



## GAY STRAIGHT ADVOCATES FOR EDUCATION

Working to Make Every Student and Every Educator SAFE at School  
Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression

**Lesson: Responding to Name-Calling, Verbal Harassment, Bullying**  
**Level: Elementary, Middle, & Secondary**

Your response to name-calling and harassment will be impacted by both the setting in which it occurs and the time available to you. The choices you make while walking rapidly through the hallway on your way to teach your next class will, of necessity, be different from the options you can choose with plenty of time to spare and the structure of a classroom supporting you. If “time and place” allow for only punitive or reactive responses, or if the needs of the targeted student will be better served by your speaking to the offending student(s) later, make sure to carve out a future “time and place” to deal with the situation more reflectively. Education will go much further than punishment alone!

### A Chart for Responding to Name-Calling in School: Considering the Time and Place

<b>STRUCTURED SETTING</b> (Classroom, library, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “That is unacceptable in this room.”</li> <li>• “You know the class ground rules.”</li> <li>• “Please apologize.”</li> <li>• “Out of this room!”</li> <li>• “Leave him/her alone!”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What did you mean by ‘That’s so gay’?”</li> <li>• “That was a stereotype. Stereotypes are a kind of lie, and they hurt people’s feelings.”</li> <li>• “That was a putdown, and I don’t think it belongs here at (name of school).”</li> <li>• “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but here’s how your comment hurt . . .”</li> </ul>
<b>UNSTRUCTURED SETTING</b> (Hallway, locker room, cafeteria, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Cut it out!”</li> <li>• “That’s way out of line!”</li> <li>• “Keep your hands to yourself!”</li> <li>• “Stop it right now!”</li> <li>• “Go to the office!”</li> <li>• “Whoa, that is <i>not</i> okay!”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “That’s bullying. It is against school rules . . .”</li> <li>• “We at this school do not harass people. Harassing people has consequences.”</li> <li>• “That was really mean. Why did you say that?”</li> <li>• “Do you understand why that was so hurtful?”</li> </ul>
	<b>LESS TIME AND/OR ONLY PUBLIC SPACE AVAILABLE</b> (Between periods, at dismissal, during recess, etc.)	<b>MORE TIME AND/OR PRIVATE TIME AVAILABLE</b> (During class or practice, conference time, after school, etc.)

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### What To Do About “That’s so Gay” and Students’ Reluctance to Admit That It (And Other Anti-LGBTIQ Slurs) Actually Mean Something

The chart below suggests a strategy for dealing, not only with one of the often-used expressions currently circulating in schools K-12, but with any instance in which students respond to your intervention by saying, “We don’t mean anything by that,” or “It’s just a word we use,” or “Everyone says it.” Like the chart on how to respond depending upon time/setting, it’s meant to be instructive rather than prescriptive; still, the primary purpose of this interaction is to get students to admit that the phrase does indeed mean something—and that that something is certainly not something positive. The responses listed below, in descending order from the initial question you might ask (“What do you mean by that?”) to the conclusion you hope your students will reach (“So maybe it’s not a good thing?”) include the benefits and challenges of each question.

RESPONSES	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
“What do you mean by that?”	Doesn’t dismiss it.	Students might not be forthcoming.
“How do you think a gay person might feel?”	Puts responsibility on student to come up with solution.	Student may not say anything.
“Do you say that as a compliment?”	Asking this rhetorical question in a non-accusatory tone may lighten things up enough for your students to shake their heads and admit, “No.”	Students may just laugh off your question, or reiterate that they’re “Just joking.”
“So the connotations are negative?” or “So maybe it’s not a good thing?”	Not accusatory. Could open up the floor for discussion.	There’s always the chance that students will still be reluctant to speak up

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