

# Teasing

by Dr Sue Knight

### Topic objectives

This short topic provides students with an opportunity to apply their moral reasoning skills and attitudes to an issue they are commonly faced with in their everyday lives.

It aims to develop in students:

- a capacity to formulate criteria in order to define complex moral concepts and behaviours;
- an increased understanding of the processes of giving and evaluating moral reasons;
- an increased understanding of the importance of thinking about the motives on which we act.
- practice in applying moral reasoning in everyday situations

### Background to the topic for teachers

Teasing would seem to involve making fun of other people. Sometimes we might tease a friend light-heartedly, about something we know doesn't really matter to him/her (consistently running late for appointments, for example), and in such cases our friend is likely to laugh along with us. On the other hand, sometimes people are teased about things they already feel bad about, like a low grade, a perceived lack of ability in some area, a shortage of friends, an aspect of their appearance - perhaps the colour of their skin - or what they perceive to be a weakness or flaw in their character - a lack of courage, for example. In these cases the effect, and sometimes the intention, of the teasing is to erode the self-confidence of the victims, and make them feel embarrassed or ashamed.

Teasing is an important issue, because the different behaviours it encompasses form a continuum ranging from arguably harmless and friendly 'ribbing' between friends to deliberate attempts to hurt and humiliate. Students can sometimes find it hard to know where the line is to be drawn. And when students cross this line, whether deliberately or not, it is important that they are encouraged to reflect critically on their own motives, as well as on the way their behaviour affects others.

The notion of teasing is obviously a slippery one, and its boundaries need to be drawn as carefully as possible. But we do not begin by giving students an abstract definition. Rather, we work with their intuitive notions of teasing, and ask them to **formulate criteria that distinguish teasing from other practices** such as threatening or criticising. This is an important logical skill, and is a focus of Lesson 1.

### Topic Structure and Resources

Aim of lesson	Resources
<p><b>Lesson 1: What is teasing? Is it sometimes okay?</b></p> <p>Students are encouraged to consider what counts as teasing, whether teasing is ever okay and, if it is, how we might distinguish between teasing which is okay and teasing which is not.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the scenarios – sufficient for one copy of each scenario between two students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lesson 2: Why do people tease others?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the extended scenario Lisa</li> </ul>

Stage 3 (even year) Topic 7

Students are encouraged to consider why people may engage in the sort of teasing which makes people feel bad about themselves.

and the Birds – one each or one between two.

**References**

Lesson 1	Scenario 2 is adapted from an example by Fred Frankel (Extract from <i>Taking the Fun Out of Teasing</i> ), John Wiley and Sons Inc. 2010. <a href="http://www.education.com/reference/article/fun-teasing/">http://www.education.com/reference/article/fun-teasing/</a>
Lesson 2	Lisa and the Birds is inspired by a theme running through Matthew Lipman's <i>Lisa</i> .

## Lesson 1: What is teasing? Is it sometimes okay?

For this lesson you will need

- Enough copies of each of the scenarios for 1 between 2 students

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### Introductory discussion

5 minutes

*This discussion is designed to encourage students to reflect on the views they have and the attitudes they already hold about teasing.*

Hands up if you have ever been teased.

Hands up if you have ever teased someone else; maybe a friend, a brother or sister, or someone you didn't know very well.

- 👋 Do you and your friends sometimes tease each other? Can you give an example without naming who did it? *Take 2-3 examples here.*
- 👋 Have there been times when you were teased and didn't mind - maybe you thought it was funny? Can you give an example? *Again, take 2-3 examples.*
- 👋 Have you ever seen someone being teased and getting upset or embarrassed by what was said? Can you give an example? Don't name anyone here - just tell us the words that were used.
- 👋 Would you have been upset if you'd been teased like this?
- 👋 *(Note that while this is a substantive question we are only looking for a few initial ideas)* Would you say teasing is: always OK, sometimes OK or never OK? Hands up if you think it is always OK. Hands down. Hands up if you think it is sometimes OK. Hands down. Hands up if you think it is never OK. Hands down.

We've probably all teased someone else.

- 👋 Why do you think we do it?

In this topic we're going to think about teasing in some more detail and we are going to start by looking at some different scenarios so we can work out:

- What counts as teasing, and
- Whether teasing is ever okay.

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### Discussion part 1: what counts as teasing?

25 minutes

*Put students into pairs and give each pair a copy of the first scenario. Allow students 2 minutes to discuss the scenario.*

*Facilitate a whole group discussion of the two procedural questions that follow each scenario. Use the follow up questions, listed after the scenarios, only as needed if the students are having trouble answering.*

*Repeat this with each of the following scenarios.*

### Scenario 1

It's summer holidays, and lots of kids from Kathryn's class are swimming at the local pool. They're having a dive-bombing competition, jumping from the second-highest board. But Jack won't join in. 'Hey Jack, come up', Mickey yells. Jack shakes his head. 'Nah' he calls back. 'Chicken!' Mickey yells, and the other kids laugh.

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Why doesn't Jack want to jump from the diving board? What do the other kids think the reason is?*
- *Do the kids try to help him? What do they do?*
- *How do you think this makes Jack feel? Imagine you were in Jack's place—how would you feel?*
- *How would you feel about yourself?*
- *Would you feel ashamed or embarrassed? Why?*
- *How would you feel about your friends?*
- *Do you think Mickey deliberately set out to make Jack feel bad?*
- *Does this count as teasing?*
- *Is it okay? How would you like it if the same thing happened to you?*

## **Scenario 2**

Hannah likes to play netball, but she's not very good. There are two Year 6 teams, and Hannah always wants to play in the team that has the best players. In their last game, Hannah played Goal Defence and missed every rebound. She didn't manage a single turn-around, and gave away six free shots at goal. The other members of the team grew more and more frustrated and irritable, until at last someone called out, 'Hannah, you're so bad at this'.

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Why do Hannah's teammates get irritable towards the end of the game? If you were in the team, would you feel the same way?*
- *Did the other kids make fun of Hannah? Or laugh at her?*
- *How would you describe what the team member did when she called out, 'Hannah you're so bad at this'?*
- *Was it okay for Hannah's team mate to say that? Make sure you give your reasons.*

## **Scenario 3**

Everyone likes Hugh. He's really laid-back and cheerful. And he's really good at football. He never boasts about it though, and gives lots of help to other kids when they're having trouble with their kicking and tackling. But Hugh is really disorganised - he's often a bit late for training and sometimes forgets to bring his mouth-guard to matches, which means he has to race back home to get it. It never makes much difference though. He always makes it back for the start of the match, and is always among the best players. And everyone just accepts that that's the way he is.

Today Hugh's club is playing the top team in their local league. The coach arrives half an hour early to find most of his players there already, warming up and practicing their kicking. Hugh is there, with his mouth-guard in, organising the warm up drills. The coach comes over, smiling, and calls out, 'Who do we have taking the lead here? It looks like Hugh, but there's still 30 minutes to kick off!' Everyone laughs - including Hugh.

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Do you think the coach is trying to make Hugh feel bad? What makes you think that?*
- *Hugh doesn't seem upset by the coach's joke. Why do you think that is?*

#### **Scenario 4**

Jen isn't good at sports. She's really good at some things - especially Maths - and she spends a lot of time reading. She really wants to play netball with her friends, but she just doesn't seem to get it. She's always giving away penalties and she fumbles the ball most times it comes her way. It's weird, because her mum coaches the senior team in the local league Jen plays in, and she used to be a state player. She tries to help Jen but gets impatient when her daughter doesn't seem to improve. Jen often ends up crying.

Jen's under-12 team has just won a close match and the coach is giving the players some feedback. 'Well Jen', she says, 'I guess you get points for trying, but it would have been good if you could have caught the ball now and again!' A few people laugh.

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Is this scenario similar to the previous one? If not, what are the differences? .*
- *Do you think the coach should have thought more carefully about the effect his 'joke' was likely to have on Jen?*

#### **Scenario 5**

Jen and Nicole have been friends ever since they started school. They are very different. Nicole is really outgoing, talks a lot, and gets very excited about things, sometimes rushing in with her opinions, and not realising that other people are wanting to speak. Jen is quieter, is interested in other people's opinions and listens carefully to what they say. The girls often joke about their differences.

This afternoon they're getting together with some of the other kids to plan the end-of-year class party. As usual, Nicole has lots of ideas, and talks and talks, getting more excited as she goes on. When she stops for breath, Jen smiles, and says to the others, 'Quick, better get in now - it might be your only chance!' Everyone laughs. Nicole is laughing too. 'Sorry' she says, 'I'll try to keep quiet from now on.'

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Does Nicole realise that she often dominates the conversation? How worried is she about that?*
- *To what extent does it upset her friends?*
- *Is Nicole upset by Jen's remark and by the laughter from her classmates? Why do you think this is?*

#### **Scenario 6**

It's Nick's second day at his new school. As he follows the other kids across the yard to the art room, a group of boys steps to the side and one of them sticks out his foot - and Nick goes tumbling to the ground. The boy leans over and says quietly, 'Just so you remember- don't mess with us.' And then the boys walk on.

1. What did you decide? Was it teasing or not?
2. Is this okay or not?

*Follow-up questions, to use as needed:*

- *Is anyone laughing in this scenario?*
- *Were the boys teasing Nick? Or were they doing something else? If so, what?*

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### End the lesson

Next week we are going to talk some more about teasing.

## Lesson 2: Why do people tease others?

*For this lesson you will need*

- *Enough copies of Lisa and the birds for one between two or one each*

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### Extended scenario – Lisa and the birds

5 minutes

*Distribute copies of the scenario to students so they can read along – read it out or have a student or students do so.*

Lisa, Harry and Mickey are friends. Lisa loves animals and wants to be a vet. She is always coming across injured birds and kittens that have been abandoned, and looks after them until they are strong enough to be released or given a new home. Mickey doesn't really understand why Lisa does all this. He likes animals too, especially his dog, Paddy, but he figures it's just natural that some animals survive and some don't.

Lisa's mum loves cooking and everyone loves her roast chicken. Lisa often asks her friends around on the weekend, and that's always what they have for lunch.

This weekend though, Lisa is really busy, caring for a baby blackbird. He was all skin and bones when she found him, but now he has started to eat. She has to feed him every hour or so, and she's been doing that all morning. So she hasn't been able to pay much attention to Mickey and Harry.

Now it's lunchtime, and Lisa's mother is carving the chicken. Lisa gets a drumstick - that's the part she likes best. As she begins to eat, Mickey says, in a funny, singsong-y sort of voice, 'Hey Lisa - that's a dead bird you're eating. You're eating a bird you know'.

Harry looks shocked. And Lisa stops, with her fork halfway to her mouth. Then she pushes her plate away, and runs from the room.

As she does, Mickey calls out, in an irritated voice, 'Lisa - I was only joking!' And then, when Lisa doesn't return, he mumbles to Harry, 'She just can't take a joke'.

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### Facilitated discussion

25 minutes

*Use your procedural questioning skills to facilitate discussion of the numbered questions.*

Mickey claims he was only joking when he said to Lisa, 'That's a dead bird you're eating'.

1. Suppose Lisa's mother asks Mickey to explain the joke to the rest of them. What do you think he'd say? *Take 2 - 3 responses*
2. Do you think Harry sees Mickey's remark as a joke?
3. If you were Harry, how would you describe Mickey's behaviour?
4. How do you think Mickey's remark makes Lisa feel? Why do you think that?
5. Do you think Mickey was just trying to be funny, or do you think there was another reason why he made the remark?

*Follow-up question (use only if no-one raises the point below):*

- Could it be that Mickey was annoyed with Lisa for choosing to spend her morning looking after the blackbird instead of talking to him and Harry?
6. Is it possible that Mickey doesn't understand why he said it?
  7. Is it possible that Mickey was trying to 'get back' at Lisa?

8. Is it possible that Mickey was trying to 'get back' at Lisa, but didn't realise it?
9. Do you think Mickey deliberately set out to 'get back' at Lisa? Or is it possible that he didn't plan to say what he said, but that the words just slipped out?
10. Is it important to think carefully about why we say the things we do?

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**End the lesson with a facilitated discussion**

-  Does anyone have any questions they would like to ask about the topic or comments to make?

~~~END OF TOPIC~~~

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