

Speak Up!

Have you ever been in a situation where someone has said something to you...or you might have overheard someone say something and you just knew in your gut that it wasn't right? You might have felt offended by what was said, or witnessed another person or group

Did you step up and speak up to try to right the offensive behavior...or were you stumped? Didn't know what to say? Maybe didn't want to offend the offender...who might have been a friend, coworker, family member.

When someone tells a racist joke, makes a casual sexist comment, utters slurs against other ethnic groups, makes homophobic comments....your silence indicates your acceptance of what was said. Tonight we are going to begin to work on becoming more comfortable in speaking up against racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, ethnic slurs, etc.

This is a process – a process that involves learning to recognize when someone – or sometimes even ourselves – are being offensive to other individuals or groups. And it is a process in learning to become more comfortable and confident in addressing unacceptable behavior.

It's also a process of learning when and where to speak up against bigotry. Below is the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Six Steps to Speak Up*

Six Steps to Speak Up

Be Ready. You know another moment like this will happen, so prepare yourself for it. Think of yourself as the one who will speak up. Promise yourself not to remain silent.

"Summon your courage, whatever it takes to get that courage, wherever that source of courage is for you," said Dr. Marsha Houston, chair of the Communication Studies Department at the University of Alabama.

To bolster that courage, have something to say in mind before an incident happens. Open-ended questions often are a good response. "Why do you say that?" "How did you develop that belief?"

Identify the Behavior. Sometimes, pointing out the behavior candidly helps someone hear what they're really saying: "Janice, what I hear you saying is that all Mexicans are lazy" (or whatever the slur happens to be). Or, "Janice, you're classifying an entire ethnicity in a derogatory way. Is that what I hear you saying?"

When identifying behavior, however, avoid labeling, name-calling or the use of loaded terms. Describe the behavior; don't label the person.

"If your goal is to communicate, loaded terms get you nowhere," said Dr. K.E. Supriya, associate professor of communications at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and an expert in the role of gender and cultural identity in communication. "If you simply call someone a racist, a wall goes up."

Appeal to Principles. If the speaker is someone you have a relationship with — a sister, friend or co-worker, for example — call on their higher principles: "Bob, I've always thought of you as a fair-minded person, so it shocks me when I hear you say something that sounds so bigoted."

"Appeal to their better instincts," Houston said. "Remember that people are complex. What they say in one moment is not necessarily an indication of everything they think."

Set Limits. You cannot control another person, but you can say, "Don't tell racist jokes in my presence anymore. If you do, I will leave." Or, "My workspace is not a place I allow bigoted remarks to be made. I can't control what you say outside of this space, but here I ask that you respect my wishes." Then follow through.

"The point is to draw a line, to say, 'I don't want you to use that language when I'm around,'" Bob Carolla, spokesman for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. "Even if attitudes don't change, by shutting off bad behavior, you are limiting its contagion. Fewer people hear it or experience it."

Find an Ally/Be an Ally. When frustrated in your own campaign against everyday bigotry, seek out like-minded people and ask them to support you in whatever ways they can.

And don't forget to return the favor: If you aren't the first voice to speak up against everyday bigotry, be the next voice.

"Always speak up, and never be silenced out of fear," said Shane Windmeyer, founder and coordinator of Campus PrideNet and the Lambda 10 Project. "To be an ally, we must lead by example and inspire others to do the same."

Be Vigilant. Remember: Change happens slowly. People make small steps, typically, not large ones. Stay prepared, and keep speaking up. Don't risk silence.

"There's a sense of personal disappointment in having not said something when you felt you should have," said Ron Schlittler, acting executive director of the national office of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Carolla put it this way: "If you don't speak up, you're surrendering part of yourself. You're letting bigotry win."

THE SPEAK UP! PLEDGE

Commit to respond to everyday bias and bigotry. Sign and place this pledge card in your wallet, book bag or desk drawer, or post it on your wall. Also use these pledge cards as a part of a campaign in your workplace or school, making as many photocopies as you need. Post the pledge in public places, encouraging others to join.

Because what we say matters.

I PLEDGE TO SPEAK UP!

In pledging to respond to everyday bigotry, I will:

- ✦ Speak up when I hear or see bigotry;
- ✦ Question and identify bias when I see it;
- ✦ Be mindful of my own behaviors;
- ✦ Promote and appeal to higher principles;
- ✦ Set limits on what is said or done around me;
- ✦ Seek help and help others to work against bigotry; and
- ✦ Remain vigilant and persistent.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____