

# School Guide to Visible Differences

A practical guide for teachers, school counselors, nurses, and school leaders

**Help every student feel safe, respected, and included. These ideas support classroom belonging and bullying prevention; adapt them to your school's policies and students' ages.**

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## Start with belonging

Children notice differences, and they may ask questions about skin, hair, bodies, or medical devices. A calm, respectful response can teach curiosity without turning one student into a classroom lesson. No child should have to explain or represent a condition to earn respect.

### What is vitiligo?

Vitiligo is a condition in which areas of skin lose pigment, creating lighter patches. It is not contagious. It does not make a person less capable, less worthy, or less deserving of friendship. Questions about an individual student's health should be handled privately with the family and appropriate school staff.

### Use language that protects dignity

- Say: "People's skin can look different, and everyone deserves respect."
- Say: "Vitiligo is not contagious."
- Say: "We do not make jokes about someone's appearance."
- Avoid asking a student to explain their skin in front of the class.
- Avoid describing a child as a lesson, inspiration, or spokesperson without their agreement.

## A 10-minute classroom conversation

1. Set the purpose: "Today we are practicing how to make our classroom a place where everyone belongs."
2. Invite general observations: "What helps someone feel welcome in a group?"
3. Practice a response: "That is a personal difference. We speak respectfully."
4. Discuss action: "If you see teasing, what is one safe way to get help?"
5. Close with a commitment: each student names one action that helps classmates feel included.

## Responding to teasing or bullying

1. Interrupt safely and calmly when appropriate: "That comment is not okay here."
2. Check in privately with the targeted student: "I saw what happened. You deserve respect. What support would help right now?"
3. Follow school reporting and safeguarding procedures; document the behavior factually.
4. Notify the appropriate staff and family according to school policy.
5. Follow up. Do not rely on a single conversation if behavior continues.

## Support without spotlighting

- Ask the student privately what support they want.
- Offer choices about whether and how to answer classmates' questions.
- Protect privacy; share personal information only with appropriate permission and need.
- Address repeated behavior consistently, including online conduct connected to school.
- Make inclusion a classroom norm for everyone, not a special favor for one student.

## Quick planning checklist

- I know the school's bullying-reporting procedure.
- Students have a safe way to ask for help.
- Classroom examples represent different skin tones and visible differences respectfully.

- I will not require a student to disclose personal health information.
- I will check in after an incident and document follow-up.

### **Educational note**

This resource is for awareness and educational use. It is not medical, mental-health, or legal advice and does not replace school policy, individualized student supports, or consultation with qualified professionals.

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