



## sticks & stones

Young children ages 5 to 12 describe how they feel when they hear put-downs of themselves or their families in this video for kids, their educators and parents.

Children learn from subtle clues what society thinks about gender roles, same-sex parents and family differences. The children in sticks

& stones vividly describe how it feels to be teased when their families don't follow traditional gender roles. They talk about why bullies indulge in name-calling, and what they think should be done about it.

By showing that they know what's wrong, the children challenge educators, parents and other kids to act positively to make schools and playgrounds safe and welcoming for everyone. This compelling video uses interviews, animation and documentary footage to spark discussions about families, gender stereotypes and name-calling. It encourages all children to feel empathy and respect for their playmates.

Background information and classroom activities are printed on the inside of this videojacket.



**For Grades 3 to 7**

sticks & stones is part of the NFB collection *Celebrating Diversity: Resources for Responding to Homophobia*.

"The effects of homophobia can be devastating. The Canadian Human Rights Commission encourages schools, community and youth organizations to make use of this important video to discuss the dangers of intolerance."

— Catherine Barratt, Media & External Relations  
for the Canadian Human Rights Commission

**Director & Writer: Jan Padgett • Producer: George Johnson**  
**17 minutes • Order Number: C9101 045**



Close captioned. A decoder is required

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# sticks & stones

Words that hurt and how young people can overcome them

sticks & stones



VHS

C9101 045



A National Film Board of Canada Production

## LANGUAGE SHAPES ATTITUDES

Language communicates to children what society thinks about them and their families. When people deliberately or carelessly show disrespect for students' families, they damage what is most important to growing children – their self-esteem.

- As the children in the video demonstrate, hurtful language and attitudes can make them want to hide their families, or deny their own interests.
- Children learn from schoolyard and classroom language that activities and interests that challenge traditional gender roles are often ridiculed.
- Name-calling is the most common form of bullying and discrimination in schools, and homophobic names are among the most common.
- To provide a safe and supportive learning environment, teachers must use and encourage language that includes all of their students, their diverse families and interests.

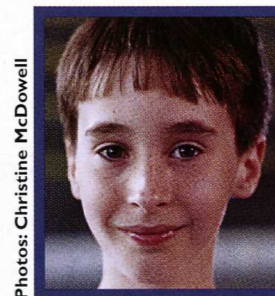
## DOING THE RIGHT THING

Educators want the young people in their care to grow up proud of their accomplishments, striving to reach their potential. Professional responsibility, school policies and laws tell teachers to keep their students safe from physical, verbal or psychological abuse. Teachers know the importance of language and attitudes in shaping children's futures.

Careful attention to language in the school environment will help create a positive learning environment, reduce bullying and violence, and improve the self-image of students who feel harassed or left out.

When children or their families challenge narrow definitions of gender and family, they create opportunities for personal and social growth.

**Carol Irwin, President, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Toronto Region** has this to say about sticks & stones:



Photos: Christine McDowell

"Very articulate young children movingly discuss their reactions to persons who find them or their families unacceptable because they are different. It shows how attitudes and casual words can deeply hurt these children. Should be viewed by teachers, school trustees, parent-teacher associations and community groups as well as school children."

## APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE AND TERMS

In your class discussions and interactions with students, use language that is gender-neutral and that avoids suggesting that all families come with two opposite-sex parents. This will help to include families with single parents, same-sex parents, gay or lesbian siblings and other complex familial relationships.

- Avoid implying all families are headed by one man and one woman, or that the adult partners are necessarily of the opposite gender. Use examples of extended families, single parents, same-sex parents, etc.
- Use neutral language such as “parents and guardians” rather than “mothers and fathers” or “partners” rather than “boyfriend” and “girlfriend.”
- Avoid suggesting that certain activities are normally the role of one gender. Encourage children to explore the roles of the opposite gender if they are interested.
- If children tease others for acting more like the opposite gender, point out that in today’s world, people can have a variety of roles. Eg: a woman can be a firefighter or a man can stay at home and raise children.
- Even young children are able to talk about the impact of language and gender roles on their lives. Help them to use language respectfully and celebrate the diversity in their families and their communities.

## GUIDELINES FOR TALKING ABOUT LANGUAGE IN SCHOOL

It’s important to respond immediately to inappropriate comments by correcting stereotypes and offensive language and preventing personal attacks. Interrupt hurtful language with consistent, firm, and low-key comments. (“We don’t use that word here because it is hurtful”; “That’s a hurtful word. How do you think it would make you feel?”)

To ensure safe classroom discussion, tell students to show respect, listen to others and speak calmly.

Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC (GALE B.C.) say this about sticks & stones: “Finally we have an elementary-level video that addresses directly the issues of homophobia, name-calling, and families with gay or lesbian parents. The language is clear, and the word explanations quite lively. The children discuss their fears and pain very honestly. Most valuable for young viewers are the family photos and interactions, and the wisdom and idealism of the children. And it’s Canadian!”

## Titles from the collection Celebrating Diversity

**One of Them** (2000) A drama in which teenagers planning Human Rights Day at high school confront opposition when they try to add homophobia to other forms of prejudice. For ages 13 and up.

**Out: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth** (1993) Breaks the silence surrounding sexual orientation. For ages 13 and up.

**School’s Out** (1996) Members of Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia visit schools, and author and activist Jane Rule offers her insights. For ages 13 and up.

**In Other Words** (2001) Name-calling and cruel language hurt, say the teens in this documentary video. Interviews, animation and documentary footage create a positive way to tackle the challenging subject of homophobic bullying. For ages 13 and up.

**Apples + Oranges** (2002) For children aged 8 to 12, this is an energetic short film that uses a story-based model to integrate anti-homophobia information into community issues.

## SCREENING THE VIDEO

It is essential to preview the video and plan activities to provide support and security for children who may disclose family details.

Have the class divide a sheet of paper into quarters. Stop the video three times, and have students draw in the first three quarters a picture showing how the children in the video feel at that point. At the end, have them draw a picture in the last quarter showing how they themselves feel about the video. Invite students to explain their drawings to the class. Some stopping points:

- After the children talk about what “gay” means.
- After the children explain the worst thing about name-calling.
- After the children talk about their response to the traditional roles of boys and girls in society.

## DISCUSSION AFTER SCREENING THE VIDEO

- What new words did you learn from the video?
- How many kinds of families were in the video?
- How did people in the video say they felt when they or their families were called names or they were teased?
- Why did some boys want to do “girl” things and some girls want to do “boy” things?
- How do the names used in the video affect people with gay or lesbian family members?

## NAME-CALLING

- Discuss name-calling with the class: how does it make you feel, why do people do it, is it okay, what would be better? Make charts of key words from each discussion, and have students use the words to make a sentence or story.
- Ask the class for reasons why people use hurtful language. With the class, make up a story, drama or puppet play showing the reasons a character uses hurtful language, and what would be a better approach.
- Discuss whether the sticks and stones chant (“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me”) is true, and why people sing it. Have the class make up new words and actions that students think are true.
- Invite children to tell a story about a time they felt picked on, and what they did about it, or what they might have done.



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& Design  
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Music  
**Shari Ulrich**

Order number  
**C9101 045**

17 minutes



## BOY CULTURE/GIRL CULTURE

- Have the class list gender-specific terms such as *fireman*, *policeman*. Ask what is wrong with the words. Have students draw cartoons that show how these words don’t fit contemporary families and communities.
- Have the class make up charts of “boy” activities and “girl” activities. Ask if they ever want to do the things listed for the other gender. Discuss whether any activities should be limited to boys or girls.
- Have students describe a time when they felt they had to act a certain way because they were a girl or a boy, even though it was not the way they felt like acting, or a time they felt like acting a certain way but could not.

## EXPLORING FAMILY

- Ask the class to list everyone in their families. Count and graph the different types of families, number of family members, etc.
- Collect books and pictures of different families. Discuss what makes a family, who can be in a family, and if all families have a mom and dad.
- Ask whether students know any families with lesbian or gay people in them. Ask them to describe the families.
- Have students bring photographs of their families to school, and write a story about them. Have them make mobiles of their stories and pictures to hang around the classroom.
- Invite students to bring family members to read to small groups for 10 to 20 minutes to start each day, or on a given day each week. Have students read the family mobiles to their families.
- Have the class make a mural showing all the different kinds of families that exist in the school or in the community.
- Have a family diversity “open house” for students to introduce their families to their class and share their stories and art.

## IDEAS FOR FURTHER ACTION

- Have students write and illustrate charts explaining rules for good behaviour, then bind the charts into a Big Book. Have students show the Big Book to other classes.
- Have school staff work with students to write a code of conduct stating rules about name-calling and other behaviours.
- Designate a teacher or playground supervisor that students can talk to about language or behaviours that they feel are hurtful.