



Speechifying at the Start of the Year

By Beth Reis, Safe Schools Coalition Co-Chair, August 2008

for use by principals and teachers

"I care about and respect the people in this school (bus, playground) and I know you want peace and respect just as much as I do. I hope you will join me in a new kind of promise this year. A promise not to intentionally hurt anybody. Not with fists but also not with words, rumors, or actions, either. Not about their color, how they speak, how masculine or feminine they are, their religion, what they wear, who they like, how much money they have, their abilities and disabilities, their hair, how they walk, who they hang out with, their size or height ... not for any reason at all. I expect you all to treat each other [if the audience is your staff, insert "and your students"] -- and I will treat you -- with kindness. I don't want to hear [insert words you heard last year].

*I expect you to tell someone, even me, when something they say or do is racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, transphobic, or otherwise prejudiced or just plain **mean**. If you tell me that something I have said is one of those things, what I promise is to hear you out, and no matter whether I meant it to be offensive or not, not to defend or explain it but just to simply apologize for the offense or hurt. And I promise to try my utmost not to repeat the offense. I hope every person here will do the same.*

*If you **do** tell the person that what they said or did was offensive or hurtful and the behavior doesn't stop, please please please come to me or _____. We will take what you say seriously. We will talk with everyone who may have seen or heard what happened. And we will do our level best to make you safe. If you haven't felt heard in the past when you have tried reporting something, give me/us another chance. This is the year we will turn it around.*

Wouldn't it be the coolest thing ever if we could be a place every single one of us woke up every morning wanting to come to? I know that some of you don't believe it's possible. It's only possible if we -- every one of us -- decides to make it that way. It's just that we all have hard things happen at home sometimes and we don't need to have more hard things happen here. This can be the island. We can make it that way. This may sound as if we should all sing kum-ba-yah together. But I don't mean it to be a sappy thing. Just a clean start.

What do you think?"