

Bullying and Violence Prevention: Marvin

Lesson Title: What Is “Normal” Anyway?

Grade Level: High School



Project and Purpose

Challenge the notion of “normal” and consider where ideas about what is “normal” come from.

Essential Question

What is “normal” anyway?

Notes

This lesson could be conducted over the course of two class periods.

Materials

- Writing utensils
- Paper
- Sign that says “STRONGLY AGREE”
- Sign that says “STRONGLY DISAGREE”

Procedure

1. Remind students that in the video about Marvin’s experiences as a gay teenager, Marvin describes how the mistreatment he received from his classmates eventually began to feel normal: “I thought it was all normal, I thought that’s what every kids goes through because I was so young, I didn’t know any better. I thought that was life.”
2. Tell students that “normal” is defined as conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected (Webster).
3. Tell students that to further explore this idea of “normal,” they will play a game.
4. Divide the class into five teams of 4-5 students each. Ask each team to choose one scribe who will be responsible for writing the team’s answers, and provide each team with five sheets of paper (they can be half-sheets or scrap paper).
5. Explain to the groups that the game is similar to Scattergories with a few slight differences. You, the teacher, will call out a category and the teams will have two minutes to write a list of eight things that are “normal” parts of the topic. The goal is to think of things that the other groups will also think of as “normal”. For example — if the topic were “colors” teams would want to write down a color like blue, one of the most common colors, because other teams would be likely to guess the same thing.

6. For the first round call out the topic “going to school.”
 - Set the timer for 2 minutes.
 - Student groups should write their eight responses in the allotted two minutes.
 - When the timer rings, all pencils should be down.
 - Ask one representative from one group to read aloud the team’s answers while the other groups listen. If the group reading aloud says an answer that the other teams have, all teams that have that same response should circle that answer.
 - Ask a representative from each successive group to read their responses following the same process.
 - Once all groups have read their answers ask students to tally up the number of answers that their team got that were the same as the other teams.
7. Repeat step 6 for each of the following topics:
 - Celebrating a birthday
 - Going on a date
 - Being a teenager
 - Things you do for your friends
8. Debrief the game with students by asking them how many common “normal” items their teams came up with for each round. How would they label the other answers on their lists that other teams did not have on their lists? Are those items something “other than normal”? Why or why not?

Conclusion

Bring students back to the central theme of this lesson. Engage students in a discussion around the questions:

- How do things that are “normal” become normalized?
- How do our experiences shape what we perceive as normal?
- Is “normal” the same for everyone? Consider some situations in which what one person thinks of as normal, to another person might be strange.
- Remind students that in the video the mistreatment Marvin received from his classmates came to feel normal for him. How can something unhealthy or unsafe come to feel normal?