

# LESSON 5: I WAS JUST KIDDING!

**OVERVIEW:** Students are asked to consider the difference between good-natured teasing and bullying through discussion of fictional scenarios and reflection on real-life situations. Students are provided with concrete guidelines that help them to understand when harmless joking has crossed the line to become disrespectful or mean.

## OBJECTIVES:

- To help students understand and articulate the difference between harmless teasing and verbal bullying
- To provide students with an opportunity to apply this awareness to concrete situations

**AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL:** Grades 4-7

**TIME:** 45 minutes or one class period

**MATERIALS:** Chart paper/markers; pens; Student handouts: *I Was Just Kidding! and Teasing or Bullying?*

## PROCEDURE:

### PART 1—INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)

Write the following phrases on the board:

- I was just kidding
- I didn't mean anything by it
- Can't you take a joke?

Ask students if they have ever had their feelings hurt or been talked to disrespectfully only to hear one of the above expressions in response to their disapproval. Invite a couple of volunteers to share an incident and to describe how it felt. Ask if, in retrospect, they were overly sensitive or if the comments "crossed the line." Challenge students to articulate how they know when a comment is mean or offensive rather than funny. List these measures or standards on a sheet of chart paper and discuss for a few minutes.

### PART 2—JUST KIDDING SCENARIOS (15 MINUTES)

Distribute the handout, *I Was Just Kidding!* Ask students to work with a partner to read each scenario and to discuss whether the incident described is "harmless teasing" or "hurtful," or to identify additional information needed to make a decision. Students should be specific as they list their reasons and articulate particular criteria used to evaluate each situation. When students have responded to all three scenarios, discuss their conclusions as a class and add key ideas to the list you started in Part 1 of the lesson. Ask students to share their responses to the final question on the handout: "*Teasing has crossed the line to become hurtful when...*"

### PART 3—REVIEWING GUIDELINES (10 MINUTES)

Distribute the handout, *Teasing or Bullying?*, which provides very specific guidelines about types of teasing that are "off limits." Review the information with students to reinforce their understanding of the difference between good-natured teasing and hurtful language.

# I WAS JUST KIDDING

When teasing or name-calling leads to hurt feelings or consequences, “I was just kidding!” is a common response. Most of us enjoy good-natured teasing that is done in fun. And some people just don’t know how to take a joke, right? So how do we know when we have crossed the line? When are we no longer “*just kidding*,” but participating in mean behavior?

Read the scenarios below. With a partner or in a small group, discuss whether or not you think each situation is an example of harmless teasing or hurtful language. Explain how you came to your decisions or what additional information you need to make a decision.

1. Sonia recently moved to Lincoln Heights and just finished her first week at the local middle school. At 5 feet 8 inches, she towered over most of the students in her seventh grade class. While looking for a place to sit during lunch, another student called to her, “Hey, shorty, there’s a spot over here!” Sonia paused for a moment and another girl from the group waved her over. “Don’t pay attention to her,” she told Sonia. “That’s just the way we talk to each other. They call me Einstein because I got all C’s on my last report card.”

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

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2. For years, Angel has made fun of his best friend, Dave’s, peanut butter obsession. “You’d eat my gym sock if it was covered in peanut butter,” he once told Dave. One day in science lab, the students designed mazes to test the intelligence of white mice. When the teacher told the class that they would be baiting the mazes with peanut butter, Angel called out, “Better be careful—Dave might get to the end of the maze before the mice!” The other students broke out in laughter.

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

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3. On Monday afternoon, Rob used his recess time to hang campaign posters around the school, which read, "Vote Rob for Student Council President." On Tuesday morning in homeroom, Rob found one of his posters taped to the blackboard in the front of the classroom. Someone had crossed out the word, "President," and replaced it with "First Lady." One of Rob's classmates pointed to a girl in the first row, indicating that Maria had altered the poster. Rob glared at her as he tore down the poster. "It's just a joke," Maria laughed. "Lighten up—I'm gonna vote for you."

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

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Based on your conversation, list three ways to complete the following sentence.

Teasing has crossed the line to become hurtful when...

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **TEASING OR BULLYING?**

Most of us enjoy teasing that is done in fun. Sometimes, though, our joking goes too far. We all need to be sensitive to topics and behaviors that may not be appreciated by others. Use the information below to help evaluate when teasing is good-natured and when it has crossed the line. Remember, everyone deserves the right to feel safe and to be left alone.

### **GOOD-NATURED TEASING...**

- Involves a playful back-and-forth between both parties
- Is accompanied by a friendly tone of voice and laughter
- Is accompanied by affectionate gestures or expressions
- Brings people closer and encourages friendships
- Sometimes helps to lighten a tense or angry situation
- Does not lead to physical confrontations

### **HURTFUL TEASING OR BULLYING...**

- May be accompanied by an angry tone of voice
- May be accompanied by angry body language, such as clenched fists
- Continues even when the person being teased shows distress
- Continues even when the person teasing knows the topic is upsetting to others
- Is sometimes accompanied by showing off in front of others

**THINK FIRST!** Consider the following three areas before engaging in what may seem like good-natured teasing. If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you may be crossing the line.

#### **THE PERSONALITY AND EXPERIENCES OF THE OTHER PERSON:**

- Are you aware that the person has not appreciated teasing in the past?
- Are you aware that certain subjects are touchy for the other person?
- Are you aware of a factor in the other person's life that may make them especially sensitive to teasing?

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND THE OTHER PERSON:**

- Is the person a stranger or someone you don't know very well?
- Do you have a history of social problems with the person?
- Is he or she likely to misunderstand your intentions or sense of humor?
- Are you bigger and/or older than the other person?
- Are there gender, race or other differences between you that may make some topics inappropriate?

**THE TOPIC OF THE TEASING:**

- Is the teasing about identity (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender)?
- Is the teasing about appearance (body size/shape, complexion, clothing, physical attractiveness)?
- Is the teasing about ability (intelligence, physical strength or skill)?
- Is the teasing about social status (friends, family, class)?
- Does the teasing compare someone with an object or animal in an offensive way?
- Does the teasing have sexual content?

*The following book was used as a resource for this fact sheet: Teasing and Harassment: The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents by John H. Hoover and Glenn W. Olsen, National Education Service (2001).*