Feeling Different Brainstorm

Goal:
- To identify the emotions that often arise as a result of feeling somehow apart or different from those around us and to make room for feelings of empathy.

Have Ready:
- One flipchart with the heading “How does it feel to be different?”
- 2 markers and tape.

Instructions:
- Tell the youth to think about an occasion in their lives when they felt different from other people in a group situation. This could be either a positive or negative experience. Remind that they will not be asked to share the experience, but that we are interested in the emotions that they felt at that time. Ask the group “How does it feel to be different?”
- Get the youth to brainstorm all the feelings and write them on the flipchart. It is recommended that the positive and negative emotions be written in two separate columns. If only ‘negative’ feelings are being shared acknowledge this (often people do have very negative feelings due to bad experiences of feeling different) and probe for positive ones: can feeling different ever feel good?

Sample flipchart answers:
“How does it feel to be different?”
- humiliated
- weird
- scared
- depressed
- angry (inward and outward)
- thoughts of suicide
- isolated/lonely
- frustrated
- bad
- hurt
- alone
- rage
- unique
- strong
- happy
- proud
- special
- confident/leader/teacher
- honoured
Debrief:

- Mention even though each of our experiences of “feeling different” can be quite varied from those of our peers, the emotions they stir can often feel the same. Therefore, we call these our **Common Feelings** (write “Common Feelings” at the bottom of the flipchart). Through acknowledging that we are all capable of feeling scared, sad, happy, proud, etc. we can learn to relate and appreciate others who seem, perhaps, quite different from us. I have felt many of the same emotions in response to being put-down or mistreated for being different from others for other reasons. **Therefore, it is because of these shared emotions that we can all understand how it is wrong to put someone down because we think they are different.** Instead of trying to be the same as everyone else, we need to start appreciating that we are all different and that this is a good thing.

- Mention by being different we have an opportunity to learn from each other (and address the fear and intolerance in society caused by ignorance). We each have a **choice** everyday as to how we treat people; we can treat people poorly and hurt them which will likely make them feel these emotions on the left, or we can appreciate and embrace differences and chances are people will feel the emotions on the right. Ask yourself “which kind of world do I want to live in?” We can sometimes feel helpless to change things, but this is something all of us can do every day.

- Mention that because feeling different can lead to **thoughts of suicide**. Discrimination and bullying, whether due to homophobia, racism, etc., are very serious. Everyone deserves the right to live their lives free of harassment and bullying. If you are harassing someone for being different, that is not ok. Your actions can lead to someone feeling isolated, bad about who they are, and could be contributing to someone wanting to hurt themselves. **Everyone has a right to go to school safely and free of harassment.** If you are experiencing bullying, you can speak to a teacher or a guidance counselor in your school. If you or someone you know is feeling the things in this left column, including thoughts of suicide, it is very important to talk to an adult that you trust about it and get the help that’s needed. You deserve to be happy and safe in your life. (FYI: In our society LGBTTQ and Indigenous youth are many times more likely to attempt suicide than youth who do not identify as such.\(^1\) Dealing with issues of isolation, whether due to homophobia or racism or any other reason can be really hard for anyone.)

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\(^1\) 1995 Study showed that Canada had one of the highest suicide rates in the world, with LGBTTQ youth accounting for about one-third. (Kroll and Warneke, 1995) Another study out of Calgary showed that gay or bisexual men were “almost fourteen times more likely to have made a serious suicide attempt at some point in their lives than their [straight] counterparts.” (Bagley and Tremblay, 1996)- Adapted from “Some Facts on being gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgendered, & transsexual,” by Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia.