

Learning to Intervene

Flagging bias in a conversation can be scary. Remember that the purpose of intervening is to get the best outcome in the situation by thinking things through more carefully — it is not to make the person “better” or to attack someone’s character.

When someone makes a statement that seems biased to you, you can use the phrases below to pause and think things through.

Practice using these phrases out loud so when you are confronted with a situation involving bias you are better prepared to address it. You can practice in your car on the commute to work, in bed before you go to sleep, etc.

- “Can we pause and discuss what was just said?”
- “I’m having a strong reaction to this and would like to tell you why.”
- “Let’s dive into the dynamics I am seeing here.”
- “This feels unfair to some of our team members.”
- “The way you phrased that seems problematic to me.”
- “I think there are some issues here that are not being addressed.”
- “It sounded like you just said _____. Is that really what you meant?”

These phrases are great examples of non-combative ways to start a dialogue about problematic or biased behavior and/or processes. When our emotions are heightened we can struggle with our language, and may unintentionally exacerbate things with severe or accusatory language. By using these phrases, you relieve yourself of the pressure of thinking of the right words to say and you lay the groundwork for a productive conversation and positive change.

