

HOW TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

“Taking a stand” requires a commitment to take action against the anti-Semitic language and behaviors that happen on your campus or in your community. It doesn’t necessarily mean you should jump in and directly confront every offensive remark, though that may be the most appropriate and effective response in some situations. To determine when and how to respond, ask yourself a few quick questions about who the aggressor is, your relationship with the person, and the possible safety concerns of the situation. Although there is no one right way to respond, no magic words or actions that apply to every situation, a commitment to take action and a willingness to respond in effective and appropriate ways will help you to establish campus and community environments where you and others feel safe and respected. When you are faced with anti-Semitism, the guidelines below will help you choose the best and most appropriate action to take.

... To Speak Up Now or Later; That is the Question! ...

In some instances, it is best to speak up immediately in response to an anti-Semitic comment. Other times, it may be better to wait and speak privately to the person who has said or done something anti-Semitic. Before reacting, ask yourself these questions:

■ How Well Do I Know the Person?

Is it a friend or someone you don’t know? If a good friend makes an anti-Semitic comment, even as a “joke,” you can feel fairly comfortable speaking up immediately. If you don’t know the person, there are other considerations to think about before deciding what action to take.

■ Is It Safe to Speak Up Immediately?

Quickly assess the safety of the situation. If you know the aggressor, think about whether he or she has a history of bullying or harassing others.

Did the person engage in anti-Semitism because of a conflict or feelings of anger?

When people are feeling strong emotions, such as anger, they are less likely to hear what you’re trying to say. Is there a chance that an immediate response could escalate the situation? If you wait until after the person has had a chance to calm down, he or she may be more receptive to what you are saying.

Did the person intend to be offensive?

Try to determine the person’s intention. You can usually tell the difference between something said or done out of ignorance and something meant to be intentionally hurtful. If the person does not realize that the behavior is anti-Semitic, there are simple ways to let him or her know. If the intention was to be hurtful and cruel, proceed carefully. It may be better to postpone responding until you can talk the situation over with someone you can trust.

■ What Else is Happening and Who Else is Around?

Assess what is happening around you. Is there a large group of other people in the vicinity? Sometimes, when you immediately challenge what someone has said or

done, the person can become embarrassed or defensive. In these cases, it is more effective to wait until later to say something; however, make a personal commitment to do so. Set a time and place to talk to the person, so you don't later change your mind about responding.

■ Do I Need Help?

If you are in immediate danger or are unsure how the situation can otherwise be resolved, ask someone for help. A professor, resident advisor or other trusted mentor or friend can assist you in taking consistent and appropriate action against aggressors.

How to Take a Stand¹

Whether you decide to speak up now or later or to seek the assistance of someone else or not, you can use the following simple but effective strategies to respond to anti-Semitic name-calling, stereotypes, jokes and behaviors:

1. Assume Good Intent and Explain Impact

It's not necessary for you to shame, blame or insult someone who has made a thoughtless anti-Semitic comment. *"I know you didn't mean any harm, but what you just said hurts."*

2. Ask a Question

Assume the person is not being intentionally offensive, and ask a simple, non-blaming question. *"What do you mean by that comment?"*

3. Interrupt and Redirect

If you are unable to respond immediately, use this strategy to change the direction of the conversation without having to provide additional information. If the following simple statement doesn't work, consider walking away. *"Let's not go there."*

4. Broaden to Universal Human Behavior.

When people express anti-Semitic stereotypes, they are attributing a common human trait to only Jewish people and assuming that Jewish people are all exactly the same. This strategy breaks through stereotypes by suggesting that the trait applies to humankind in general. *"I think that lots of different people have that quality."*

5. Make It Individual

The opposite technique is also successful at breaking through stereotypes. This strategy narrows the focus by suggesting the characteristic may apply to some members of a group, but not to everyone in the group. *"Are you speaking about someone in particular?"*

6. Say "Ouch!"

When you don't have the time or energy to speak up, or you aren't sure how to respond, you can say... *"Ouch, that hurt."*

¹"How to Take a Stand" strategies adapted with permission from Leslie C. Aguilar, *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* (Flower Mound, TX: The Walk the Talk Company, 2006). © Leslie C. Aguilar.