

Challenging Biased Language



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On a daily basis—in the lunchroom, at the grocery store, in school hallways and even at home—people hear and sometimes use words and phrases that demean, ridicule or demonstrate ignorance about people from different groups and backgrounds. Regardless of whether the comments are deliberately malicious, said out of ignorance or thought to be a joke, such words not only impact those on the receiving end but also everyone around who hears the words as well.

Responding to Bigoted Words

Prejudicial phrases and statements often come without warning, leaving the listener stunned and sometimes speechless, unsure how to respond.

Unfortunately, the typical response is often to say nothing. ADL's A World of

Difference® Institute believes that there is a better response than no response. While difficult to do, challenging bigoted and offensive remarks is critical to ensuring dignity and respect for all people. [Responding to Bigoted Words](#) provides guidelines and suggestions.

Responding to Jokes and Slurs

[Responding to Jokes and Slurs](#) provides a process that helps people confront offensive humor or slurs.

"I Didn't Mean It Like That": Challenging Your Own Biases

Anyone, even those who use and choose their words carefully, may find themselves inadvertently using language or making insensitive comments that hurt others. While the intent may be benign or even neutral, the impact of the words may deeply affect the listener enough for him or her to respond. In such situations, it is easy to get defensive and say, "That's not what I meant" or "You're taking it the wrong way." However, ["I Didn't Mean It Like That": Challenging Your Own Biases](#) outlines how recognizing that all people have biases—developed consciously and unconsciously through socialization, education and media exposure—can help to create opportunities for us to “unlearn” biases and to check ourselves for stereotypes or misinformation that we may hold about people with backgrounds different from our own.

Taking Stock in Ourselves

Because “unlearning” prejudice is a life-long process, it is useful to periodically reflect on our attitudes and behaviors regarding issues of bias. To assist in this, use [“Personal Self-Assessment of Anti-Bias Behavior”](#) which provides a checklist for assessing individual attitudes and behaviors for bias.