

What did you just say?
Responses to racist comments collected from the field

Most of us have had that moment where someone says something racist/offensive and our brain freezes and stops us from responding. Having a couple of phrases in your back pocket can help prepare you for next time. Read through this list and pick out a couple that roll off your tongue easily. Or make a card with your favorite phrases to keep at your desk or in your phone.

- That's how we do things here. (Or: That's not how we do things here.)
- That's our culture. (Or: That's not our culture.)
- Think before you speak. Whatever you say, you can't take back.
- Racial jokes are not acceptable here.
- That's not funny to me. It sounds racist.
- What makes that joke funny?
- That could sound racist./ That sounds racist to me.
- Let's be careful of our words. We respect all people here.
- Let me push on that a little...
- How do you think our/your....would feel if s/he heard you say/call her/him that?
- I have no idea if you realize the impact of those words.
- I'm not sure how hearing this makes me feel...
- I don't want to put you on the spot, but that comment makes me feel uncomfortable.
- Think about what you just said. If you really mean that, we need to talk.

- ❖ Whoa, you can't say that.
- ❖ That was not necessary.
- ❖ What you just said is very serious.
- ❖ What if you're wrong?
- ❖ Really? Seriously?
- ❖ I'm sorry, what?
- ❖ Did you just say _____?
- ❖ Dude, pick another word.
- ❖ Ouch! That hurts.
- ❖ Wow!

- ❖ Help me understand your thinking.
- ❖ When I hear that, I feel offended.
- ❖ When and why did you start believing that?
- ❖ What evidence do you have to support this belief?
- ❖ I can see how you might think that but/and....
- ❖ So, what do you mean when you say _____?

- Is the fact that the person was Asian/Black/Latino/etc. relevant to your story?
- I'm not sure I understood you correctly. Do you mean....?
- When I hear you say _____, it makes me feel _____
- I don't know if you know how that sounded, but the way it sounded to me is...
- I think I know you pretty well and I didn't realize you think that.
- That's curious, it sounded like you just said _____.
- Hold on, I need a minute to process what you just said.
- What you just said does not reflect for me the good person I know you are.
- Excuse me did you mean to say something that may be interpreted as offensive?
- Can we talk in private? I was concerned with your statement earlier, it comes across as insensitive to _____.
- I feel obligated as a peer, supervisor, friend to tell you.....

- It sounds like we are assuming _____, what if we assumed _____ instead?
- I hear what you are saying. I don't quite understand how that is good for all kids. Help me understand it.
- Can you explain why you have such different expectations for (or responses to) individual/groups of students?
- Ok, so who from your class will you choose to not pay attention to and have fail school or drop out?
- As your teacher, I thought I was modeling something positive, please let me know where am I failing so I can correct it.
- I think we should be careful here. To an outside observer, it may have sounded like we are really saying...
- I don't agree with you, but I would like to hear more about that.
- I wonder if other factors may be affecting... and I wonder what those might be...
- You may not realize this, but you are talking about my story. That was me growing up.
- That sound racist (homophobic, sexist...) to me. If you are going to continue talking like this, I will have to leave.

And a reminder: *"It is a profound experience for a person of color to hear a white person address racism."*

Taking It Up participant



Created collectively by CFEE grads across Oregon.