

LESSON 4: CREATING AN ANTI-SLUR POLICY

OVERVIEW: Students work collaboratively to develop an anti-slur policy for their classroom. They consider the categories of name-calling and types of behavior that should be addressed by the policy. They next think about measures for preventing and responding appropriately to name-calling in school, and draw up a draft policy. Students are encouraged to share their class policy with school officials, to learn about the school anti-slur policy (if one exists) and to help educate others in the school about their efforts to reduce name-calling.

OBJECTIVES:

- To increase students' awareness about the importance of a policy that addresses name-calling
- To engage students in the process of developing a policy that reflects observed needs
- To encourage students to honor and act upon the policy they have devised
- To involve students in school-wide public education about the policy

AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL: Grades 5 and up

TIME: 90 minutes or two class periods

MATERIALS: Chart paper/markers; pens; Student handouts: *Creating an Anti-Slur Policy for Your Classroom and Sample Anti-Slur Policy*

PROCEDURE:

PART 1—INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (15 MINUTES)

Suggest to students that we are all accustomed to participating in a school community where we are able, for the most part, to speak freely. We can talk about our political views in class discussions, criticize school policies through student government, and express our interests during clubs all without being penalized. Ask students if there are circumstances under which they feel our words should be bound by rules and consequences in school. Are there times when words can go too far and when students deserve protection from those words? List student responses on the board and discuss them for a few minutes.

Point out that we have all been on the receiving end of name-calling or hurtful language that has, to some degree, compromised our feelings of safety and security in school. Ask students to share examples of times when name-calling has occurred and there were no apparent protections from it. If your students have participated in the *Name-Calling in Our School* activity (lesson 3), they may want to share some of their observations (making sure not to divulge the names or identities of actual students). Ask students to consider what type of interventions or protections, if any, they feel should be put in place in response to such incidents.

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PART 2—CREATING AN ANTI-SLUR POLICY (1 HOUR 15 MINUTES)

Tell students that implementing an “anti-slur” policy is one way to create an environment in which expectations about language are clear and there are some protections against name-calling and verbal bullying. Divide the class into groups of about four students each. (If your students do not have the experience to work productively in small groups, you may want to do this as a large group.) Distribute copies of the handout, *Creating an Anti-Slur Policy for Your Classroom* (attached). This worksheet breaks the process of developing an anti-slur policy into several clear steps:

1. Students are asked to list the types of name-calling that are most common in their experience—not the slurs themselves, just the category they fit into, for example names based on people’s religion, appearance or race.
2. Students are asked to think about the different types of behaviors associated with name-calling and the specific ways in which negative speech is carried out, for example through teasing or rumors.
3. Students are asked to identify strategies for preventing disrespectful speech before it becomes a problem.
4. Students are asked to brainstorm fair and realistic consequences for those who intentionally disrespect others.
5. Students are asked to identify safe and confidential ways to report incidents and get help.

When groups have completed their discussions, have them share back to the entire class and create a master list that captures all of their ideas. After class, these ideas can be written up in a narrative form either by the teacher or a small group of student volunteers. They can use the handout, *Sample Anti-Slur Policy*, as a guide. The policy can then be posted prominently in the classroom and signed by all students so that it serves as a group agreement to stop name-calling and disrespectful language.

PART 3—FOLLOW-UP

Once students have created an anti-slur policy for the classroom, form a committee of volunteers to share it with the principal or another school administrator. Ask them to find out if there is a school-wide anti-slur policy already in existence. If not, students can work with the administration to include one in the school handbook. If your school already has an anti-slur policy, students can inquire about ways that teachers and students are educated about it each year. If no plan exists, students can work with teachers, counselors, and/or administrators to:

- Create a plan for making sure that every class reviews and discusses the policy
- Make sure the policy is distributed to students and/or posted in places where they are likely to read it
- Turn education about the policy into a media campaign by developing eye-catching posters with visuals and phrases that communicate important aspects of the policy, which can be displayed around the school.

CREATING AN ANTI-SLUR POLICY FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

When it comes to a game of kickball in the schoolyard or how to use science equipment in the lab, there are rules that everyone agrees to respect. So why not set some ground rules about the way in which we talk to one another? Name-calling, teasing and other kinds of verbal bullying hurt our feelings, get in the way of learning, and generally contribute to an unsafe school environment. Working in small groups, follow the steps below to develop an anti-slur policy or set of ground rules for your classroom that will help put a stop to disrespectful speech.

1. Think about the kinds of name-calling most frequently heard in your school. If your class has conducted the *Student Survey: Name-Calling and Verbal Bullying*, read carefully through the results. Below list the types of name-calling that are most common. Don't list the slurs themselves, just the category they fit into, for example names based on people's religion, appearance or race.

2. Think about the different types of behaviors associated with name-calling and hurtful language. Some of these behaviors are carried out purposely to put down others and some are unintentional. Below list the specific ways in which negative speech is carried out, for example through teasing or rumors.

3. What can be done to stop name-calling and disrespectful speech before it happens in your classroom or school? Think about who gets bullied, who does the bullying, where it usually happens, and the types of situations that commonly lead to disrespectful speech. Consider rules or routines that have helped you to feel safer in the past. Below brainstorm some strategies for preventing disrespectful speech before it becomes a problem.

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4. Now brainstorm some fair and helpful responses to disrespectful speech. What should be the consequences for those who intentionally disrespect others? What if someone is unaware that his/her words are hurtful? What if disrespectful language is used generally, not against a specific person (for example, "Those shoes are so gay" or "That assignment is retarded")? Below list consequences that are specific, fair, and that can be easily carried out in your school. Think about consequences you have experienced in the past that actually made a difference.

5. Finally, list ways that targets of name-calling and bullying, or those who witness it, might safely and privately report incidents and get help. How can students get the support they need straightforwardly and without drawing unwanted attention or losing standing with their peers?

Now that you have done some thinking about the kinds of language that are most hurtful and ways to respond, write an "anti-slur policy" for your classroom or school. Your policy should be about one to two paragraphs long and include:

- A statement about why it is important to address disrespectful speech in school
- A list of the categories of disrespectful speech that are discouraged (e.g., names based on race or religion)
- A description of the types of behavior that are discouraged (e.g., rumors or threats)
- Practices that will be put in place to prevent disrespectful speech before it becomes a problem
- Consequences that may be enacted in response to instances of disrespectful speech
- Ways that students can safely and privately report incidents of bullying

SAMPLE ANTI-SLUR POLICY

The District takes very seriously incidents when students make remarks (slurs) against other students, families, staff members or members of the community. A “slur” is speech, for example, epithets, threats, verbal abuse, use of profanity or derogatory comments that make reference to real or perceived ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status, religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation, manner of speech, or any other physical or cultural characteristics.

A “slur” also includes spreading rumors, jokes, notes, stories, drawings, pictures or gestures that make reference to real or perceived ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status, religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation, manner of speech, or any other physical or cultural characteristics.

Any student who directs a slur towards any other student at school or at a school-related activity and who is reported to the school for making the slur is subject to the disciplinary action described below.

Consequences: Making slurs may result in, but is not limited to, the following:

- Phone call to parent/guardian
- Conference with any or all of the following: students involved, parent/guardian, administration, counselor, staff members
- School/community service
- Detention
- Written apology
- Loss of school privileges
- Suspension

BULLYING

Remember, no one deserves to be bullied. You can still help yourself and ask others to help you.

1. Tell a friend what is happening. Ask him or her to help you. It will be harder for others to pick on you if you have a friend with you for support.
2. Try to ignore the bullying or say 'No' really firmly, then turn and walk away.
3. Try not to show that you are upset or angry.
4. Don't fight back if you can help it.
5. Try to think up funny or clever replies in advance. It helps to have an answer ready.
6. Try to avoid being alone in the places where you know the bully is likely to pick on you.
7. Sometimes asking the bully to repeat what they said can put them off. If they repeat it, you will have made them do something they hadn't planned on and this gives you some control of the situation.
8. Keep a diary of what is happening.
9. Telling about bullying isn't 'telling tales' or 'tattling.' Even if the bully does find out, it is better to have things out in the open.

From the Adaline E. Kent Middle School Student/Parent Handbook, Kentfield, CA, at <http://www.kentfieldschools.org/stories/00/57/kenthandbook.pdf>