

Calling People Names

Name-calling is when one person uses a negative label to describe another person. Young people call each other “stupid,” “moron,” and “idiot.” Adults call children “rude,” “lazy,” and “selfish.” Adults call each other “meatheads,” “bums,” and “rednecks.” Everyone seems to do it.

Name-calling, an *ad hominem* attack, is a type of bullying. Ad hominem attacks appeal to a person’s emotions and beliefs rather than their ability to think. The purpose of the attack is to connect a negative concept with a person. By linking someone to a negative symbol, the person doing the name calling hopes the other person will be rejected on the basis of the symbol, rather than the facts.

Name-calling is a powerful influence on how people think and what they do. It’s almost always used to achieve negative ends, like causing conflict, ruining reputations, and influencing decision-making through prejudice and fear.

When words are used to describe someone—whether it’s you or someone else—think about what you’re hearing and how you react (see *Losing Your Temper*). Are the words being used in a positive or negative way? You can recognize negative words because they give new uncomplimentary meanings to existing words (butt head, for example) or they use taboo words (see *Swearing*) to describe a person. Not good.

The next time you feel like calling someone a name, try expressing your feelings without attaching a negative label. Instead, replace the negative label with a word meaning the exact opposite. For example, instead of saying, “You’re stupid.” Say, “I don’t like your idea.” Or, “I disagree.” Here are a few more ideas to consider:

- “You’re rude” changes to “Please be polite.”
- “You act like a baby” changes to “Let’s be mature about this.”
- “You’re mean” changes to “Please be nice.”

You get the idea. With a little practice, using positive words is easy and a whole lot better than their negative counterparts. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Name-calling Dos and Don'ts

- Be respectful.
- Be considerate.
- Make sure you're brain is in gear before your mouth starts running.
- Choose your words carefully.
- Think before you let a name influence what you believe.
- Make it a rule that you don't call people names.

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