Almost everyone has been called a name at one time or another. You miss an easy ground ball in gym class and someone yells, “You clutz!” You know they didn’t really mean anything by calling you a name, but you still felt badly about it. But you get over it. Almost all of the bad names are pretty meaningless: Name-calling usually comes from frustration but still can be hurtful.

There may have been times when you have called someone a name and really didn’t mean anything by it. There are other times, however, when you called someone a hurtful name that was meant to make a person feel badly.

The person who name calls may not have bad intentions. It may have been done without thinking. But the person who gets called the name may take it differently. He or she may be hurt by it or get angry and start fighting.

The best thing to do is simply not call another person a name. That way, no one gets hurt. But it’s very hard to take all those names out of one’s vocabulary. Name-calling can become a habit, and habits can be hard to break.

As you get older, one of the expectations that parents, teachers and other adults have is that you will think before speaking. As you are involved in more and more situations, you gain more experience in what words are acceptable and the ones that are not.

This is a good time to think hard about the problems that come with name-calling.

Stories

Here are two stories about name-calling. Think about what happens in these stories and how these stories might offer something that you can learn. You’ll be asked some questions about the stories later.
Mrs. Horst

Larry was the trouble-maker in class. Everyone knew that. But Larry was also the best at many things. He was the fastest runner in gym class. He could hit a baseball farther than anyone. He always got a perfect score on the spelling quizzes and his report card was filled with “A” grades in most subjects. Larry also liked to brag about his successes. He also pointed out the “Needs Improvement” he got in the behavior part of the report card. He seemed proud of his bad behavior.

It was not surprising that many kids in class wanted to be his friend. He was, what one might call, a “natural leader.”

Mrs. Horst was scheduled to be a substitute teacher for Larry’s class while the regular teacher took some time off to have a baby. Mrs. Horst did not really want to be a substitute teacher. She was just trying to help out at her old school. She had taught school for almost fifty years and retired four years ago. She was almost eighty years old, but the principal could find no one else.

As she wrote her name on the board the first morning of her return to school, a voice called out from the back of the room, “Mrs. Horse?”

The class giggled.

Mrs. Horst turned to the students and said, firmly, “My name is Mrs. Horst. Please call me by my name. Mrs. Horst.”

“Um, Mrs. Horse, I was just wondering, I mean, where does someone get a name like Horse anyway?”

A number of students laughed aloud. Larry was having another great day in the back of the room.

“My name is Mrs. Horst and I will thank you to call me by my name. I’m proud of my name. I took the last name of my late husband sixty years ago and it has become an important part of who I am. Please call me by my right name.”

Four hands shot up from parts of the room.

“Yes?” Mrs. Horst called upon Billy.
“Mrs. Horse, I have to go to the bathroom. Can I please have the pass?”

More laughter as Billy got up to take the Washroom Pass from the teacher’s desk.

“Now wait just a minute young man…”

“Aw, let him go Mrs. Horse, Mrs. Tuttle always just let us go if we had to go,” commented Sheila.

“Yea, Mrs. Horse, just let him go.” The others chimed in. The whole class seemed to be enjoying the joke.

Mrs. Horst, however, was not enjoying any of it. Her lower lip quivered and tears began to form in the corners of her eyes.

By now many of the students in class were laughing.

**Dummy**

The principal introduced a new student to the class Monday morning. “Class, I’d like you to meet Dominic. He’s transferred to our school from Cerignola, Italy. He’s not only new to our school, but he’s new to our country. Please give him a Central School Welcome and make him feel at home here.”

Dominic smiled as he was guided to his seat by Mrs. Saif. One could tell just by looking at him that he was nervous and scared. “I’m sure he’ll be just fine in our class. Don’t worry, Dominic, the students here are very nice. You’ll see.”

Dominic simply nodded and smiled.

Mrs. Saif asked him to tell the class about Cerignola and Italy. Dominic, however, simply nodded and smiled.

“How you speak English?” She asked.

“Only un po’ - a little,” he said. “Please, Mrs. Teacher, my name, my name is Dum.”

“Ah, I see. Fine. You call me ‘Mrs. Saif’ and we’ll call you ‘Dom,’ short for ‘Dominic.’ Is that okay?”
“Si. Mrs. Saif.”

Judy started it at lunch. As Dominic was looking a bit bewildered holding his try near the end of the line, Judy called out, “Hey Dummy! Over here! You can sit with us.”

The four girls at Judy’s table shushed her right away. “Judy! Don’t do that! That’s terrible.”

“What? He doesn’t even know. What do you mean terrible. He said to call him ‘Dum,’ right?” And with that she called out again, “Dummy! Over here!.”

By now the rest of the cafeteria was quiet, watching Judy and the new boy with the cafeteria tray and the confused look.

“Come on Dummy,” chimed in Heather. “Yeah, you can sit with us Dummy,” added Adriana.

Dominic’s face turned bright red. He looked down at his feet and started to walk to a corner table where no one was sitting. Dom understood English quite well, he had difficulties speaking the language, however, because he was new to the country. All students in Italy talk classes in English.

Amanda laughed loudly, “Awww, Dummy, don’t you want to sit with some real American girls?”

**A Tipping Point**

In each of the stories you read above there was name-calling. Sometimes the names just slip out, but other times, like in the stories you read, some were intended to be cruel. Some, however, slip out and can be fixed with some quick and mature action. Remember, name calling can be hurtful.

There is a very short period of time when the problem can be fixed, where the name-calling can be fixed. We call this period of time a window of opportunity or the “tipping point.”

If Larry had quickly said “Oh, sorry Mrs. Horst. I just wanted to know where the name Horst comes from. I’m sorry for mispronouncing your name” the problem would have prob-
ably gone away. But he didn’t.

If after calling “Dummy” over to her table, Judy could have said something like: “I mean, Dom, sorry. Hey Dom, you can sit with us. Don’t worry, we’re friendly. And Adriana here knows a little Italian, I think.” The results would have been much better.

But Larry and Judy didn’t. The tipping point passed and it became too late to fix the problem.

The problem became worse when others joined in on the disrespect.

Larry and Judy had been the only ones involved with the name-calling, it would not have created such a large problem. A teacher might step in and punish the single student and thus, end the problem. But when many other students join in, the problem becomes too large to fix.

Think about Mrs. Horst trying to teach that class for the rest of the day. For the rest of the week. For the rest of the month. That first day set the tone for the class. It would be very hard for any substitute teacher to forget what happened.

Now think about Dominic. He wanted the students in his new class, his new country, to call him by a nickname. His accent made the name ‘Dom’ come out sounding like ‘Dum’ and Judy took advantage of it. He turned red and walked away, probably realizing that not only were the students making fun of his name, but his accent was well.

**In The Future**

Sometimes even your best friend does something very wrong. When this happens, it’s easy to say “sure,” and go along with it, even though you know better. Following is easy, leading is hard.

Any number of students in Larry’s class could have fixed the prob-
lem. Billy and Sheila joined in on Larry’s fun by also mispronouncing the teacher’s name. Billy could have turned to Larry and said “Hey! Keep quiet and let her teach.” Sheila could have turned to both Larry and Billy and told them to “Be kind.” But neither was confident enough to be a leader. Both followed Larry, even though Larry was leading them down a bad path.

All of the girls at Judy’s table had the opportunity to minimize or prevent the problem. None of them did. They actually chimed in with Judy in being disrespectful.

Think about the outcomes. But first, pretend you are Mrs. Horst and Dominic. How would you feel?

Going along with someone like Larry or Judy is immature. If one asked the students in Larry’s class if they should do whatever Larry does, most would probably say “no way.” Same with the students in the cafeteria. Judy is not the one most would pick to be a wise leader.

Think. Ask yourself questions. Weigh the consequences.

In the future, when asked to follow someone else’s mistakes, ask yourself two questions: “What’s the worst that can happen if I go along?” and “Will anything good come from this situation?” And ask yourself these questions: “If I speak up, can I make things better? Am I confident enough to speak up?”
Questions

Name_____________________
Date_____________________

Answer each question. Use the space below each question to write your answer. If you need more space, use the back of the paper. Make certain you use good grammar and write in complete sentences. Many of the questions have no “right” or “wrong” answer. Do the best you can. Your answers may be shared with your parents, teachers and counselors.

1. What did you do to get in trouble? Describe what happened.

2. The title of this packet is “Stamp Out Name-Calling.” Why do you think you were asked to read the packet and answer these questions?

3. You read a story about Larry and Mrs. Horst. What did Larry do that upset the substitute teacher? Why do you think he did it?

4. Why do you think Mrs. Horst was so upset? What might have caused her to start crying?
5. Who could have prevented Larry’s outburst from being so hurtful? What could have been done?

6. Why is it so hard to speak up when someone like Larry says or does something that is hurtful?

7. You read a story about Dominic and Judy. Describe what happened.

8. What do you think would have happened in the cafeteria if the girls at Judy’s table had been successful when they shushed her? Explain why.
9. Pretend you are the principal of Larry’s school. What punishment would you give Larry? What about Billy and Sheila? Explain your answers.

10. Pretend you are the principal of Judy’s school. What punishment would you give Judy? What about Heather and Adriana? Explain your answers.

11. What could you have done to have prevented your problem today? Why do you think this would have worked? Explain.

12. If you had taken the time to be more mature and think about consequences, do you think you would have gotten in trouble? Explain why in at least one paragraph.