am in the sixth grade. I go to an elementary school in Michigan. I have two moms and a little brother who I love a lot. He is almost five. Our family is one of just a few families with LGBT parents in our community. I am proud to have two moms.

My school seems to be OK with people who are LGBT. My friends all know I have two moms and are OK with it. I think they react better if I just tell them when we first become friends. I think that if you don't come out right away when you meet someone, it's like you are not OK with it, maybe kind of ashamed, and it's easier for other kids to say mean things to you or about you. At the beginning of each school year, my moms go and tell my teacher that I have two moms. I haven't had one teacher that has been obviously uncomfortable with it.

The only thing that annoys me at school is when people start saying stuff like, "This is gay" or "You're gay." I think that saying these things is a way to bully other kids. When I hear people say that, I tell them to stop, but they normally just keep doing it. The teachers don't do

anything about it either, but some of my friends and their parents tell them to stop too. But if only a few people are telling the kids who are saying that to stop, they are just going to keep saying it. (I can't believe they actually think it is cool to say stuff like that!) I think that if the schools would start to pay attention more, they would see that it is a problem too.

Sometimes, not as often, some of the boys in my school (always the boys) have started saying stuff like, "Dude, you're a lesbian." I believe that the children who say this phrase don't understand what they are saying.

I think that if some of the kids who have LGBT parents and other kids whose parents support LGBT people would get together and talk to the schools about the things kids say, they might pay better attention. I think one reason I don't do it is that I'm scared the principal or the other sources of power at the school might discriminate against my family. The other reason is that there aren't many other kids and their parents who would speak up.

When kids learn that I have two moms, they are normally OK with it. Sometimes I'll come across someone who says it is weird by that doesn't bother me because I'm fine with my family. I tend to not be very good friends with the kids who say it is weird to have LGBT parents because I am almost certain that the kids who say that are some of the few who are not OK with it. I think it helps that my family and I are so out with who we are.

Other than that situation, my school is very accepting. I could tell just about anyone that I have two moms, and they would be OK with it. But until the kids stop saying "This is gay, That's gay", I am going to do my best to get them to stop saying that and make my school a safer environment for the other kids with LGBT parents.