When responding to problematic behaviors or comments, deciding how to approach a problem depends on many factors including your goal(s). One’s own identity plays an important role in deciding what strategies work best in any situation. It can be exhausting for people who have been marginalized for an aspect of their identity to constantly have to address problematic comments or behaviors. This can be an opportunity for allies to offer support and do the heavy lifting.

Thinking about your goal(s), do you want to…

* Address a pattern of problematic behavior?
* Let someone know the impact of what was said or done?
* Set a boundary for future interactions?
* Show solidarity with someone who’s being harmed or targeted?

Strategies for addressing the problem:

* Approach the situation with authentic curiosity (and compassion); assume that the person didn’t intend to be inappropriate or offensive. We can’t really know what is in someone’s heart.
* Avoid getting irritated, especially with someone who makes a one-off inappropriate comment. Putting people on the defensive reduces the likelihood that they will “hear” your feedback, apologize, and make changes to their behavior going forward.
* Choose your moment. If there isn’t a chance to address the problem when it happens, circle back with the person (and with others who were present, if applicable).
* Use “*and”* rather than “*but”*
  + For example, “I understand that you don’t think you were yelling at the meeting *and* that’s not how people experienced it.”
* If someone asks an inappropriate question, one option is to respond by asking a question back. You can inquire why the person asked in the first place (e.g. “Why do you ask?”). This helps if you are left feeling speechless and a lot can be learned from how the person responds.
* If you are at a loss for words, but need to change the subject, try something completely off topic (e.g. “I like your shirt—could I ask where you got it?”).

Here are some examples of how you could approach the conversation **(*using compassion and curiosity in your tone and intention***):

* You may not realize that your comment had a negative impact. I’m wondering if we could talk about it.
* I really do hear where you’re coming from. Would you be open to hearing another way of seeing this?
* I don’t agree with what you said. Can you say more about what led you to this belief?
* I don’t understand what you mean by that. Say more about what you’re thinking?
* I’m not sure I follow where you’re coming from because what you’re saying is problematic. Help me understand what I’m missing.
* I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
* I’m surprised to hear you say that-- I don’t see it that way. Could you say more about what experiences or information have shaped your perspective?
* Really (with curiosity)? Can you say more?
* I’m confused by what you said, but I can’t talk about it now. Could we check in later?
* Your personal experience is valid and it’s important to look at the range of other experiences that are also valid.
* I don’t really know what to say to that right now. Could we talk later?