

# A TECHNIQUE FOR INTERRUPTING BIAS

Adapted from Michigan State University  
Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives

Kaplowitz, D. R., Griffin, S. and Seyka, S. L.(2019).  
*Race dialogues: A facilitator's guide to tackling the elephant in the classroom.*  
Teachers College Press.

## THE PA<sup>2</sup>LS APPROACH

Interrupting bias, harmful language, or problematic behavior requires courage and preparation. This is a methodology to use to interrupt something that may be problematic or hurtful while still staying connected to the relationship. The major objective is to call in and speak your truth clearly.

# P

### PAUSE

Pause/Halt/Stop/Slow the conversation.

The goal of "Pause" is to interrupt the flow of the conversation or behavior. This gives you time to let the speaker know that you are interested in learning more about something they just said or did. Pausing or interrupting the behavior is often the hardest step! It requires courage to call someone in on something you observed, or something you think might need to be addressed further.

**Use your own instinct or language. Things you might say:**

- "Wait a second,"
- "Excuse me,"
- "Um, hold on a second..."
- "Ouch... that hurt a bit."

Sometimes interrupting the behavior is all that is needed!

# A<sup>2</sup>

### ACKNOWLEDGE/ASK

Acknowledge what the person is saying.

Try to make meaning out of what was said, even if it is a odds with your own ideas. You don't have to agree to simply acknowledge what was said. Acknowledging a person's thoughts shows respect, dignity, and interest in collaboration or dialogue.

- "What I hear you saying is..."
- "I appreciate your thinking on this. I am just having a hard time understanding..."

**Ask for clarification.** Get curious about what the person may have meant.

- "I'm curious. Why do you think so?"
- "What experiences led to your thoughts on that?"

**Let them know what you think you heard them say.** Clarifying comments clear up misunderstandings.

- "It sounded like you made a joke about... Is that what you meant?"

# L

### LISTEN

Listen deeply to what was shared and the connected feelings.

Even if you disagree, consider what really matters to the person and what lies beneath what they are saying. Especially when you disagree, strive to see the dignity and humanity in the person.

As you listen, avoid thinking of responses. Practice active and engaged listening, and reflect back what you think you heard.

**If necessary, take time (even days) to reflect on what was shared. Be open to challenging your own way of thinking.**

Sometimes listening causes further harm. If what was said was harmful, self-care may require us to remove ourselves from the situation.

# S

### SPEAK YOUR TRUTH/SHARE STORIES

**Speak your truth boldly and calmly:** Be clear and specific as you describe your objection. Connect your thoughts and feelings as you describe the way the language or behavior impacted you or others.

**Share your story** or the story of someone you know in order to illustrate the impact. There is power in storytelling; while sharing factual data may be helpful, we know that people are moved to open up and take in other perspectives when they hear personal stories.

**Try saying:**

- "I feel/am [emotion] when/that you [behavior]. I value [need]. Would you/could you [request]?"

**For example:**

- "I feel frustrated when you say that pronouns don't matter. I value being seen, and acknowledging my pronouns help me do so. Please use my pronouns from now on."



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