

SPEAK UP at SCHOOL
How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes
Tips for Carrboro High School to address the elephant in the room in 2017

You're tongue-tied. Someone has said something biased that makes you uncomfortable, or even angry. You want to say something, but you're not sure what to say.

It happens "almost daily," one teacher relates. Maybe it's one of your students. Or it's a colleague. Or an administrator. And maybe you laugh along-a forced or awkward laugh-because you don't want to be rude. You see students grappling with the same issues.

It doesn't happen "almost daily," but it did happen today! Sadly, I report it has been happening with more frequency at Carrboro High School. It is our responsibility as educators and role models (*whether we like it, asked for it, or not*) to speak up against prejudice, bias and stereotypes at school.

These are teachable moments for all of us. These are moments when we can reinforce our school and district expectations for racial equity. We can help our students develop empathy and support systems at these moments. There are ways to be ready for such moments, ways to make sure that you AREN'T caught tongue-tied or saying the wrong thing, ways to make sure that you don't let hate have the last word.

A few ready responses:

- *That offends me.*
- *Using that word as a put-down offends me.*
- *Using that word in any context doesn't help other people feel safe or accepted at our school.*
- *I don't find that funny.*
- *I'm surprised to hear you say that.*

Simple questions also are a good way to interrupt everyday bigotry:

- *What do you mean by that?*
- *Why would you say something like that?*
- *What point are you trying to make by saying that?*
- *Did you mean to say something hurtful when you said that?*

*Questions work really well because they place the burden on the person who made the remark. When faced with having to explain a racist "joke" or support a stereotype, people sometimes find themselves at a loss for words or forced to really think about what they've just uttered.

Hate is not behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work, or privilege, or a lack of exposure to diverse populations. Prepare your students by giving them language and context to help them become people who themselves speak up against racism or bias.

Here are a few ways to do that:

- *Discuss why some words are hurtful to others.*
- *Build context for students (historical, psychological, literary, and social)*
- *Aim to have your students build meaningful relationships with one another to help in anti-bias work*
- *Develop ground rules for communication at the outset of the school year (with student input)*
- *Model positive behaviors for students--respond quickly and unequivocally when a student seeks help with a moment of bias--especially if the student felt powerless to respond*
- *Require follow-up actions from students (when appropriate) who insult, offend, or discriminate in class*

Cheat Sheet:

- I. ***Interrupt!*** Stop what you're doing and speak up against every biased or bigoted remark--every time.
- II. ***Question!*** Use simple, exploratory questions as a powerful tool against bigoted remarks. Avoid aggressive questioning which can sometimes be counterproductive.
- III. ***Educate!*** As an educator, be willing to educate others about the negative power of some words.
- IV. ***Echo!*** Be the first follower or second voice when others speak up to join in the interruption.

So unless you are dealing with a longstanding pattern of discriminatory, biased or bigoted behavior, give the speaker the benefit of the doubt--and allow (and assist) him/her to make a change!

Compiled and adapted from Speak Up at School (A publication of Teaching Tolerance--a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center)

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