

Most of us enjoy teasing that is done in fun. Sometimes, though, our joking goes too far. We all need to be sensitive to topics and behaviors that may not be appreciated by others. Use the information below to help evaluate when teasing is good-natured and when it has crossed the line. Remember, everyone deserves the right to feel safe and to be left alone.

#### **GOOD-NATURED TEASING...**

- Involves a playful back-and-forth between both parties
- Is accompanied by a friendly tone of voice and laughter
- Is accompanied by affectionate gestures or expressions
- Brings people closer and encourages friendships
- Sometimes helps to lighten a tense or angry situation
- Does not lead to physical confrontations

#### **HURTFUL TEASING OR BULLYING...**

- May be accompanied by an angry tone of voice
- May be accompanied by angry body language, such as clenched fists
- Continues even when the person being teased shows distress
- Continues even when the person teasing knows the topic is upsetting to others
- Is sometimes accompanied by showing off in front of others

**THINK FIRST!** Consider the following three areas before engaging in what may seem like goodnatured teasing. If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you may be crossing the line.

#### **THE PERSONALITY AND EXPERIENCES OF THE OTHER PERSON:**

- Are you aware that the person has not appreciated teasing in the past?
- Are you aware that certain subjects are touchy for the other person?
- Are you aware of a factor in the other person's life that may make them especially sensitive to teasing?

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND THE OTHER PERSON:**

- Is the person a stranger or someone you don't know very well?
- Do you have a history of social problems with the person?
- Is he or she likely to misunderstand your intentions or sense of humor?
- Are you bigger and/or older than the other person?
- Are there gender, race or other differences between you that may make some topics inappropriate?

#### **THE TOPIC OF THE TEASING:**

- Is the teasing about identity (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender)?
- Is the teasing about appearance (body size/shape, complexion, clothing, physical attractiveness)?
- Is the teasing about ability (intelligence, physical strength or skill)?
- Is the teasing about social status (friends, family, class)?
- Does the teasing compare someone with an object or animal in an offensive way?
- Does the teasing have sexual content?

*The following book was used as a resource for this fact sheet: Teasing and Harassment: The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents by John H. Hoover and Glenn W. Olsen, National Education Service (2001).*

*No-Name Calling Week Resource Guide, Copyright ©2004 by GLSEN, Inc. 71*