

# Zero Indifference

## A Guide to Stop Name-Calling & Bullying

A “Zero-Indifference” response to name-calling means that members of the school community take collective action to not tolerate name-calling and bullying. Although there is no one right way to intervene, consistent intervention is key to establishing a school environment where all students feel safe and respected.

### Three things that you should avoid:

1. Ignore the incident.
2. Excuse it.
3. Allow yourself to become immobilized by fear or uncertainty.

### Effective interventions consist of two steps:

1. Stop the behavior immediately.

Some sample responses:

	<b>LESS TIME / PUBLIC SPACE</b> (between periods, at dismissal, during recess)	<b>MORE TIME / PRIVATE SPACE</b> (during class or practice, after-school activities)
<b>IN A STRUCTURED SETTING</b> (a 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>• Leave the room.</li><li>• Leave him/her alone!</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What did you mean by what you said?</li><li>• That was a stereotype.</li><li>• 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 our 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cut it out! Using language like that is no joke.</li><li>• That’s out of line!</li><li>• Keep your hands to yourself!</li><li>• Go to the office!</li><li>• Stop it right now!</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• That’s bullying. It’s against the school rules.</li><li>• We don’t harass people at this school. It could get you suspended.</li><li>• That was really mean. Why did you say that?</li><li>• Do you understand why that was so hurtful?</li></ul>

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## 2. Educate those involved.

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The determining factor about whether to educate on the spot or privately, immediately or later, should be the needs of the targeted student. Both options have advantages and disadvantages.

EDUCATING ON THE SPOT	EDUCATING LATER PRIVATELY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides immediate information and support</li><li>• Models taking a stand</li><li>• Reassures others that the school is a safe place</li><li>• Sets a compassionate tone</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allows harasser to “save face”</li><li>• Prevents possible embarrassment of target</li><li>• Allows you to cool down</li><li>• Allows more time to explore and discuss the facts</li></ul>

- **Distinguish between what feels right and what is best for a given student or situation.**

Incidents of name-calling and bullying can be complex, calling for educators to use thoughtful, critical judgment in each situation. You may want every student within fifty feet to hear you loud and clear when you reprimand the tormenters of a targeted student, so that students will get the message that your school will not tolerate name-calling. This response, however, may cause targeted students to cringe at the attention your public intervention draws, and to increase their concerns for their safety on the way home, when no one will be there to protect them.

- **Ask targeted students what they would like you to do.**

As a teacher, you may feel you need to take charge and determine on your own what’s best for all students. Instead, you can stop the name-calling immediately, and set aside a time to educate harassing students later. Establish a time to meet privately with targeted students and discuss what they think might work best for them. Determine whether targeted students have a history of being harassed in general, whether offending students have a history of harassing other students, and whether the involved parties have a history with each other.

## Some Considerations for Forming Effective Responses

*Where and when did the incident occur?*

An effective response to name-calling and harassment is dependent on where the incident occurred and the time available at the moment. Choices you make about intervening as you walk down the hall on your way to your next class will differ from those you make when you have the time and structure of the classroom to support your decision.

If “time and place” allow for only punitive or reactive responses, or if you believe the needs of the targeted student will be better served by speaking to the offending student(s) later, be sure to schedule a future “time and place” to deal with the situation. Education is more effective at changing students’ future behaviors than punishment alone!

*Was the incident isolated or part of a pattern?*

A one-time transgression can be dealt with swiftly, but a persistent pattern on the part of any of the involved students requires more intensive intervention. If a student has a history of harassing other students, in addition to stopping the behavior and making decisions about educating those involved, consistently apply and enforce existing school rules and policies and take disciplinary action, when appropriate. If a student has a history of being picked on, a guidance counselor can assist the student in dealing with the considerable emotional strain of being targeted. Targeted students need support and should never be given the impression that they “deserved” or “provoked” the attack.

*What was the harassing student's intent?*

Consider the ages of the harassing student(s), their understanding of the meaning and impact of their behavior, and the existing relationships between the involved students. Are the students best friends? Is it possible they are only repeating language they have heard someone else use? Is the harassing student older or substantively bigger than the targeted student? Are the students developmentally able to understand the meaning and impact of their behavior?

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS	MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask if they know the meaning of the derogatory word(s) they used.</li><li>• Explain, in age-appropriate language, the possible origins, meaning, and hurtful impact of the word(s).</li><li>• Clarify school and/or classroom rules and policies about the behavior.</li><li>• Communicate that, regardless of the original intent, the word is a put-down, and that you do not want to hear the student use it again.</li><li>• Take steps to insure the safety of the targeted student.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider the history, age, and intent of parties involved.</li><li>• Determine whether to educate publicly on the spot or later, in private.</li><li>• Firmly communicate the seriousness and consequences of the behavior, and that you do not want to hear or see it again.</li><li>• Refuse to sanction behavior as joking or "fooling around."</li><li>• Take steps to insure the safety of the targeted student.</li></ul>

Although individual circumstances may require educators to occasionally make judgment calls that violate their sense of what "feels right," name-calling and bullying provide daily opportunities for "teachable moments" for educating students to show respect for all people.

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This handout was adapted from *Zero Indifference: A How-to Guide for Ending Name-Calling in Schools* by Nancy Goldstein, Ph.D., GLSEN Educational Resource Manager, © 2001, GLSEN. This resource, among others, can be found in the School Safety section of GLSEN's online Resource Center at [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org). Permission to reprint granted to the Anti-Defamation League.