

Six Tips for Speaking Up Against Everyday Bigotry

Adapted with permission of [Teaching Tolerance](#),
a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center
with Quaker Pieces added by Anne Nydam, Wellesley Friends Meeting

Whatever situation you're in, remember these six steps to help you speak up against everyday bigotry. In any situation, however, assess your safety, both physical and emotional. There is a risk, and that must be acknowledged as you make your own choice to Speak Up!

Be Ready.

You know another moment like this will happen, so prepare yourself for it. Think of yourself as the one who will speak up. Promise yourself not to remain silent.

"Summon your courage, whatever it takes to get that courage, wherever that source of courage is for you," said Dr. Marsha Houston, chair of the Communication Studies Department at the University of Alabama.

To bolster that courage, have something to say in mind before an incident happens. Open-ended questions often are a good response. "Why do you say that?" "How did you develop that belief?"

[Quaker Piece: Practice your awareness of Divine Presence, so that when difficult situations arise, you know how to draw on that support and guidance.]

Identify the Behavior.

Sometimes, pointing out the behavior candidly helps someone hear what they're really saying: "Janice, what I hear you saying is that all Mexicans are lazy" (or whatever the slur happens to be). Or, "Janice, you're classifying an entire ethnicity in a derogatory way. Is that what I hear you saying?"

When identifying behavior, however, avoid labeling, name-calling or the use of loaded terms. Describe the behavior; don't label the person.

"If your goal is to communicate, loaded terms get you nowhere," said Dr. K.E. Supriya, associate professor of communications at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and an expert in the role of gender and cultural identity in communication.

[Quaker Piece: Remember that God cares about this person, as well, and that you can confront their bigotry in love for them and the Divine in them.]

"If you simply call someone a racist, a wall goes up."

Appeal to Principles.

If the speaker is someone you have a relationship with — a sister, friend or co-worker, for example — call on their higher principles: "Bob, I've always thought of you as a fair-minded person, so it shocks me when I hear you say something that sounds so bigoted."

"Appeal to their better instincts," Houston said. "Remember that people are complex. What they say in one moment is not necessarily an indication of everything

[Quaker Piece: Try to feel for That of God in this person, for the places where they can connect with their own experiences of Love.]

they think."

Set Limits.

You cannot control another person, but you can say, "Don't tell racist jokes in my presence anymore. If you do, I will leave." Or, "My workspace is not a place I allow bigoted remarks to be made. I can't control what you say outside of this space, but here I ask that you respect my wishes." Then follow through.

"The point is to draw a line, to say, 'I don't want you to use that language when I'm around,'" Bob Carolla, spokesman for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. "Even if attitudes don't change, by shutting off bad behavior, you are limiting its contagion. Fewer people hear it or experience it."

[Quaker Piece: Being "nice" or non-confrontational is not the same as being loving. Sometimes you have to risk being obnoxious to be firm in what's right.]

Find an Ally/Be an Ally.

When frustrated in your own campaign against everyday bigotry, seek out like-minded people and ask them to support you in whatever ways they can. And don't forget to return the favor: If you aren't the first voice to speak up against everyday bigotry, be the next voice.

"Always speak up, and never be silenced out of fear," said Shane Windmeyer, founder and coordinator of Campus PrideNet and the Lambda 10 Project. "To be an ally,

[Quaker Piece: Trust that the Spirit may be moving in others around you, too. Don't forget to use your meeting community for support!]

we must lead by example and inspire others to do the same."

Be Vigilant.

Remember: Change happens slowly. People make small steps, typically, not large ones. Stay prepared, and keep speaking up. Don't risk silence.

"There's a sense of personal disappointment in having not said something when you felt you should have," said Ron Schlittler, acting executive director of the national office of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Carolla put it this way: "If you don't speak up, you're surrendering part of

[Quaker Piece: Focus on following Divine leading in each situation, rather than assessing success in terms of tangible results. You cannot know what effect your actions are having in the hearts of those around you; you can only try your best to stay attuned to the promptings of the Spirit in your own heart.]

yourself. You're letting bigotry win."

Anticipate and rehearse. When you know bias is likely to arise, practice possible responses in front of a mirror beforehand. Figure out what works best for you, what

[Quaker Piece: Try a spiritual practice to get those spiritual "muscles" in shape! Practice being aware of and acting on divine "nudges" every day. Your meeting should be a place where you practice meeting people in the Divine even when you have disagreements.]

feels the most comfortable. Become confident in your responses, and use them.

(Southern Poverty Law Center is not responsible for the "Quaker Pieces.")