

**8th grade 2016 Second Step lesson: Bullying Prevention: Labels, Stereotypes and Prejudice**

***This year, we used a program called Second Step in our annual bullying prevention seminars. This scripted program includes video clips, activities and opportunities for collaborative discussion. We focused on how stereotypes, labeling and prejudice can contribute to the problem of bullying. Highlighted below are the important points and questions for reflection.***

As humans, we have a natural tendency to sort, label and categorize---it helps us make sense of our world. We sort people into groups with a common characteristic and give these groups a label. However, labels can narrowly define people.

As babies, we can discern our parents from other adults. As we grow older and develop greater cognitive skills, we label in more complex ways- leaders versus followers, true friends from acquaintances, those who make good choices versus those who make poor ones.

**Reflection:** Do students label their peers into groups? What groups are you aware of at Swanson? Do these labels have any impact on how students interact with others?

So, what does this ability to label and categorize have to do with bullying?

Labeling a group of people with a common characteristic can lead to **stereotyping**.

What is stereotyping?

To **stereotype** is to have a fixed, overgeneralized belief about a particular group of people. These statements usually begin with the word, "All" as in: All (members of a group)are/do \_\_\_\_\_.

Although stereotypes can be positive or negative, these labels can result in unfair judgements about an individual. Labels can narrowly define people, robbing them of their individualism even though they may share a common characteristic with a group of people such as a religion, skin color, ethnic heritage or gender identity. Overgeneralizing can make an individual in the labeled group feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or angry.

**Reflection:** What stereotypes do teens have about adults? What stereotypes do adults have about teenagers? How does it feel to be stereotyped?

Negative labels, prejudice and stereotyping can also lead and contribute to bullying: not treating others with respect.

**Reflection:** From your study of our nation's history over the last two years, what examples come to mind that support the idea that labeling and stereotyping can lead to bullying and/or unfair treatment of others?

We know from our lessons about bullying, that people are often bullied through the spread of rumors or name calling. The power of the bullying relationship can make a targeted individual fearful and suffer in silence.

If we assume that everyone **pre-judges**, (no matter how open-minded we believe we are) , then it is important to identify our own prejudices so we can be more **empathic** and counteract

the negative effects of labeling and stereotypes. **Prejudice** (preh joo dis) is a prejudgement or assumption about someone else. An assumption is often based on what we **think** we know. It may or may not be true.

What is **empathy**? **Empathy** is the ability to identify, understand and respond thoughtfully to the feelings and perspectives of others.

**Reflection:** Are you keeping current on the events that are happening in the world? Do you read newspapers (online?), magazines like **Time** or watch the evening news? Keeping up with current events can enhance your understanding of world geography and increase your empathy to the challenges facing our world today. How are our prejudices and stereotypes affecting the global plight of refugees fleeing war, persecution and terror? How are our prejudices and stereotypes impacting race relations in the United States?

Last year, we discussed the power of peers in the battle against bullying behaviors. It's important to recall the statement: "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." Being an empathic upstander ---and not just a bystander--- when you witness bullying, prejudice and stereotyping that hurts others is one important way you can make a difference and work to make our world a better place.

What can you do?

- Avoid assumptions about individuals before you get to know them.
- Do not join in when someone calls others derogatory names, even as a joke.
- Be an ally to someone who is being bullied or treated unfairly.
- Your empathy towards others can help friends reconsider their biases.
- Tell a trusted adult if you are aware of bullying...or use the anonymous reporting form on Swanson's website.