Witnessing Microaggressions: What Can I Do?

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Speaker Disclosure

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• Nonfinancial:
  – ASHA SIG 14 affiliate
  – Member of National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing
Microaggressions are indignities that insult or marginalize targeted individuals.

Microaggressions can create physiological and psychological harm over time.
Too often, microaggressions are seen and heard by bystanders, but no one says anything, to either the person making the comment or the one being insulted or marginalized.

Why?

Many reasons why...

- Some subtlety or nuance in the comment that gives an illusion of ambiguity
- Conflict-averse, reluctant to label subtle racism, or not sure what to say
- Fear of repercussion or retaliation or making things worse
- Speed of the moment
- Immobilized by not knowing what to do
For targets of microaggressions, **microinterventions** are words or actions of bystanders that:

- **Validate** their reality.
- **Convey** their **value** as a person.
- **Affirm** their racial or group identity.
- **Support** and **encourage**.
- **Reassure** that they are not alone.

*(Clay, 2017; Sue et al., 2019, 2020)*

**Microinterventions** can:

- **Make** “the invisible visible”
- **Disarm** negative words and actions
- **Educate**
- **Support** and **empower** targets of microaggressions

*(Clay, 2017; Sue et al., 2019, 2020)*
Being an **Active Bystander**

- **Recognize** acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.
- **Realize** the positive outcomes for all through action.
- **Have a repertoire of responses** to use.
- **Practice, practice, practice**.
- **Seek external intervention**.

(The Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/active-bystander-training/)

**Drawing Attention**

- Discourage problematic acts or comments by calling attention to them.
- A new Asian or Latinx CSD student is visiting your team. Everyone seems impressed by her and an older staff person says, “You speak excellent English.”
- After the student leaves, you say, “Why were you surprised that she speaks English well?”
The Impact, on You

- Avoiding assumptions or assertions about the potential impact on the student, you describe the impact on you.
  - “I felt uncomfortable by it, like we were drawing attention to a perceived difference.”

A Different Perspective

- Offering a different perspective when they respond, “I was just trying to compliment her. What’s the big deal?”
- You reply, “If I just met the team and had, what I thought was a great conversation, and the only thing one of them said to me was that my English was good... I think I might take it as a bad sign, right?”
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Resources

- Did They Really Just Say That?! Being an Active Bystander
  kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/active-bystander-training/
- Tool: Interrupting Microaggressions
  academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_InterruptHO_2014_11_182v5.pdf
- Standing Up, Speaking Out for Racial Justice
  leader.pubs.asha.org/do/10.1044/leader.ftr2.25082020.52/full/
- Raw Conversations: Stop the Silence Listening Session and Tips to Become a CSD Student Ally
  blog.nsslha.org/2020/06/16/raw-conversations-stop-the-silence-listening-session-and-tips-to-become-a-csd-student-ally/
- Resources on Implicit Bias’and Microaggressions
  diversity.gwu.edu/resources-implicit-bias-microaggressions
- Allies and Microaggressions
- A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions

Coming up next

We’ve explored the concept. In the next activity, we’ll review some examples.
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REVIEWING EXAMPLES

The Team-mate

A couple of colleagues and I were chatting about our time in undergraduate CSD programs. One, a new employee, expressed surprised that the other, who is African American, went to an Ivy League school.

Later, sort of out of the blue, she suggested to me that her being Black must have been the reason she got into the school.
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The Team-mate

What Can I Do?

Recognize the problematic comment and draw attention to it.

Offer another perspective that validates the target of the microaggressor.

Describe the impact on you.

“That’s definitely not right. She’s an exceptionally smart and dedicated clinician. I bet she worked incredibly hard to get into that school. The idea that successful people of color get unfair advantages and don’t deserve their success isn’t true and really bothers me.”
The New Hire

I was part of an interview team to hire a new employee.

One member of the team asked the applicant if he’ll be comfortable living in a city where there are few Hispanic families.

She added that they “took a chance” a few years ago in hiring a Hispanic individual who left after 2 years.

The New Hire

Stop it right away.

Recognize the problematic comment and call attention to why it’s a problem.

Offer a different perspective that moves the conversation in a positive direction.
“Actually, that’s not correct. She was a great colleague and we were lucky to have her join the team. Two years isn’t unusual anyway. We know that coming to a totally new city can be challenging for anyone, which is why our onboarding process welcomes new coworkers’ entire family to our community. We welcome and try to celebrate diversity here.”

SLPs in a school region were meeting to receive the names of the students who would be on our caseloads.

Each student’s name was given along with the SLP to whom the student was assigned.

I started to notice that all the BIPOC students were being assigned to BIPOC clinicians.
**The Cases**

- Draw attention to the issue through observation.

**What Can I Do?**

- Talk about the impact on you and suggest a different course of action.

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“I’m not sure if you noticed, but it looks like all the BIPOC kids have been assigned to just a few SLPs. That’s probably not ideal, is it?

I really enjoy working with kids from different backgrounds and recognize it helps me be a better clinician. If we more evenly distributed those students, we’d all benefit from the experience.”
Coming up next

We’ve explored the concept and reviewed some examples. The next activities are your turn to plan, practice, and reflect.

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<th>WHO</th>
<th>DATE</th>
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How’s PLAN

Spend 5 minutes to create a plan to apply the course concepts.

YOUR PLAN

What microaggressions have you witnessed before? What could you imagine witnessing in your everyday life? What could you do or say to intervene as an active bystander? Plan a practice conversation.
TRYING YOUR PLAN

Spend 5 minutes at work putting your plan into action

NOTES

TRY IT

Practice the conversation out loud or with a friend. Try to imagine how they might react. Remember that the goals of intervention are to draw attention to an issue; invite people to do better, rather than ostracizing them; and offer support to the impacted individuals.

WHAT HAPPENED

WHAT WORKED WELL

IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

's REFLECTIONS

Spend 5 minutes to reflect on how your plan went

SPEAKER TIPS

What worked well? What was hard? What would you change next time? Practice is critical to effective intervention, so keep practicing to build your confidence and repertoire of responses.
LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Spend 5 minutes to complete your learning assessment in the ASHA Learning Center.

You’ll have access to a certificate of completion immediately after you complete and submit your assessment.