

The Freshman in the Lunchroom

Characters: At least four male and two female characters. It would be good to add more observers, but these are not essential.

Ages: Grades 7-12

This skit can be conducted by either the leaders and/or selected members of the youth group. Take care not to select students who are currently being bullied or who are currently involved in bullying others. The script is the minimum that might be done and it is possible to imagine many scenarios like the one suggested. You can give each of the characters names if you wish.

Setting: A Freshman boy is sitting at lunch with two girls, talking in an animated way about how much fun a weekend band/choir trip is going to be. Two upperclassmen sit down at the other end of the table and start talking. You can assume that these boys have harassed the Freshman before. Eventually, the bullies begin talking loud enough for the Freshman and his two friends to hear.

Upperclassman one (UC1): I wish I could get two babes to sit with me at lunch. I wonder what Justin's secret is?

Upperclassman two (UC2): Probably because he is such a manly man. Oh wait, he's not! Hmm, must be something else.

UC1: I don't much about this but I hear that girls like to hang out with gay guys a lot – fag hags, I think they are called.

UC2: (Spoken directly to the Freshman) Is that it, dude? You don't really like these girls do you?

Pause – The Freshman doesn't answer and appears nervous and upset.

Girl one (G1): Shut up, and leave him alone!

UC1: Ah, so this is why gay guys like to hang out with girls, they defend him.

UC2: Dude, I think he must really be gay. Hey, Jim (again your choice of names), (calling to another boy at the next table), we have ourselves a gay boy right here in our school.

Some people at the next table laugh and others look on, seeming to be unsure about what to say.

One boy gets up from his seat at another table and approaches the Freshman and gets ready to speak. When the new boy on the scene gets to the table, have everybody freeze in place as if the scene is paused. Then the leader can turn to the crowd and begin a discussion (if discussion goes long, the actors may need to adjust positions). Possible questions to prompt the discussion include:

- What will the boy say?
- What should he say?
- If he was going to defend the Freshman, what could he say?

After a brief discussion, use this to define the defender role in a bullying episode. You could say:

In most bullying situations, there are bystanders who support the bully, are indifferent, or want to defend the student being bullied but are afraid or unsure about how to help. Research on bullying shows that most bystanders want to help but don't because they are not sure what to do. Let's brainstorm some ways that this bystander could become a defender and live out the Golden Rule in this situation.

These are tough situations and you might not want to endorse many of the ideas presented. However, it is important to get students thinking about how they might move from being passive bystanders to active defenders, even at risk of being harassed. Not all students of bullying are easy to help; they may feel that their situation will get worse if someone calls attention to their plight. However, research demonstrates that social pressure as well as institutional pressure will help reduce bullying.

After several minutes of discussion, the skit can be completed by having the boy who approached the table speak.

Defender: I don't like how this is going. In fact, this is not cool at all. (Spoken to the Freshmen and friends) You guys want to come eat with us?

Debriefing this skit, it would be good to point out that there are many factors which would influence the actual response. For instance, if the defender knew the bullies, he could make a more direct response, telling them to stop it. If the bullies were Christians, the defender could make an appeal to their faith. If the school had recently implemented a bullying prevention program, the defender could reference that program. If the defender was physically intimidated by the bullies, then he could take more people with him. In general, defenders can help by

- Intervening directly by communicating that the bullying should stop
- Providing support for the student being bullied
- Not joining in the bullying in any way
- Alerting an adult

I would also use this opportunity to point out that slurs involving sexual orientation are not acceptable for Christians to use. Many people don't give this much thought and sometimes see gays and lesbians as acceptable targets for name calling and uncivil treatment. Being different or disagreeing with someone does not mean that the Golden Rule no longer applies. Christ taught us in Luke 6:31 to treat others the way we want to be treated. We don't like being stereotyped as Christians, so it seems likely that other groups don't like being negatively stereotyped. If you don't like it, then don't do it to others.

It would be helpful for church youth leaders to be available for students to discuss situations at school where a student is being bullied. Youth leaders can support reluctant or worried defenders by calling the

school and explaining the feedback about bullying situations. Some school personnel are more receptive to this feedback than others, and you might not feel that the effort was helpful. Nonetheless, your actions signal to your students that the church has a role in preventing bullying and elevates the issue in priority. Encourage students to befriend bullied students and stand against bias and stereotyping of all kinds.

Note: Leaders may use this resource freely with proper attribution to the author, Warren Throckmorton and the Golden Rule Pledge website: www.goldenrulepledge.com.