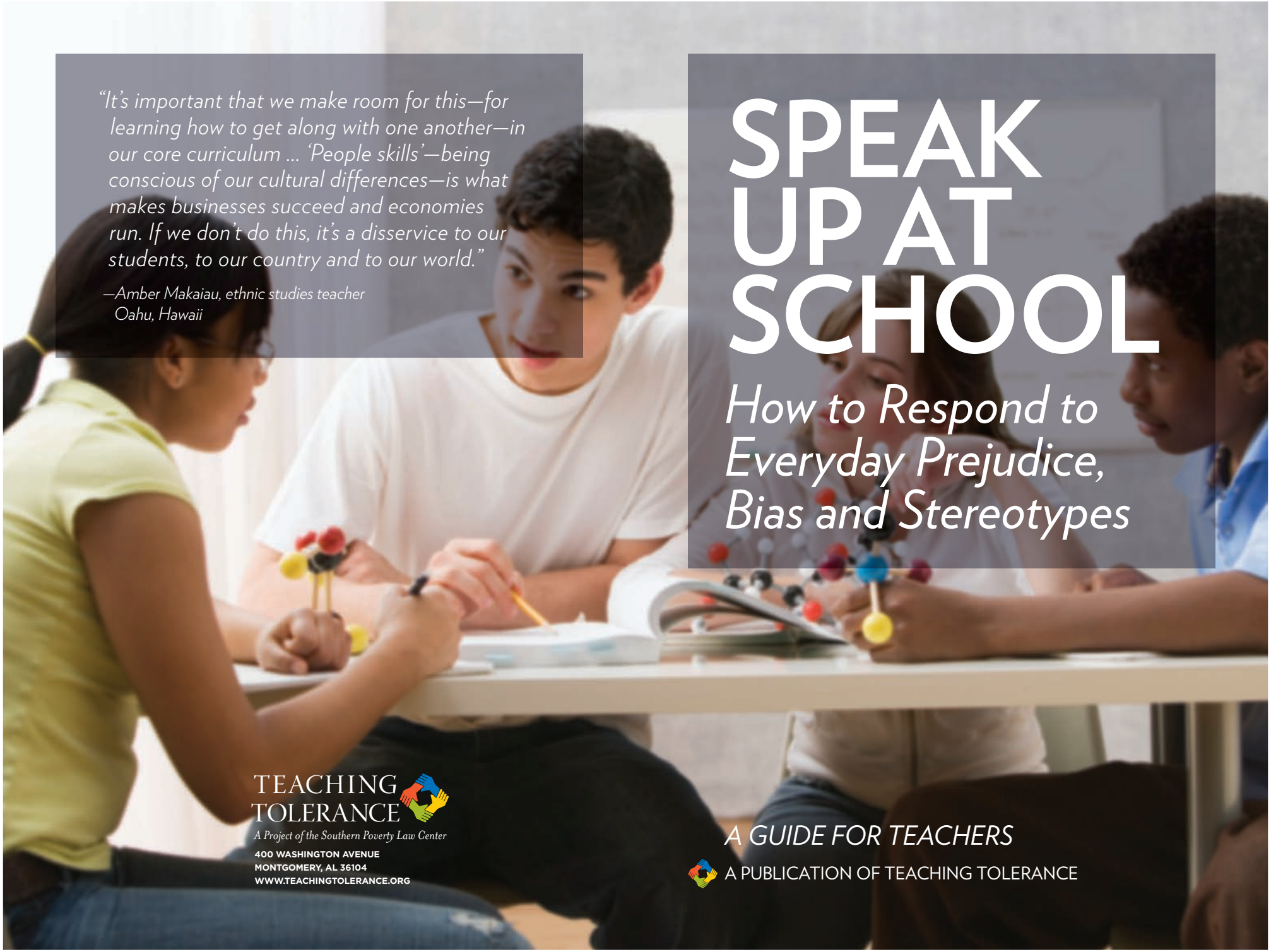

"It's important that we make room for this—for learning how to get along with one another—in our core curriculum … 'People skills'—being conscious of our cultural differences—is what makes businesses succeed and economies run. If we don't do this, it's a disservice to our students, to our country and to our world."

—Amber Makaiau, ethnic studies teacher
Oahu, Hawaii

SPEAK UP AT SCHOOL

How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes

TEACHING TOLERANCE
A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center
400 WASHINGTON AVENUE
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A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

A PUBLICATION OF TEACHING TOLERANCE

SPEAK UP AT SCHOOL

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"IN THE END, WE WILL REMEMBER NOT THE WORDS OF OUR ENEMIES, BUT THE SILENCE OF OUR FRIENDS."

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Dear Educator,

Many of the questions we receive for our magazine column "Ask Teaching Tolerance" are from educators seeking advice about how to respond when someone—a student, a colleague, even a parent—uses biased language or stereotypes in school.

This booklet is our response. It's for educators who want to develop the skills to speak up themselves and who want to help their students find the courage to speak up too.

What exactly is biased language, you might ask? Slurs, put-downs and other negative labels, of course. We know these can start as early as kindergarten when, for instance, a boy is teased about being "girly" because he like dolls. And we're all too familiar with the queasy feeling that comes when a colleague makes a joke that relies on stereotypes for its humor.

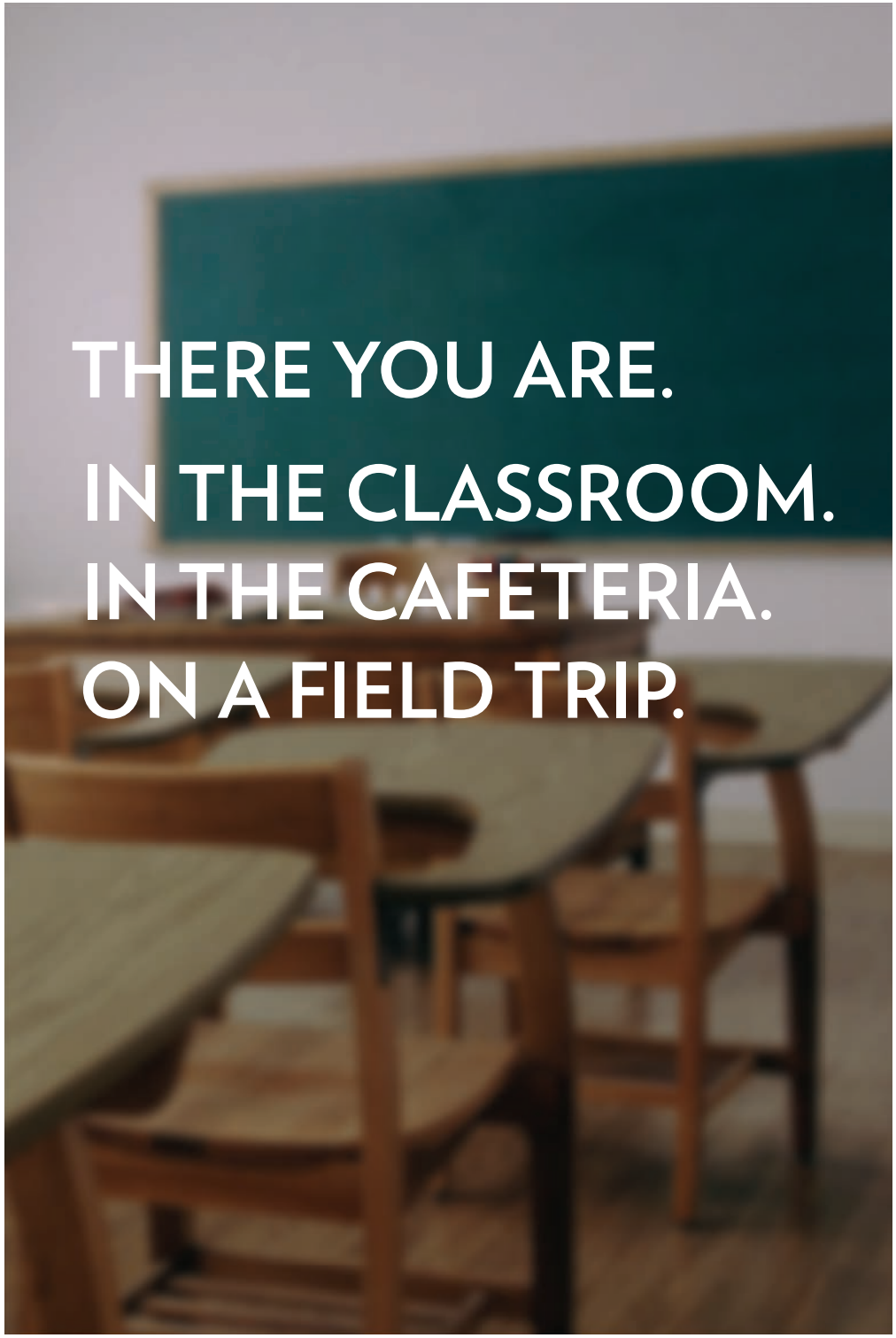
No single word covers all this ground. In this guide, we refer to it as biased language, and to the larger problem as bias. We know that many, if not most, of these remarks are said in ignorance, but that some reflect real hostility.

This guide is for the adults in the school. It offers advice about how to respond to remarks made by students and by other adults and gives guidance for helping students learn to speak up as well. We believe that modeling the kind of behavior we want from students is one of the most effective ways of teaching it.

We also know that schools are hierarchies, for the adults and for the students. So we've addressed the ways responding to bias might be affected by the power relationship involved. It's relatively easy for a teacher to correct a student who's used an ethnic slur, but quite uncomfortable—even fearful—to do so when the slur comes from a colleague, administrator or parent.

Finally, you'll notice that we talk a lot about "moments" in this guide. We're talking about the very short time that passes when somebody says something and you struggle with how, or even whether, you'll respond. These moments are opportunities that must be acted on swiftly. We hope this guide provides you with practical ideas about how to respond to biased language in the moment, from any source, in any situation.

Maureen Costello
Teaching Tolerance Director



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.

This guidebook offers tools and strategies to prepare you to speak up against prejudice, bias and stereotypes at school.

Because whoever it is, and wherever you are, there are ways to be ready for such moments, ways to make sure that you *aren't* caught tongue-tied, ways to make sure that you don't let hate have the last word.

NOTE

This is not an anti-bullying guidebook, though the strategies can be used to address some forms of bullying behavior. If you are implementing a specific anti-bullying curriculum in your school or district, this guidebook can be used in concert with that effort.

If, for example, you are using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, you can work with the "Circle of Bullying" chart and use strategies in this guidebook to move "Possible Defenders" and even "Disengaged Onlookers" to genuine "Defenders."

IN
ADVANCE

PREPARE YOURSELF

You're an educator. You want to make the world a better place. You want to create a school environment that is safe and welcoming for all students—and you don't want to let moments of bias pass silently. But what to say?

The best way to avoid being stymied when the moment occurs is to prepare. Simply telling yourself that you are someone who will speak up goes a long way toward shifting from inaction to action. So say to yourself:

- *I am a person who will speak up against bigotry.*
- *I will not let hate have the last word.*

A next step is to develop ready responses that will work in a variety of moments.

- *That offends me.*
- *I don't find that funny.*
- *I'm surprised to hear you say that.*

These phrases allow you to speak up against bias in a simple, straightforward manner. Sometimes they may open a dialogue. Other times, they simply allow you to challenge bias and take a vocal stand against it.

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?*

Questions place a burden on the person who made the remark. When faced with having to explain a "joke" or support a stereotype, people sometimes find themselves at a loss. Follow up with a simple "Tell me more" to help the person move toward a deeper understanding of why the remark is offensive. If the speaker falls back on something such as, "C'mon, I was just being funny," then you can use one of your ready responses, such as, "I don't find that funny."

Practice the phrases aloud. Memorize them. Have them ready for the next moment.

"The most important thing is to say something," says Deb Nielsen, a middle school teacher in Durango, Colo. "Don't let these kinds of put-downs pass. Put yourself out there, and you will make a difference."

Nielsen offers her own set of standard responses:

- *Did you mean to say something hurtful when you said that?*
- *Using that word as a put-down offends me.*
- *Using that word doesn't help others feel safe or accepted here.*

Keep these in mind as well:

How do you say it? You know you'll speak up. But what about tone and temperament? Veteran educators say it's best if you remain calm and thoughtful. Don't react with shock. Mostly, just

be yourself. Be firm. Be confident. Know that you are doing the right thing. There is no need to shame or humiliate the other person; that tack too often works against you, galvanizing the behavior instead of changing it. Humor is risky. Sometimes it can defuse a tense situation. Other times, though, it can send a mixed message. Was something about the bigoted comment funny? Are you laughing at (and potentially shaming) the speaker, and will that backfire?

Assess the risk of speaking up. You may be branded too sensitive, too "politically correct," too *something*. You may feel the sting of rejection. You may fear retaliation by hostile students or colleagues. This is especially true when challenging someone in authority. So consider your safety in any moment when you may choose to speak up. *Is now the best time? Could I handle this in a different way, later, that would be safer? Is there someone I trust—a colleague, a peer, a mentor—to whom I can speak about this, to help me prepare for the next time it happens?* Try not to let unwarranted fear silence you, but do consider the consequences of speaking up—and weigh them against the consequences of *not* speaking up.

Understand the dynamics of change. It happens slowly, and sometimes not at all. People can hold on to prejudice with tenacity. But know this: Speaking up offers a powerful force for good, and it is felt by all within earshot. If you speak up, others may follow—and others after them. You may inspire people to find the courage to speak up themselves, in a later moment. Don't gauge success solely by whether the person you are addressing changes; change is happening all around you, and the ability to marginalize bias is a sign of success.

> *"BE FIRM. BE CONFIDENT. KNOW THAT YOU ARE DOING THE RIGHT THING."*

Don't undermine your efforts. If changed behavior is what you are after, keep that goal in mind—and let it shape your response.

Calling someone a "racist" may feel satisfying, but it also may reinforce that person's bigotry, and be counterproductive. You may never change this person's behavior—a tough realization in anti-bias work—but that doesn't mean you should strengthen their cause by behaving badly yourself. "I'm not going to call another teacher racist," says Tracy Oliver-Gary, an AP history teacher from Burtonsville, Md. "That just throws up a brick wall, and anything else I say will be lost." As the old saying goes, be the change you want to see—and impart this idea to your students as often as possible. Keep in mind, too, that your students struggle with the same issues you do, and more.

PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS

This guide aims to help people in school settings handle moments of everyday bias—when and how to speak up. But if all we do is speak up after the fact, we will forever be responding to the problem. So, at the outset, we want to put in a plug for prevention.

This work starts in preschool and kindergarten and carries right on through to high school graduation. It also begins on or before day one of any school year, when you consider how to build community within your classroom and how to develop ground rules or guidelines for communication.

Ask yourself, "What climate do I want in my classroom and my school?" Then ask yourself, "What can I do to promote that kind of atmosphere?"

Consider these ideas:

LANGUAGE AND CONTEXT

Students at all grade levels need language and context to help them become people who speak up against bias.

Share with them the ready responses from the previous chapter. Or, better yet, brainstorm to come up with a list of their own, then keep that list posted in the classroom. It's something you can refer to during the year.

In age-appropriate ways, discuss why some words hurt. Building context (historical, psychological, literary and so on) around such words helps students better understand their power to hurt.

Teachers who provide such language and context tell us that it often spreads outward from the classroom, into the halls and cafeteria, where they overhear students using language developed in the classroom to speak up against intolerant remarks.

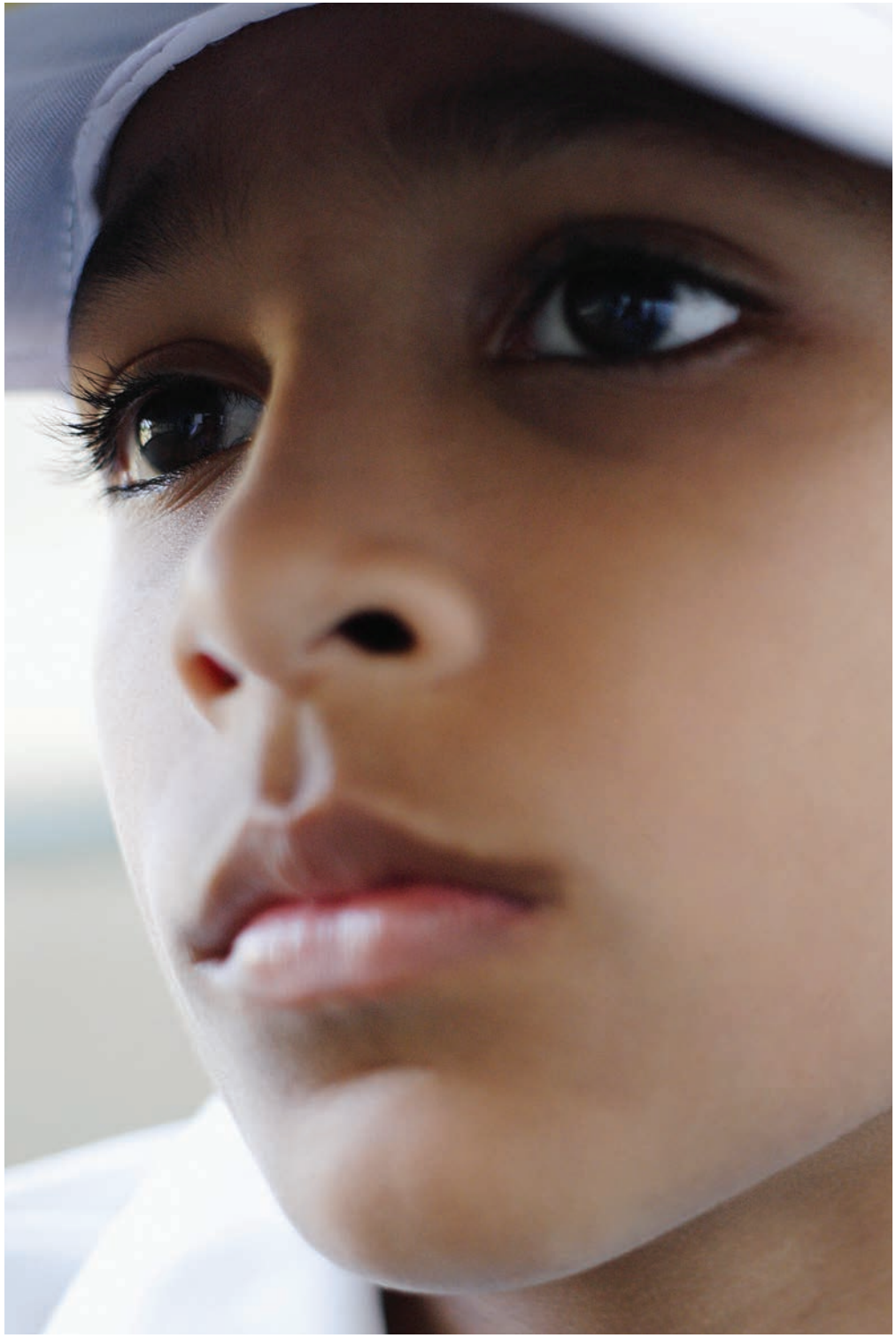
CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

Seasoned teachers tell us that classroom community is at the heart of anti-bias work. Help students build meaningful relationships within the classroom, and they will be ready and able to speak up against intolerance for themselves.

Develop ground rules for communication, with student input, at the outset of the school year. Post the rules prominently, and use them as a touchstone when an issue arises. By creating language together ("We want everyone to feel safe in our classroom.") when a put-down is heard, you have that language ready: "I'm betting not everyone feels safe in this classroom when you say something like that, Marcus."

Teachers who do this work at the beginning of the school year say that it pays off all year long in improved classroom behavior.

It pays off in other ways, too. Researchers have found the single best way to eliminate bias is by having students of different races, ethnicities, abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds work together on successful projects. So by creating classrooms in which that happens, you are doing the upstream work of preventing future incidents.



MODELING BEHAVIOR FOR YOUR STUDENTS

Dan Rubin, a high school language arts teacher in Las Cruces, N.M., encourages teachers to respond quickly and unequivocally when a student seeks help with a moment of bias—especially one in which the student felt powerless to respond.

Rubin shares an example from a time when he served as advisor to the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at his high school.

At the beginning of the year, he asked GSA members whether they had any issues or concerns to share. One student described a moment that had occurred near the end of the previous school year. He told Rubin that one of his teachers had pulled him aside as the class was leaving, when the room was nearly empty. The teacher had told him, "I know a church that can help you with your 'situation.'"

The student told Rubin that he felt stymied, uncertain how to respond, so he had said nothing.

Rubin immediately informed the principal via email. The next morning, the principal sent out an all-staff email reminding teachers that it was against district policy to discriminate against any student based on his or her sexual orientation. The text of the specific policy was included in the email.

The email concluded: "Let me give you fair warning—whatever your views may be, telling a student this is absolutely STRICTLY prohibited in our educational setting."

Visit tolerance.org for a wide variety of exercises and lessons to promote classroom community at all grade levels.

GETTING STUDENTS IN THE FRAME OF MIND

Students who want to speak up face the same issues that you confronted as you prepared. When you encourage them to speak up, remember to

- tell them they can do it.
- discuss the importance of tone and temperament.
- consider their safety.
- be patient and believe they can make a difference.
- keep their eyes on the behavior.
- avoid labeling people.

IN THE
MOMENT

BASIC STRATEGIES

01 INTERRUPT

Educators from all grade levels and all parts of the country emphasize this point: You must speak up against every biased remark, every time it happens. Letting one go, then speaking up against the next one, sends an inconsistent message: that sometimes bias is OK; other times it isn't. Letting the first instance go without comment also sends the message to anyone within earshot that it's OK to say bigoted things.

So interrupt it. Every time. In the moment. Without exception.

"Stop what you're doing—whatever you're doing—and address it," says Soñia Galaviz, a fifth-grade teacher in Nampa, Idaho.

So if Galaviz is teaching a math lesson and she hears a student make a biased remark, what does she do? "I say to myself, 'Hold on, let's stop.' The parallelogram lesson can wait. And I go back to all the work we did the first two months of school, discussing classroom culture and sharing our own cultural stories. I address it in the moment. I never let it pass. Anytime you let it pass, it's an opportunity missed."

Usually, such moments have stopped happening by mid-year or earlier, based on that early work, Galaviz says. But once, many years ago, well into the second half of the school year, a student casually used the n-word in class. "I went 'Errrrrrh. Hold on a second.' I tempered my own response, so I wasn't angry or out of control. And I asked why in the world he would say such a thing."

In the end, Galaviz worked lunch hours and after school with the student, having him write what turned out to be a 15-page paper on the origin and history of the n-word. It was a lesson the student didn't forget. When he was in high school, he came back and thanked Galaviz for teaching him the negative power and ugly history of that word.

These moments are rare, Galaviz says. But early, firm intervention sends the message that bias will not be tolerated.

Nancy Brakke, a music educator in Tacoma, Wash., admires and encourages these "instant" responses. "No anger, no recriminations, no lecture—just a calm, straightforward 'stop,'" she says.

Connecticut teacher Christine Sipes describes just such a moment: "I was a new teacher on lunch duty, and a veteran teacher came up to me and said, 'Have you heard the one about the Italian and the ...?' I immediately said, "I don't like ethnic jokes.'"

This may not stop every so-called joke; the person still may tell such "jokes" to others. But it begins to marginalize the behavior. The more often it is interrupted, the more likely it will be curtailed.

02 QUESTION

As mentioned in the opening chapter, asking simple, exploratory questions in response to bigoted remarks can be a powerful tool: "Why do you say that?" "What do you mean?" "Tell me more."

Galaviz, the fifth-grade teacher, also serves as an adjunct faculty member at Boise State University. One of her students, preparing to begin student teaching, said to Galaviz, "You can tell kids whose families don't have an education."

As it turns out, Galaviz, who has multiple degrees and solid educational credentials, grew up in a lower-middle class family, the daughter of parents who had to drop out of school to begin working. She didn't immediately challenge her student's comment. Instead, she said, "Tell me more. Tell me what you mean by that."

She says that approach accomplished two things. One, it led the speaker to encounter his own blind spots or bits of ignorance, as she teased out the reasons behind his thinking. Two, it helped her better understand his thinking and gave her more time to frame and tailor her response.

Galaviz says that this doesn't work if you pepper the speaker with aggressive questions. "What *exactly* do you mean by that?" Aggressive questioning can be counterproductive, closing off communication rather than opening it. The gentle-but-clear "tell me more" approach extends the conversation rather than shutting it down.

Tone matters in these moments. Your goal is to understand the roots of the speaker's prejudices, then help add context and information to dispel them.

Don't think for a moment that we all don't have some sort of prejudices. "I call them the 'uglies,' and we have to acknowledge the uglies within ourselves if we're ever going to make lasting change," Galaviz says.

Amber Makaiau is an ethnic studies teacher at Kailua High School in Oahu, Hawaii. She recalls a moment when she faced the "uglies" in front of her students.

Makaiau periodically checks in with students about classroom culture—what's working, what's not working, any issues to discuss. During one of these check-ins, a student asked Makaiau why she pushed the Filipino students to talk more during classroom discussions but did not similarly push the white students.

> *"WE ARE THERE TO LEARN AS MUCH AS THE STUDENTS ARE."*

"I said, 'Hmmmm,' and it surprised me. They had a good point," Makaiau says. "They got to see me work through this surprising realization right in front of them, and I was able to change my behavior accordingly. Teachers need to be open to that. We are there to learn as much as the students are."

03 EDUCATE

Hate isn't behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work, or lack of exposure to diverse populations. Other times, people simply don't know the negative power behind certain words or phrases. So a good first step in a moment of bias—particularly if it's the first time you've encountered it with someone—is to explain why the term or phrase is offensive.

So if someone says, "That's so lame" or calls someone a "bitch," not knowing the discriminatory or sexist power behind these words, you can offer background and context to encourage the person to choose a different expression.

Barbara Hemann, an Iowa teacher who has multiple sclerosis, shares this example:

> *My most obvious symptom is my foot dragging as I walk, creating a limp. A student once said to me, 'What's with the gimp?'*
>
> *I don't think the student meant to be disparaging in any way, so I sat down and told him that although I was not hurt by his*

comment, that many people who have a disability would be, and that he should always be respectful and use respectful language if he was going to ask someone about a disability. I told him that I welcomed questions, and I would always take time to answer those questions.

I think the student left with a lifetime skill.

So unless you are dealing with a longstanding pattern of behavior, give the speaker the benefit of the doubt, and allow that person to make a change. "Be kind," Hemann says. "Nearly everyone is fighting a great battle."

It is not your "job" to educate everyone else about bias. People do need to take responsibility for their own ignorance. Self-education—the realization that one lacks knowledge on a subject and will seek it out on one's own—is vital.

That said, you are in a school, and education happens in schools. So it's a natural fit to wrap education around moments of bias or stereotyping.

Consider this moment, shared by Vanessa D'Egidio, a second-grade teacher in New York City: A group of second-grade girls was overheard on the playground, laughing and making negative comments about classmates' clothing. They found fault with clothing that wasn't name brand and laughed at others whose clothes were faded and frayed.

"Another teacher pulled the group aside to discuss what she overheard, explaining to the students that what they were doing was teasing, bullying and very hurtful toward their peers, regardless of whether it was to their faces or behind their backs," D'Egidio says.

Afterward, the second-grade teaching team collectively decided to follow up with a community meeting of all second-graders.

"During the meeting, we did not single out the students who had done the teasing, but we brought up the issue of teasing someone about their clothing or something else about them through gossiping," D'Egidio says.

Teachers role-played different scenarios, showing how gossip can be hurtful. Then they asked students for examples of more considerate behavior.

"The teachers reminded students that words can hurt, whether they are used in private, overheard or said directly to someone," D'Egidio says. "We also highlighted the importance of being an ally, the importance of speaking up against teasing, and the importance of everyone working together in a community to create a safe, caring space for all."

04 ECHO

It's powerful to be the first voice that interrupts bias. It's also powerful on another level to be the second, third or fourth voice to join in the interruption. In group settings, if someone has said something biased, and not one but four people speak up, the echoing power of those voices can have a multiplying effect.

As the echoing voice, you can reiterate the anti-bias message or you can thank the first person for speaking up—or both!

Consider this, from a high school teacher working with ninth-graders:

I overheard a side conversation where a student said, 'That's so gay.' I was shocked. I thought that phrase was rarely used. (Maybe I just wasn't aware.) Immediately, another girl in the group said that was a wrong thing to say. The first girl giggled and said she was just being funny. The second girl said it's not funny because it hurts people. I was impressed, so I jumped into the conversation. I told her, 'Thank you. I have a lot of respect for you speaking up like that, and I totally agree with you.'

THE DYNAMIC

01 SPEAKING FROM AUTHORITY

When you communicate from a position of authority, your words often carry more weight—and sometimes you cannot gauge whether the listener genuinely understands or simply is unwilling to talk back. If the response is silence, don't assume that your message has sunk in. Watch closely to see if behaviors change, and be ready to speak up again—and again—if needed.

From a position of authority, your words also affect people within earshot. If a principal hears a student in the hallway using a casual sexist slur and she stops to tell the student that biased language is not tolerated at the school, others will hear an anti-bias message from the top. This can have a ripple effect—both to curb slurs and to empower others to speak out against them. Imagine that same principal delivering a message against slurs at a schoolwide assembly. That's another case in which speaking from authority can have a huge impact.

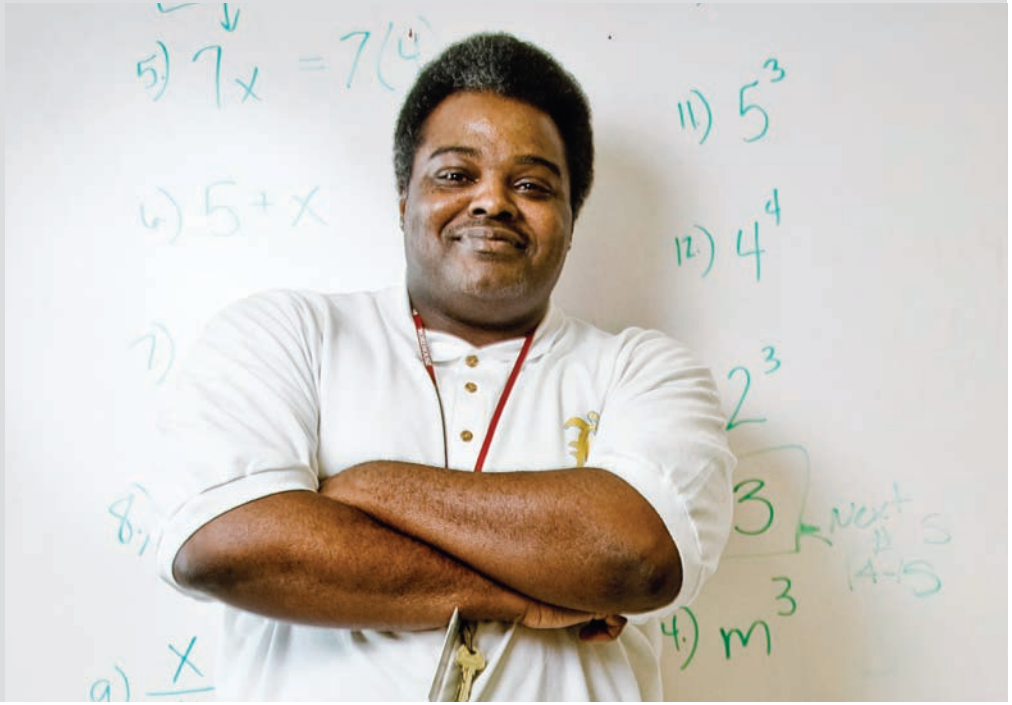
> *"I AM THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN STOP THE BIGOTRY IN MY CLASSROOM."*

Perhaps more important, if someone in authority does *not* speak up, it empowers a different sort of behavior. That lack of action tells everyone within earshot that slurs are allowed in hallways, classrooms or the office.

A teacher from upstate New York describes the rural, largely white community in which she lives, where casual and not-so-casual bias sometimes is allowed to thrive. But it does not thrive in her classroom, where she has the authority to set the tone and speak out. She states it flatly, and takes responsibility for the work: "I am the only person who can stop the bigotry in my classroom."

A teacher from another part of the country learned her lesson on this issue from moments when she did not speak up.

> *I often just did not pay attention to hurtful comments or bigoted behaviors. [Then] I began to make a personal connection to my own life and how bullying had impacted me as a youth. Bullying and bigoted behaviors have so many layers and are presented in so many ways. This is when I realized that I was contributing to the problem by not speaking up and speaking out.*



Every week, she found herself in situations where she needed to speak up against comments that were intolerant. The result?

I discovered that the more I speak up, the more I hear [my students] speaking up, too. This is one of the ways we create that safe space around us, where our young people know that they are accepted, appreciated and heard.

An elementary school principal in the Pacific Northwest says that he routinely interrupts when he hears biased words being used—either with teachers or with students.

I step in. I say, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa.' The vast majority, with students, is kids using words they don't really understand. They just know the word is negative, a put-down. So I make it public, but I don't make it punitive. It's a teachable moment, and I want everyone within earshot to know it's not okay to speak that way here.

02 SPEAKING TO A PEER

There is power in a peer relationship. When a friend or trusted colleague tells you something, you often hear it more clearly than if it comes from some other source. Peer relationships also are problematic. Explaining to another teacher why offensive language should be avoided might result in a reply along the lines of "You're not my boss."

So there are considerations to be made:

- *How close are you to this peer? (Strong friendship, mild but positive acquaintance, nothing more than "hello" in the hallway?)*
- *What is the nature of past interactions? (Happy but shallow, feelings of real affinity, some tension over other issues?)*
- *How does this person best receive communication? (Written, verbal, with humor, in group settings, as a quiet aside?)*

Weigh your response based on relevant factors. Some examples:

TEACHER-TO-TEACHER

An early-childhood educator from Wisconsin had someone she considers a good friend speak excitedly about some bargains he had found at a neighborhood yard sale. She continues:

He said quite conversationally that he had 'Jewed down' the owner. I asked what he meant and watched as his face went from puzzlement (at my 'ignorance') to embarrassment (he knows quite well that I'm Jewish). I let him flounder for a bit and then tossed him a lifeline—his promise not to use that phrase again, regardless of who is in the room.

STUDENT-TO-STUDENT

A Georgia high school student describes himself as the only African American in his circle of friends.

They do not necessarily say mean-spirited things or bully me directly, but they always make a point to mention that I am the 'token black.' I usually laugh it off or ignore it, but recently it became too much. I was having a bad day, and I could not hold back my annoyed feelings any longer. I began to yell at them explaining how racist it was that they called me that ... and how mean they were being. When I finally finished, they stared at me until one of the boys started laughing. They all laughed and made fun of me, and I realized that all I did was fuel their fire.

Looking back, the student says he would have changed his approach.

> *I would have confronted it much earlier, when I first realized that I had a problem with the way I was being treated. I should have pulled my friends aside or talked to them individually, explaining my issues with the situation—not with anger or revenge, but with calmness.*

"I SHOULD HAVE EXPLAINED MY ISSUES WITH THE SITUATION."

03 SPEAKING TO AUTHORITY

Speaking up to an authority figure is tricky. It carries risk. Are you questioning your principal's leadership skills? Or are you challenging a senior teacher in a way that might backfire? Will you face punitive reactions? Is the power relationship so imbalanced that you won't be heard at all—or worse, will be mocked for being overly sensitive or "whiney"?

Ask yourself some questions:

- *Should I write down my issue, present it in the form of a letter or memo? Would that avoid an initial face-to-face confrontation that could get ugly, allowing the person in authority to absorb the message before we speak about it?*
- *Should I seek an ally or allies?*
- *Am I jumping over a level of authority (going to the superintendent before speaking with the principal, for example), and will that lead to problems later?*

In 2004, when Emma Fialka-Feldman was in high school, she wrote a letter to teachers and administrators at her school about the lack of response to the use of the word *retard* as a casual slur at her school. Emma's older brother has developmental disabilities, and she was angered by the use of the word.

> *I wrote a letter to my teachers and administrators at the beginning of the school year, reminding them the power they have to teach their students not only about academics but also social values, such as respectful language. ... I was nervous. I wondered that their response would be.*

A few days after the letter arrived in all teachers' mailboxes, Emma's biology teacher stopped her in the hallway.

> *He said, 'I know there have been times I haven't said anything. I am sorry, and I plan on calling out more students now.' I was speechless. My teacher was coming up to me to apologize; I thought students always did the apologies. ... I am honored to have gone to a school district that could learn from its students.*

Emma's letter has been republished widely and included in at least one anthology. Here is a brief excerpt:

> *Changing the culture of any high school to promote values of respect and responsibility does not happen overnight. ... It happens little by little. I can't and will not tell every single person I hear use the r-word to stop saying it. I need your help. In the classroom, when a student uses the r-word, tell them to stop. By saying it in front of the classroom, the entire class knows that they can no longer use the word because you don't tolerate it.*

When they eat in the cafeteria or walk down the hallways they will also learn that they can no longer say it on school property because every time they do, a teacher will tell them to stop ... [and] they will bring what the teachers, staff and administrators taught them into the larger world.

STUDENT-TO-TEACHER

A teacher in the Northeast related this story:

Two teenage girls, both pregnant, are walking down the hallway of their high school. A teacher passes, clicks his tongue and says, "I bet neither of you even knows who the baby daddy is," and keeps walking by. The students say nothing.

What might they have said?

"It's tough," the teacher says. "Teachers have power, and students know that. They certainly could have said, 'You can't talk to us that way,' but even that might be risky."

The teacher relating the story suggested that the girls together might approach an administrator and describe what happened and ask what can be done. Or they could tell their parents, and the parents could contact an administrator. This work isn't easy, and the power involved in some relationships makes it tough to find an effective avenue for change.

04 SPEAKING TO A PARENT OR VISITOR

When the person making a biased remark is a parent or a visitor to your school, ask yourself some questions. Do you have an ongoing relationship or is this person a one-time visitor? What kind of relationship does this person have with the school? (Someone with a history of antagonistic interactions with the school may require a different response than someone with positive or neutral relations, for example.)

The basic advice for speaking up to visitors is to be quick, calm, firm and straightforward. Whenever possible, tie the moment to classroom rules, school policy or some other principle.

If a father visiting on parents' night casually makes a biased remark, a possible reply would be, "Oh, we don't use that word in our classroom. Our classroom rules prohibit the use of hurtful words." Don't engage in a debate over whatever term was used, just refer again to the rules, if needed, and move on.

> *"CHANGING VALUES TO PROMOTE RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY DOES NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT."*

If you have a relationship, draw on that. ("Oh, Maria, I know you didn't mean to be hurtful using that word, but we don't say hurtful things in our classroom.")

If it is someone with a history of offensive behavior or antagonistic relations, stay firm and straightforward, and move on to the content at hand. ("We don't use that word in this classroom. Thank you. Now, we were discussing the art project planned for the spring ...")

An ELL/Spanish teacher in Illinois held a parents' night. The father of one of her Spanish class students told her he insisted that his son take Spanish so he could "show those Spanish-speaking factory workers who's boss."

I have to say I was taken aback by the tone of the comment. [But] I am grateful this parent shared his opinion. I added additional parents' nights to discuss the presence of immigrants in the United States and the challenges they face. As evidenced by the surveys, the meetings ended on a positive note. All participants indicated they had a better understanding of immigrants.

THE LOCATION

01 IN THE CLASSROOM

In your classroom you have the advantage of time and authority. You—working with students—can set ground rules and limits about slurs and hurtful comments. You can interrupt a moment, suspend the planned lesson and devote the time needed to discuss and explore the impact of what was said.

(We know that you are inundated with mandatory curricula, testing and other things that fill classroom time, and we also know that the issue of creating a safe and welcoming environment for all students is something you believe in—and something worth the classroom time.)

"We talk about intellectual safety in our class, that we're a community where inquiry and reflection can happen—and a community where everyone can feel safe," says Amber Makaiau, the ethnic studies teacher in Oahu, Hawaii.

This gives students the language to speak up throughout the year, Makaiau says, both in and beyond the classroom. In the classroom, they can use their shared language ("I don't feel safe when you use that term"). Outside the classroom, they are empowered to speak up against biased remarks because of the understanding they have reached inside the classroom.

Makaiau describes the classroom as a place where teachers and students can "unpack" language. "So if someone says, 'We have to respect each other in our classroom,' we don't stop there. We take it further, to explore how different people from different cultures define respect, and how we balance its many meanings within the classroom."

The need for a prompt and strong response to biased remarks in the classroom has been explored earlier in this guidebook.

Some teachers, though, move beyond spoken responses and require follow-up action from their students.

"If someone says something inappropriate or offensive in my class, I stop what I'm doing and have them write a letter of apology," says Tracy Oliver-Gary, the AP history teacher from Burtonsville, Md. "It might be something sexually offensive, or something involving bias—anything that may offend another student in class and make them feel targeted. It happens, and I say, 'Start writing the letter.'"

02 IN THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE

The teachers' lounge is a place where uncomfortable peer-to-peer situations may arise. Conversation might be more casual there. Insensitive comments and biased assumptions may be voiced more frequently.

For example:

> *A fellow teacher made a joke to other staff about the band students, referring to them as 'band fags.' Needless to say, I told him it wasn't funny and certainly not appropriate.*

A colleague I barely knew expressed sadness that his Jewish and Hindu students were all going to hell [based on his Christian beliefs]. I was left breathless. It took me a few seconds to recover enough to tell him—firmly but gently—that I did not share that belief, for a lot of reasons.

The level of the peer relationship must be considered. How close are you to this person? There also must be some sensitivity about who else is present, who else might hear any interaction and how they might react.

All those factors are at play, but the basic strategies still apply. Do speak up. Don't antagonize. Do keep your eye on the goal: to keep communication channels open and help someone realize the effect of biased comments.

Consider this incident:

Two educators were talking in a teachers' lounge at a school in the Pacific Northwest. Each had a sibling from the same family as a student. The teacher of the younger sibling said, "Those parents don't care a thing about their child's education. They don't even come to parent-teacher conferences."

Hearing that, the second teacher—the one who relates this story—took a breath and considered how to respond. She had

"THAT'S A BOLD STATEMENT..."

visited the family's home and knew some of the pressures and realities the parents faced: living in poverty, working multiple jobs, having unreliable transportation. Getting to a parent-teacher conference was not a case of not caring; it was a simple impossibility, given their situation.

"That's a bold statement, to say a parent doesn't care about a child's education," the teacher says, recalling the moment. "What was going on was that this teacher had not worked to engage herself with the student's family, to understand what was going on in that home. She hadn't done her job."

Can one teacher tell another teacher, "You're not doing your job"? Not without some sparks.

So this teacher took a different tack. She told the teacher, "You know, I've had a completely different experience with the older sibling."

She then described the family circumstances that were working against the parents' school involvement.

"I put a face on it. I made it real for her. And she got it. I saw the light bulb go off, and she realized she'd made some assumptions based on her own thinking about 'those' kinds of families."

03 IN HALLWAYS AND COMMON AREAS

Hallways—like buses or playgrounds—are places where student-to-student bias can thrive if no one speaks up against it.

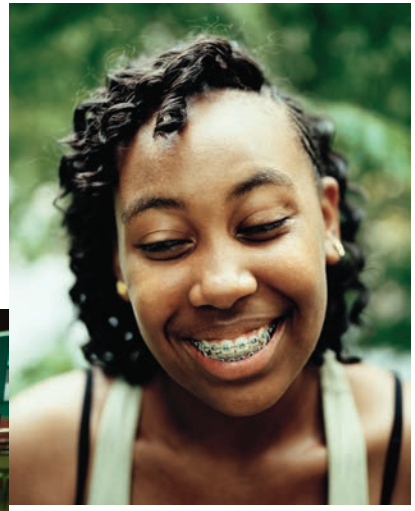
A middle school student related this story:

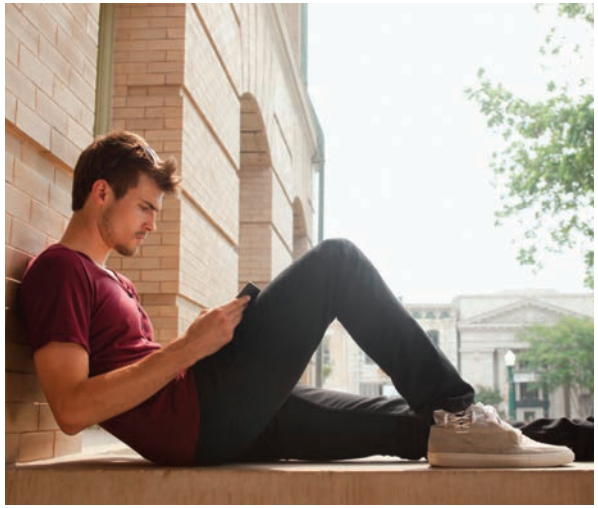
A boy in the hall—a popular kid with lots of friends—routinely cackled at a girl with hearing aids when he passed her in the hall. As she got near, he'd shout the line from a cell phone commercial: 'Can you hear me now?'

His friends and classmates (including those worried about fitting in or losing his friendship) laughed at his "joke." Other students—and adults—within earshot didn't join in the laughter but said nothing in response. They allowed cruelty to have the last word. The student with the hearing aids spoke with the principal about it, and the principal objected, saying, "We don't have that kind of bullying here."

You have mere seconds in the hallway to speak up. The bustle of students moving quickly between classes creates its own kind of chaos. So any intervention needs to be quick, clear and pointed.

A teacher overhearing the boy's remark might say, "Jacob, that's not funny. If you say that again, I'll be forced to call your parents in for a conference." That might encourage one of the bystander students to say, "That's a stupid thing to say. Stop it." If more students joined in, the pressure might be enough.





The hallway is where you need to have your comments ready. They must be brief, no more than a sentence or two, and they must be easily delivered above the din.

Advance strategy also can come into play. Three teachers can promise each other they'll all speak up, together, the next time it happens—because it will keep happening if no one speaks out against it.

Other speaking up also can occur, including saying comforting words to the target of the abuse and asking how she would like to be supported. (She may be suffering so greatly that she wants no added attention, for example.)

Had the principal responded in a more supportive fashion, he could roam the hall, waiting to encounter a similar incident himself, then simply take the bully to his office and address the situation seriously, outlining consequences if the behavior continued.

04 IN THE CAFETERIA

Cliques, racial and ethnic lines, socioeconomic class—so many factors are at work in the cafeteria. National surveys of students continue to indicate that the cafeteria is the place on campus where dividing lines are most clearly drawn.

Because of that, a group at one table can easily fall into biased remarks about some other group across the room. These remarks are overheard by passersby—other students, teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers.

It's a ripe landscape for speaking up.

Advice from teachers who have spoken up in cafeteria settings indicates that sitting down is a key strategy.

As with so many things, it's about relationships. If you sit down on a regular basis—not just to scold but to get to know students better—you become more relevant and can have more impact with these groups. A teacher who just walks by and says, "Don't say that" is more likely to get eye-rolling and whispered sneers than improved behaviors.

If you sit down and use some of the strategies in this guidebook ("Why do you say that?" "Tell me more."), you have a better chance of building a relationship, deepening your own understanding of the prejudices at work, and tailoring your comments accordingly. If any of the students are in your classes, you can continue the guidance there as well.

If you have existing relationships with any students at a table where slurs are being casually tossed around, speaking individually to that student also can be a tactic. "Why do you listen to that? You know it's wrong to say those kinds of things." Planting the seed that encourages the student to someday speak up is a good strategy to employ. Again, these are lessons you can offer in your classroom, with an eye toward improving behaviors in the cafeteria.

PUTTING IT INTO WORDS

GRADE-LEVEL RESPONSES TO THE USE OF PEJORATIVE OR BIGOTED TERMS, OR BENIGN TERMS USED WITH A PEJORATIVE TONE OR MANNER.

Community-building work at the beginning of the school year, including setting ground rules, can help educators deal with students who use hurtful language. Below are examples of age-appropriate things for teachers to say.

GRADES PRE K-2

Tina, you know there are words that hurt, right? Words like stupid *or* ugly. *Well, there are other words that are used to hurt people, too, and that's one of them. That's why we don't use that word as a put-down or to hurt someone else. So promise me you'll stop using it, okay?*

There is no need to explore specific history or politics around the term being used. Simply place it in context for the student and move forward with a plan to stop using it, offering appropriate alternate language for the student to use.

GRADES 3-5

Tina, that word carries more weight than you might know, and it can really hurt people. There's a lot of emotion around that word. It's been used to attack people, and I know you're not meaning to attack anyone, but if someone hears it, they might feel attacked. And we don't want that here. We want everyone to feel safe here. So let's not use that word anymore, okay?

Depending on the setting and/or the maturity of the student(s), you may want to explore the basic historical context around the term being used. It may tie in with a social studies lesson or some other instructional materials. "Class, remember when we talked about words that hurt, well that relates to this lesson ..."

MIDDLE GRADES

Tina, I know that you know that word is hurtful, and I'm surprised, and more than a little disappointed, to hear you use it. It has no place in this classroom, or this school. You know we have an agreement here to not use hurtful language, and I'll need you to honor that agreement and stop using that word.

UPPER GRADES

Tina, that doesn't fly here and you know it. I need you to stop it, or there will be more serious consequences.

In middle and upper grades, if you have classroom ground rules and they have been broken, follow through with agreed-upon consequences. If the student repeats the behavior, deepen the conversation and escalate the consequences—including meeting with an administrator or contacting the student's parents. Tie such slurs or pejorative remarks to classroom lessons whenever possible, making historical context relevant and meaningful.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

PREPARING YOURSELF TO CHALLENGE BIAS AND PREJUDICE

It's clear that one voice in one moment does not stop bias. Bias is insidious, arriving in many forms and many voices. Insults and put-downs, like the rest of the English language, are ever-evolving. As people use language to create new ways to ostracize and hurt others, we hope the strategies in this guidebook can be adapted and adjusted to keep pace.

Every moment that bias goes unanswered is a moment that allows its roots to grow deeper and stronger. Bias left unanswered is bias tacitly approved. If you don't speak up, you are saying, in your silence, that you condone it.

In moving forward, consider the basics:

BE PREPARED

Prepare yourself, and help prepare your students. Have handy phrases you are comfortable saying. Promise yourself that you'll speak up in these moments, then follow through.

BE POSITIVE

Don't just be reactive. Take proactive steps to help create the school climate you seek.

BE CONFIDENT

There is no need to apologize for speaking up. Don't let naysayers silence you. You recognize bias, and you seek to eradicate it. This is important work, and you must dedicate yourself to it.

BE ENCOURAGING

Help others prepare to speak up. Encourage the good behavior you see, especially *changed* behavior. If someone else has spoken up before you, be the next voice, echoing that anti-bias message—thanking the person who has spoken up and encouraging others to join in.

WORK TOGETHER

This guidebook is designed for individuals, but know that you are not alone. Even in the most oppressive school environments, allies are waiting for you somewhere in the building. Maybe they are students, other teachers or counselors. Maybe they tried to speak up once, weeks or months or years ago, but felt too alone to bring change. Seek them out. Band together. Create a campaign focused on the most prominent problem at your school, and put it into place, using resources included in the appendices of this guidebook. There *is* power in numbers.

The campaign against bigotry involves all of us. Each of our voices matters, and each is vital to creating inclusive schools—schools that embrace the great diversity of our nation.

So speak up. Don't let hate have the last word.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FOR STUDENTS

I am a person who will SPEAK UP against bias.

INTERRUPT

Speak up against every biased remark—every time, in the moment, without exception. Think about what you'll say ahead of time so you're prepared to act instantly.

Try saying: "I don't like words like that," or "That phrase is hurtful."

QUESTION

Ask simple questions to find out why the speaker made the offensive comment and how you can best address the situation.

Try asking: "Why do you say that?" What do you mean?" or "Tell me more."

EDUCATE

Explain why a term or phrase is offensive. Encourage the person to choose a different expression. Hate isn't behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work, or lack of exposure to a diverse population.

Try saying: "Do you know the history of that word?"

ECHO

If someone else speaks up against hate, thank her and reiterate her anti-bias message. One person's voice is a powerful start. Many voices together create change.

Try saying: "Thanks for speaking up, Allison. I agree that word is offensive and we shouldn't use it."

APPENDIX B

ROLE-PLAYING

What will you say? What will you encourage students to say?

The best way to be ready to speak up is to prepare. The more you and your students can identify stereotypes and explain why they are hurtful—or just inaccurate—the easier it will be to respond the next time you hear one. Remember, your response can have an impact.

Here are some prompts to get you started, along with background information to help you address the inaccuracies.

➨ ***An elementary student holds up the corners of his eyes and says "Ching chang chong ching" as a Korean student walks by.***

Making fun of someone's physical appearance, especially in cases where the traits being mocked are related to race, ethnicity or cultural background, is dehumanizing. The same holds true for mocking another language.

How can a student bystander respond? What about an adult overhearing the taunt?

➨ ***A parent is angry because your classroom is inclusive. "I don't understand why my son has to do group work with a retarded boy. Why aren't they in their own classroom?"***

Because children use the word "retarded" as a slur, it should be discouraged. The child has an intellectual disability.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates the least restrictive educational environment. In many districts, that means inclusive classrooms. Learn more about it at idea.ed.gov.

Explore whether the parent has curricular or pacing concerns that prompted the remark and address those.

How can you make it clear that you are attentive to the needs of his child and also appeal to the parent's sense of fairness?

➨ ***During a service project planting trees at a local park, you hear a group of students laughing as one of them complains, "Why are we doing this? This is what Mexicans are for."***

The idea that any one ethnicity is particularly suited to any one profession is a form of stereotyping.

Mexicans, like every other group of individuals, occupy a range of positions in a variety of industries.

Students from middle-class, dominant-culture backgrounds may enjoy unearned advantages that allow them to feel above particular tasks, even those performed in the service of others.

What does this student understand about stereotypes and privilege? What do those who were laughing understand about them?

➨ ***During a staff meeting, some teachers cheer when the principal announces that students from a nearby trailer park will be attending a different school next year.***

Teacher attitudes matter. The stereotype that students from a particular neighborhood, or those who live in poverty, are low achievers or disciplinary problems can have a real impact on their achievement and behavior. Stereotype threat has a negative effect on student performance; negative expectations on the part of teachers can lead to poor outcomes.

This is a good scenario in which to employ the "tell me more" strategy. Ask role-playing teachers to explain why they clapped. Be ready to provide information on how teacher expectations influence student performance.

What might the principal in this case do? What might an individual teacher do or say?

➨ ***On the way to lunch, you hear a girl say to her friends, "C'mon bitches, let's go eat."***

When the targets (in this case women and girls) of a pejorative word reclaim it and use it endearingly or as a sign of solidarity, it's often defended as language re-appropriation.

There is much debate over whether the original sexist, malicious intent of the word can be undone by this in-group usage. Sometimes re-appropriated words backfire and perpetuate the stereotypes the speaker wishes to debunk. Sometimes the words are used for shock value.

Why did this student choose that word? What other words could she have used? How can she be gently stopped?

➨ ***A lesbian student comes to you, upset. A classmate told her that homosexuality is a sin and she is going to hell unless she chooses a different lifestyle.***

The right to be safe and welcomed at school applies to all students, including LGBT students.

Bullying or coercion, even if based on sincere religious belief, has no place in school.

How would you advise the girl to respond? What else can you do?

➨ ***During group work, you hear a boy say to a girl, "Stop PMS-ing and just take notes, OK?"***

Menstruation and its related side-effects (imagined or otherwise) are used to marginalize women and exclude them from particular job functions or decision-making roles. PMS references are sexist barbs used to portray women and girls as over-sensitive, emotional, inconsistent, irrational and angry.

What was this student trying to convey to his female classmate? Is there another way to say it?

➨ ***You put students into groups and overhear one turn to another and say, "Good, you can be our token black."***

"Token black" indeed tokenizes the black student by characterizing him and all his contributions as "token" and

not integral to the completion of the project. This student's contributions are marginalized before the assignment even begins.

"Ironic" racism calls attention to race in what the speaker intends as witty, modern and post-racial ways but really just reinforces stereotypes and dehumanizes people of color. If the "humor" in the joke is based upon someone's group membership, it's a racist joke, even if it's meant to be ironic.

What did this student mean to imply with his statement? How might the student being singled out as a token feel?

➨ ***A boy who likes attention gets laughs by chanting to a classmate with hearing aids, "Can you hear me now?"***

Making fun of someone for a physical disability isn't funny.

What effect did this student's humor have on the classroom environment?

How might the targeted student felt when this comment was made?

➨ ***A teacher criticizes a girl about her earring: "Don't you realize that those look ghetto?"***

"Ghetto" is a layered term that has specific stereotypical connotations (urban, poor, racial) and shouldn't be used in the school environment except in a historical context, e.g., the Warsaw Ghetto.

Does the context and significance of the comment change if this teacher is from a background similar to the student? Does the significance change if a student makes the comment?

➨ ***During an informal chat, a parent offers to hire a "bunch of illegals" to paint your classroom.***

People are not illegal. Their actions might not have followed the law but the people themselves are not illegal. Characterizing anyone by a single factor is dehumanizing.

Race and class privilege insulates students and parents alike from the experiences of those from different backgrounds.

In many states, hiring an undocumented immigrant is a crime.

Can the offer of help be disentangled from the bias? Would asking for the speaker to explain their intent or addressing the issue of inappropriate language lead to different outcomes?

➨ ***A fellow teacher made a joke in the faculty lunchroom about the band students, calling them "band fags."***

Like the r-word or the n-word, the f-word has no place in a welcoming school; respectful and appropriate language should be expected of all teachers.

Epithets used to characterize or marginalize a group of students hurt efforts to build community in school and perpetuate bias, in this case anti-LGBT bias.

APPENDIX C

CHANGING SCHOOL POLICIES AND TAKING ACTION

POLICIES

This guide is not about dissecting and rewriting district or school policies. But policies do matter. Take the time to read your school's policies on biased or discriminatory behavior. Knowing the policies will inform some of your responses, especially when behavior has crossed the line.

Finally, what is the policy in your own classroom? Is it established on the first day of school, or do you wait for something negative to happen and then develop classroom rules?

Consider creating a classroom constitution while also teaching about the U.S. Constitution. "A New Set of Rules" (available at tolerance.org/activity/new-set-rules) can help lead the way.

TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION

Here are three longstanding school-wide campaigns that can help create inclusive school environments that challenge bigoted behaviors.

Mix It Up at Lunch
A program of Teaching Tolerance
www.mixitup.org

Day of Silence
A program of GLSEN*, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network*
dayofsilence.org

No Name-Calling Week
Created by GLSEN *and Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing*
nonamecallingweek.org

APPENDIX D

RESOURCES

MORE ON SPEAKING UP

Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry
This is a companion guidebook to *Speak Up at School*. Published in 2005, it contains valuable advice for all people about addressing bigotry and hate. tolerance.org/publication/speak/speak

Faced with the Real World, Will You Speak Up?
tolerance.org/blog/faced-real-world-will-you-speak

CLASSROOM LESSONS

A Time to Speak: A Speech by Charles Morgan
tolerance.org/activity/time-speak-speech-charles-morgan

United We Stand
tolerance.org/activity/united-we-stand

Breaking the Barrier
tolerance.org/activity/breaking-barrier

RELATED ARTICLES

Online Hate: Unfriend or Speak Up
tolerance.org/blog/online-hate-unfriend-or-speak

The Courage to Speak Up
tolerance.org/blog/courage-speak

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