



SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

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Steps to Address Hate Speech

Hate speech. We hear it around campus all too often, whether it's meant as a private joke between friends or a hastily uttered insult.

Prevention educators face a conundrum on how to address this language. One approach involves confronting the language as it arises and calling out individuals who use language that marginalizes and communicates hatred toward another group. While I appreciate this tactic, I also think there is an important caveat in approaching an individual who is using this kind of language.

A successful intervention must include two key elements. First, the intervention should start from a position of kindness and caring for the person who has been offensive. It is unhelpful if the intervention starts with "That is hate speech and by saying that, you are acting like a bigot. Was that your intention?" While true, this isn't an effective way to lower the defenses of the speaker and thereby begin an effective intervention.

I have found taking a step-down approach is much more effective. I would suggest starting with, "Maybe you didn't realize what you just said, but I wanted you to know how that kind of language impacted me." This then creates an opportunity for understanding for the other person.

The second part of the intervention is creating a space for the offending person to make a positive change. Let them make a decision about changing their language, apologizing or making amends. Allow them to gracefully admit they made a mistake.

Programs that address hate speech through bystander interventions can be very effective, if those doing the confrontation do it from a stance of kindness and caring. This allows the offending student some space to change their behavior. While it would be nice if we could take larger steps in this process, this baby-step approach is most likely to bring about the change and awareness we are looking to accomplish.

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