

Have You Ever?

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Have you ever had a bully in your school? Have you ever thought that if kids would take the time to get to know each other, there would be less bullying? If you answered 'yes' to one or both questions, you have made a connection to me. The *PassageWays* model is designed to help students and teachers make connections and build relationships through activities such as "Have you ever...?" So how does this help make connections and build relationships? Let me explain.

Since *PassageWays* has been implemented with our students, the teachers and I have noticed positive things occurring. In a couple of classrooms, the students did an activity called "I Wonder". Students anonymously wrote questions that they are wondering about, such as "Why is chicken so good?" "Who will I live with when my parents get divorced?" and "How can you go to school with the same kids all your life and still have no friends?"

When the teachers read all the questions back to them, in a tone of honoring their wonderings, some students commented that they did not know that other kids felt the same way they did. One student told her teacher that she had shared something with her group that she had never shared with anyone before. A new level of trust and belonging is emerging for our students in their classrooms.

In a small group that I am personally leading to pilot a *PassageWays* approach to preventing and healing from bullying, we did an activity

called "Wheel Within a Wheel" in which the students were paired with another student and given a topic to talk about, such as, "What do you like to do for fun?" After each topic, the students would rotate to a new partner and would be presented with a new topic. The topics are carefully chosen to ease students into talking about what is important to them without leaving them feeling vulnerable or exposed. At the end of the class the students were asked to write about something new they had learned about someone in our group. "He isn't mean like I thought," wrote one student in her journal; "I like him as my friend." Another student wrote, "I didn't know she was ever that nice."

Personally, *PassageWays* has helped me to develop a friendship and trust with someone I probably would not have pursued otherwise. Prior to the *PassageWays* training in June, Mellisa Heath and I were elementary principals in the same district but did not have a close working relationship. We worked as professionals but did not take the

time to know one another. While participating in the training in Colorado, we began to discover each other on a personal level. We realized that we had many things in common and that our personalities complemented each other. Since the training, she and I have come to depend on one another for support and advice. When we are feeling the stress of our jobs or personal life, we call each other and do a *PassageWays* "check in". At the teachers' training in August, several teachers commented that they had noticed the positive change in our relationship. Our example has led to a more unified staff between the two buildings, with teachers who are taking the time to mend relationships and to get to know one another and their students.

I know it will take some time to actually see the full effects of how *PassageWays* has impacted the lives of those involved; however, the small glimpses that I have seen of students reaching out and connecting to one another gives me hope for the future of positive student interaction.



Third-grade students and administrators in a Sharing Circle.