

Stand Up! Speak Out!

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK: This is Bias-Free Zone Guide for Discussion, Reflection or Role Play

A verbal, physical, or cyber attack that targets someone because of an *actual or perceived* personal characteristic is based on *bias**. Bias-based bullying is against the law because it is a form of discrimination: It violates the right of every student to a good education in a safe space. It is extremely disrespectful because it attacks someone's *identity*. Imagine how you would feel if *you* were the target.

Vocabulary

Bias*:	preference for or against a person or group, based on personal characteristics, prejudice and stereotypes (especially those outside our group); e.g. <i>bias</i> based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
identity:	the combination of characteristics by which a person is known or describes him/herself
to self-identify:	to choose which characteristics by which a person describes his or her self
perceived:	what one <i>thinks</i> is true, based on appearances, but not based on fact (i.e. it is against the law to bully someone based on their actual or <i>perceived</i> sexual orientation)
empathy:	the ability to feel how someone else feels by imagining what it's like to <i>be</i> that person
obscenity:	a word or expression that is extremely offensive
civility:	considerate, polite behavior; common courtesy
slander:	to make false statements in order to damage someone's reputation
debase:	to lower in status or value; to try to make a person feel "less than"
karma:	cause and effect; what goes around, comes around (from Hindu and Buddhist teachings)

Don't diss me or my identity / It's not yours, don't use it like an obscenity

1. **Make an identity chart.** It can just be a list or something that branches out like a family tree. Put your name at the top. Under your name, put the characteristic you identify with most strongly. Add other words you would use to describe yourself: how you *self-identify*. [Note: **You do not have to share this unless you wish to.**] Include characteristics like ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. (For example, this songwriter self-identifies as Caucasian, female, US-born, eastern European Jewish descent, English speaker, straight, mother, musician, anti-bullying advocate, salsa dancer)
2. **Scenario:** Everyone at school started to use *your name* as an *obscenity*, on a regular basis, to insult or describe anything or anyone as bad, stupid, ugly, or not cool. They say they're just using it "as a word" and "don't mean anything by it," but that doesn't make any difference, does it? Describe that experience, and how it impacts your sense of safety, comfort, and ability to do well in school.

That's so... No way! / Don't use my identity like it's an obscenity

3. ***That's so gay:*** That expression is offensive to LGBTQ students *and* to straight students who are Allies, who support equality, and may have gay or lesbian friends or relatives. Similarly *That's so retarded* is offensive because it's a disrespectful term for Downs Syndrome—a real disability—used as an insult, said with a laugh. Both are biased terms. **Write:** "*That's so ___!*" Fill in the blank with one of the characteristics from your identity chart, by which *you* self-identify. Describe how it feels to hear part of your identity regularly used as an insult, even when people say "it's just a word" or they "don't mean anything by it."

Your right to free speech has limits that end with me, and my right to safety and civility

4. **Safety and civility:** What should that feel like in school? Is that your experience? If biased speech was allowed in school, who would it effect most? Imagine *you* are one of those students. Describe its impact on you, how you feel about yourself, your attendance, your grades, your future.

Think before you speak / Put yourself in my shoes / Think about the word you choose

See yourself through my eyes / Think before you speak / And do more damage than you realize

5. Biased speech doesn't only happen in schools. It happens on the street and in places where people work. **Scenario A:** Someone in your family hears biased insults at work. **Scenario B:** Think of a student who has been the target of bias or bullying. *See it through their eyes. Put yourself in their shoes.* Describe *from their perspective* what that experience is like.

Think before you speak, 'cause what you say is what you stand for!

6. **Breakin' Down Bias Log:** Write down every time you hear (or use) biased speech. Record if and how anyone responds to it. How do you respond? Do you speak out against it? Why or why not?