

What Students Need to Know about

Free
Speech

VS

Hate
Speech

What is Free Speech?

- The First Amendment says people can share their ideas and opinions.
- This includes speech, writing, art, music, and peaceful protest.
- Even if words are unpopular or offensive, they are usually protected.

When Words Are NOT Protected

- Speech loses protection if it is:
- A True Threat – saying you will hurt someone.
- Incitement – trying to get others to do violence right away.
- Harassment in Schools/Work – words that create an unsafe or unfair environment (covered by Title VI and Title IX).
- Obscenity or Child Exploitation – harmful content not allowed by law.

Why It Matters in Schools

- Students have free speech rights, but not if words disrupt learning or harm others' rights.
- Hate language can make classmates feel unsafe or unwelcome.

What is Hate Speech?

- In the U.S., there is no law that bans "hate speech."
- Hurtful or mean words are still protected unless they cross a line into real danger.

BUT THAT DOESN'T DENY IT'S IMPACT

How to Use Speech Responsibly

1. **Pause and Think** – Will my words cause harm?
2. **Use Your Voice for Good** – Speak up for fairness and kindness.
3. **Report Harmful Words** – Tell a teacher or adult if language is dangerous.
4. **Build Belonging** – Help make school a safe place for everyone.
5. **Remember** – Words are free, but they carry responsibility.

You have the right to free speech. But if speech causes danger, threats, or unfair treatment, schools and laws can step in. Always use your voice to build up, not tear down.