

I WAS JUST KIDDING

When teasing or name-calling leads to hurt feelings or consequences, “I was just kidding!” is a common response. Most of us enjoy good-natured teasing that is done in fun. And some people just don’t know how to take a joke, right? So how do we know when we have crossed the line? When are we no longer “*just kidding*,” but participating in mean behavior?

Read the scenarios below. With a partner or in a small group, discuss whether or not you think each situation is an example of harmless teasing or hurtful language. Explain how you came to your decisions or what additional information you need to make a decision.

1. Sonia recently moved to Lincoln Heights and just finished her first week at the local middle school. At 5 feet 8 inches, she towered over most of the students in her seventh grade class. While looking for a place to sit during lunch, another student called to her, “Hey, shorty, there’s a spot over here!” Sonia paused for a moment and another girl from the group waved her over. “Don’t pay attention to her,” she told Sonia. “That’s just the way we talk to each other. They call me Einstein because I got all C’s on my last report card.”

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

2. For years, Angel has made fun of his best friend, Dave’s, peanut butter obsession. “You’d eat my gym sock if it was covered in peanut butter,” he once told Dave. One day in science lab, the students designed mazes to test the intelligence of white mice. When the teacher told the class that they would be baiting the mazes with peanut butter, Angel called out, “Better be careful—Dave might get to the end of the maze before the mice!” The other students broke out in laughter.

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

3. On Monday afternoon, Rob used his recess time to hang campaign posters around the school, which read, "Vote Rob for Student Council President." On Tuesday morning in homeroom, Rob found one of his posters taped to the blackboard in the front of the classroom. Someone had crossed out the word, "President," and replaced it with "First Lady." One of Rob's classmates pointed to a girl in the first row, indicating that Maria had altered the poster. Rob glared at her as he tore down the poster. "It's just a joke," Maria laughed. "Lighten up—I'm gonna vote for you."

Harmless teasing or hurtful language? Why?

Based on your conversation, list three ways to complete the following sentence.

Teasing has crossed the line to become hurtful when...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____