

The Heavy Coat

(Suitable for Years 5-9)

Aim:

- To focus on name-calling and offensive labelling.
- To create empathy for the victims of bullying.
- To encourage group responsibility.
- To foster an improved classroom/school climate.

Materials required:

- Small cards (one per person).
- Safety pins.
- An old coat that would roughly fit any student in the class.

Procedure:

1. Each student is given a card. He/she is then encouraged to write a name, insult or label on their card - often used or heard ones are good.
It is made clear that they will be used in the class.
2. The cards are collected. Then the coat is set up on the back of a chair. As each insult is read aloud, the card is pinned to the coat. This may bring some laughter. At the end the coat is covered with cards of abuse.
3. A volunteer is chosen "at random". The volunteer puts on the coat.
4. Ask: 'How does it feel to wear the coat?'
'How might you feel if you had to wear it all the time?'
5. A series of students might choose/be chosen to come wear the coat.
'How does it feel?'
'How might it feel to wear it daily?'
6. Invite some role plays based on the wearing of the coat. eg.
'How might you walk if you wore the coat?'
'Would you make eye contact if you wore the coat?'
'How might you talk with the coat on?'
'What might you say/do if bullied while you're wearing the coat?'
7. Break the class into small groups. Each one is to discuss:
 - (a) 'If you had to wear the coat for a long time, how might that affect your relationship with others and your feelings about yourself?'
 - (b) 'What can we do as a group to minimise the amount of 'heavy coat' unpleasantness that goes on in our class/school?'



Each group is to report back as a whole. Suggestions are noted and discussed as needed.

8. The teacher now debriefs the children, reminding them that it was pretend and summing up what has been learned.