

Scenarios: Bullying, Harassment, or Other Misconduct? Elementary / Middle

Scenarios created by Tracey Tsugawa, Vermont Human Rights Commission

1. Cheryl, Candace, and Alicia are friends and in 7th grade. Cheryl and Alicia live in a trailer park with their families. All three girls ride the school bus home in the afternoon. Amanda and Sarah, both 8th graders, also ride the same bus in the afternoon. During the fall, Amanda and Sarah start repeatedly calling Cheryl and Alicia “White trailer trash” and make fun of their clothes and belongings. One day, Candace, frustrated with the on-going treatment of her friends, shouts at Amanda and Sarah, “Why don’t you two stupid snobs shut up and leave Cheryl and Alicia alone!” Amanda gets up, hits Candace and says, “You shut up! You’re just a stupid 7th grader. Why do you hang out with those two trailer trash idiots anyway?” Several students and the bus driver witness the interaction.
2. Rebecca Rabinowitz is Jewish and in the 6th grade. In October she missed a few days of school while her family observed Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. When Rebecca returned to school after Yom Kippur she was teased by some of her classmates while walking home from school. Her classmates made comments about how Jews get special treatment at school and about how Jews always have a lot of money. When Rebecca gets home, she is in tears and tells her mother what happened. Mrs. Rabinowitz calls the school immediately and tells Rebecca’s homeroom teacher what happened.
3. Edgar is in 4th grade and is much taller and heavier than most of his peers. However, because he has a tremendous sense of humor, he is very popular and well-liked by most of his peers. One day during recess, during a game of dodge ball, Edgar trips on the ball and falls down. Steven, a 5th grader, yells, “Look at the beached whale on the playground!” and Steven and the other 5th graders with him laugh. Edgar turns red but picks himself up and starts to get ready to play again. Several of Edgar’s friends get angry and tell Steven and his friends to “shut up.” A shouting match ensues until a teacher comes over to break it up.
4. Kendra and Alexander are friends in 2nd grade together. One day during lunch, Alexander says to Kendra, “I know why you like chocolate milk so much!” Kendra asks, “Why?” and Alexander responds, “Because it keeps your skin brown!” Kendra looks at Alexander quizzically and says, “No it doesn’t!” Alexander says nothing and the two go on eating their lunch together. The next day Kendra’s mother calls the school outraged about what Alexander said to Kendra at lunch the day before.

Process Questions:

1. Is this bullying or harassment or some other form of misconduct? If it is harassment, what is/are the protected category/ies? If you are not sure, what additional information do you need to determine if it might be harassment or bullying?
2. What immediate reactive responses are needed to manage or resolve this situation and who needs to be involved? What would you do and/or say? Consider how you would respond to the target, perpetrator, bystanders, parents, and/or school staff.
3. What follow-up steps need to be taken and by whom?

