

Safeguarding Inclusive and Respectful Communication

Students

Respecting the students we serve

We must be able to recognize damaging phrases and redirect each other towards more inclusive and respectful communication for those we serve. Whether we are working with colleagues in our own school district or organization or supporting various external stakeholders; inequitable responses and statements can surface. Below are phrases you may have heard about students.

You may hear...

Statements about students like:

- students don't care,
- students are lazy
- students are unorganized
- students are choosing not to do their work
- students are choosing not to connect
- students know they'll just get a "pass"
- students aren't asking questions
- students need to be held accountable
- students need to learn responsibility

Sometimes we hear racist or bias phrases like, "*those students*" when referencing specific racial, cultural or income levels and groups.

Other racist and biased examples might be:

- "Native Americans don't value education."
- "Don't bother learning their name, they'll be leaving soon anyway." (migrant workers)
- "You can't suspend them because they're special ed."
- "Why should everyone have to bend over backwards for one kid?" (Gender/bathrooms)
- "How do we know they are *really* praying?"
- "But our Black students are more disruptive, so of course they will have more referrals."

So what's the big deal?

Targeted statements promote racism, perpetuate stereotypes, create toxic and harmful school culture and climate and contribute to students disliking who they are which can lead to anxiety, depression, substance abuse and even suicide. While both examples are harmful, racist or bias statements are a bigger deal. Now students are not only being cast in a negative light; but because of structural systemic inequities that exist based on race, class, gender, orientation, identity, ability, etc. these statements are even more damaging.

General negative statements about students that are not also impacted by additional inequities are still problematic. Each statement assumes negative or even ill intent on the part of the student. They also place blame and full ownership on the student without considering adult behaviors and choices first. Ownership is not a bad concept; but must be filtered through an understanding of power, privilege and unevenly distributed barriers. Ultimately, statements like these indicate a lack of understanding of barriers that may exist for students.

A Coaching Protocol

Start by examining possible barriers connected to adult behaviors and choices including bias, blind spots or dominant cultural norms. Keep in mind, not everyone may have had the opportunity to understand or recognize barriers so you may need to offer direct support or responses.

Naming the barriers you can control, and which are out of your control will also be helpful when offering support. Staying solution focused in your support will be key to healthy and lasting relationships.

Acknowledge the Feeling	Acknowledge the Value	Name the Barriers	Offer Support
<p>We want the best for our students, when we see them struggling, it can be frustrating.</p>	<p>Children are naturally wired to learn and connect.</p> <p>Sometimes schools create trauma and barriers to learning.</p> <p>Sometimes other life events (including trauma) create barriers to learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The lesson might be un motivating, unengaging or uninspiring ▪ The lesson might be biased ▪ The lesson might reinforce stereotypes ▪ The student might not understand the task or the directions ▪ The student may need more academic support to complete the assignment ▪ The student might feel embarrassed to ask questions or doesn't know which questions to ask ▪ The student might be the primary care giver (meaning working to provide family income, taking care of younger siblings, supporting younger siblings with their schoolwork, cooking/providing meals, cleaning or chores, etc.) ▪ The student might have a language barrier (include Academic English register when considering language barriers, not just languages other than English) ▪ Students might be navigating a variety of life issues (mental health, addiction, etc.) ▪ Students might be navigating a mismatch between learning needs (physically, emotional, cognitive) and schools' traditional curriculum and instruction 	<p>Coaching Language: Have you considered (name a possible barrier?)</p> <p>How can I help you eliminate the barriers we can control or offer equitable alternatives, so students get the support they need to be successful?</p>