

DL16: Responding to verbal incidents in primary school

Pupils in primary school may not necessarily understand that their comments are inappropriate and constitute bullying. This script can be used by school staff who are considering how they might handle a verbal incident. It provides a model for them to think through. When responding to an actual incident staff will also want to consider the school's hierarchy of sanctions and existing guidance on behaviour and bullying.

John and Sam are in the playground. Sam calls John a "gay boy" because he fell over and started crying.

Questions to be asked by the teacher	Points to consider
John tells you what Sam has said, or you overheard it.	
To John: Hello, can you tell me what just happened?	Has John got gay parents or other family members who are gay? Is this a motivating factor for the homophobic comment?
To Sam: Can you tell me what you just said?	Sam should repeat what has been said. Does he realise at this stage that his comment was inappropriate?
To Sam: What made you say this?	Try and establish why homophobic bullying has played a part here. Does the pupil understand the difference between heterosexual people and gay people, or is his comment made in ignorance?
To Sam: How do you think your comment made John feel, Sam?	Does Sam understand that his comment can be hurtful?
To John: How do you feel about what Sam said John?	Make sure Sam understands how John feels.
To Sam: Sam, do you understand that calling someone "gay" because they are upset isn't very nice?	Sam needs to understand that calling someone "gay" because he's done something that he thinks is weak is not acceptable.

Questions to be asked by the teacher	Points to consider
Sam says: But Sarah's mum is gay.	Sam is confused because sometimes the word gay is used to describe someone, but when he uses it, it is bad.
To Sam: Sam, some people are gay, and there is nothing wrong with that. But when you use words to tease someone that becomes mean. John is very upset about what you said.	Does Sam understand the difference? Sam has to understand the harm he has done to John.
To John: What would you like Sam to do now John?	John must have the opportunity to say what he would like to happen.
To Sam: What do you think you should do Sam?	Can Sam identify ways to resolve the conflict?
To Sam: I think you should say sorry to John, and promise not to use those words again.	You should agree some actions with John and Sam, depending on the sanctions that your school normally uses.
You must now keep an eye on Sam, and ensure that he understands why this language shouldn't be used, and doesn't do it again. If he continues to do it, then you might have to follow the hierarchy of sanctions to prevent homophobic bullying happening in the future.	