Tutorial Worship

Challenging Homophobic Language: Choose a couple of the activities below to complete with your form.

Sadly, even in the second decade of the twenty-first century homophobic language remains as prevalent as ever. Ninety nine per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people report hearing the derogatory use of phrases such as ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘you’re so gay’ in school.

The use of homophobic language has a negative impact on gay young people, making them feel less happy at school and less likely to reach their full potential. In the worst cases, homophobic language impacts on young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

**‘Breaking habits’**

1. This is a fun exercise that encourages young people to break the habit of saying **‘that’s so gay’.** Discuss with pupils how slang words develop and how the meanings of words can change or get lost over time.
2. Then discuss ‘that’s so gay’ and the fact that we started to use the phrase at a time when people really did think being gay was a bad thing, and thought it was fine to equate being gay with rubbish. Then talk about what the word actually means, and how it affects gay people when it’s used in the wrong way.
3. Ask pupils to brainstorm positive alternatives to ‘that’s so gay’ and then to come up with positive appropriate sentences in which they could use gay.
4. Use role-plays as a way for young people to try out the alternatives they’ve come up with. Encourage them to act out situations in which they may have said ‘that’s so gay’ before, but to use the new words they have chosen.

**Who am I?**

1. This exercise helps young people view the world in ‘other people’s shoes’.
2. Develop a list of attributes that make us different – whether it’s someone who is gay, has a gay sibling, has a disability, has a single parent, is from an ethnic minority background etc.
3. Each student should be assigned a different person and told to try to view the world from their perspective.
4. Pupils could devise and act out role-plays based on their characters, or create stories.
5. At the end, pupils should come together to discuss the labels, and think about how people would feel if one of these attributes was used negatively (such as gay used to mean bad).
6. Pupils should draw the conclusion that making someone’s identity into something negative is wrong.

**How do we stop it?**

1. This exercise helps young people come up with ways that they can respond to homophobic language.
2. Split the class into groups and give each group a role-play where someone uses the word gay inappropriately. For instance someone says that a t-shirt is gay, or someone tells their friend to stop being gay.
3. Encourage the pupils to work as a group to decide how they would respond and ask them to share these responses with each other.
4. Ask pupils to think about why they don’t normally respond like this when people use homophobic language and what stops them from doing ‘the right thing’.
5. Make a list of all of these barriers and then ask the pupils as a group to think of ways to overcome them. For instance a pupil might say ‘I’m worried about making myself unpopular’, to which the response could be that if everyone starts challenging homophobic language then it’s the people who use homophobic language who are unpopular, not those who try and stop it.
6. By the end, pupils should feel more confident to respond to homophobic language and know how to do it.

**Teacher support**

**What is homophobic language?**

Homophobic language comes in many different forms. Most of the time it is used unconsciously and without hurtful intent. While some language is clearly homophobic, in other cases it can be difficult for teachers to know what counts as homophobic language. Before starting to tackle the problem it’s important that all school staff know exactly what homophobic language sounds like. Being clear about this will help make sure that every instance is challenged consistently.

**‘That’s so gay’ or ‘you’re so gay’**

The most common form of homophobic language is ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘you’re so gay’. 99 per cent of gay young people report hearing the casual use of these phrases in school. These comments are sometimes directed towards people who are actually, or perceived to be, gay. However, they are most often used to mean that something is bad or rubbish, with no conscious link to sexual orientation at all. A pupil might say ‘those trainers are so gay’ (to mean rubbish or uncool) or ‘stop being so gay’ (to mean stop being so annoying).

Homophobic language is also commonly heard outside the classroom environment in the home and in particular from celebrities and in the media. This can make young people think that it is acceptable or even cool to use homophobic language.

Facts:

• nine in ten secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers say pupils, regardless of their sexual orientation, experience name-calling and homophobic bullying at school

• almost two thirds of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils experience homophobic bullying

• young people who have been homophobically bullied are more likely to leave school at 16

• seven out of ten gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying state that it has had an impact on their school work

• half of those who have experienced homophobic bullying have skipped school at some point because of it

(Stonewall)