

Calling People In – Responding to Problematic Behaviors/Comments

Your own identity is an important aspect of what strategies work best for you in any particular situation. It can be exhausting for people who have been marginalized for an aspect of their identity to constantly feel like they have to address problematic comments or behaviors. This can be an opportunity for allies to offer support and do the heavy lifting.

Deciding how to approach a problem depends on many factors including what your goal is. There is a big difference between a person making a problematic comment and a person repeatedly engaging in harmful behavior or language without being accountable.

Depending on your goal for addressing someone's words or actions, you will want to be strategic about your approach. Think about what outcome you hope for.

- Do you want to...
 - Address a pattern of problematic behavior?
 - Show solidarity with someone who's being harmed or targeted?
 - Let someone know the impact of what was said or done?
 - Set a boundary for future interactions?

It can help to approach the situation with compassion and curiosity, and assume that the person didn't intend to be inappropriate or offensive. We can't really know what is in someone's heart. If possible, avoid getting angry with someone who makes a one-off inappropriate comment. This could put them on the defensive, *which reduces the likelihood that they will actually change their behavior*. Regardless of their intent, showing compassion gives them the opportunity to save face and do better in the moment or in the future.

- Here are some examples of how you could approach the conversation:
 - You may not realize that the comment you made had a negative impact. I'm wondering if we could talk about it.
 - I think we have different perceptions about this issue. I would like to hear more about where you're coming from.
 - I hear where you're coming from and I know some people feel differently. Would you be open to hearing other perspectives?
 - I don't agree with what you said. I'm wondering what your evidence for that is (or I'm wondering what led you to this belief).

If someone asks an inappropriate question, respond by asking a question back. The question can be about why the person asked the question in the first place (e.g. "Why do you ask?") or be completely off topic (e.g. "Where did you get that shirt?"). This helps if you are left feeling speechless and a lot can be learned from how the person responds.



Other possible responses *using compassion and curiosity*:

- I don't understand what you mean by that. Could you say more about what you're thinking?
- I'm not sure I follow where you're coming from. Could you say more?
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I'm surprised to hear you say that, and I don't see it that way. I would like to hear more about why you feel that way.
- I see this differently or I don't agree. What's your evidence for that or what information or experiences have led to this belief *or* have led you to seeing it this way? *(Use this an opportunity to offer other perspectives.)*
- Really? Or huh, I'm confused by what you said. Can you say more? *(The "Really" or "Huh" response can work as long as it's with a curious tone and is not condemning.)*
- 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 experiences that are also valid.
- I don't really know what to say to that right now. Could we talk later?
- I hear where you're coming from and I know some people feel differently. Would you be open to hearing other perspectives?

Write your own one-liners or conversation openers:

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