How to Handle Harassment in the Hallways in 3 Minutes

Adapted from the work of the Toronto District School Board

A very effective way to move toward inclusiveness in school culture is for all teachers and staff to take action when homophobic or sexist comments are heard. Creating a safe learning environment in schools is the legal and moral responsibility of every adult in the school. Often teachers wish to address inappropriate behaviour but don’t feel that they know exactly how to do so. This process gives clear guidelines for dealing with those ‘teachable moments’ in school. There are four steps to this process. It is important that ALL FOUR STEPS be taken WHENEVER exclusive language is heard in the school environment.

STEPS:

1. STOP the harassment
2. IDENTIFY the harassment
3. BROADEN the response
4. ASK for change in future behaviour

A specific example that is relative to issues of exclusion based on perceived sexual orientation...
A teacher overhears a student in the halls saying, “Don’t be such a fag!”

Here is some specific language that a teacher MIGHT use in such a situation. It is important that teachers respond using language that is authentic to them, and not from a prescribed script.

STOP - “Whoa, just a minute there. Stop using that word.”
IDENTIFY - “The word ‘fag’ is not appropriate language. OR “That word you used is not acceptable. Using that kind of language is wrong.”
BROADEN - “That kind of language can be very hurtful to people in our school who may be gay or have family members or friends who are gay. That language hurts other people and makes them feel excluded. Nobody in this school has the right to hurt or exclude others. This is a safe place for everyone.”
ASK FOR CHANGE - “Please stop using that word from now on. Can you promise me that you will do that?”

Not only is the impact of this encounter important for changing the behaviour of individual students, but the positive benefits extend to all other students in the area who overhear the staff member actively building a safe space for everyone.