

ACSD Biased Incident Response Handbook

Created by and for
Arlington Faculty and Staff

Purpose

The Biased Incident Response Handbook is presented in an effort to cultivate wellness and belonging in accordance with the mission of the Arlington Central School District. Our goal is to create an inclusive environment in which all students feel respected and experience a sense of belonging. This handbook will empower all faculty and staff with the tools, supports, and resources they need to address biased situations as they occur.

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Before an Incident

Things to consider before an incident takes place...

- **Classroom Community**
 - Build meaningful relationships in the classroom to help empower students to speak up for themselves.
 - Develop rules for communication with students at the beginning of the school year and reference the rules when an issue comes up - don't wait until a biased comment or incident occurs.
 - Incorporate opportunities for collaboration amongst students into your classroom practice. "Researchers have found the single best way to eliminate bias is by having students of different races, ethnicities, abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds work together on successful projects." *Speak Up At School, How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes. A Guide for Teachers*
- **Language and Context**
 - Generate ready responses with your students and post them in the classroom.
 - Have discussions about why some words hurt.
 - Build context around words to help students understand their power to hurt (historical, psychological, literary.)

Addressing an Incident

It is important for our students' sense of wellness and belonging that we speak up against every biased remark, every time it happens. Be consistent.

If you are not sure of the best response in the moment, a great go-to phrase to buy some time to reflect and think is, "Hold on, I need to process what you just said." Be sure to follow up with all students involved at a later time.

"Calling Out"

Calling out is bringing public attention to an individual's or group's harmful words or behavior. The trick here is to be prepared with a list of possible statements to respond with. Choose a couple statements you feel comfortable with and practice saying them ahead of time, so you can readily call on them when needed. Some useful phrases to call out biased actions and language are:

1. "That offends me."
2. "I don't find that funny."
3. "Using that word as a put down offends me."

4. “Using that/those word(s) doesn’t help others feel safe or accepted here.”
5. “Using that word to put someone down is unacceptable.”

The goal of calling out is to cause the offending individual to take a step back and reconsider their actions, while simultaneously setting expectations for our community. By being prepared with three or four phrases that communicate that we are not okay with biased remarks or actions, we can immediately call out a person who may easily dismiss their actions as “just a joke.” We also affirm for bystanders that those types of actions and comments are not welcome in our space.

“Calling In/Asking Questions”

“Calling in” is an invitation to a one-on-one or small group conversation to bring attention to an individual’s or group’s harmful words or behavior, including biased, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination. This strategy provides a space for helping the offending individual or group to reflect on the impact of their words and actions. Here are some helpful phrases and questions that can be used to call in an individual or group:

- “What do you mean by that?”
- “Why would you say something like that?”
- “What point are you trying to make by saying that?”
- “Did you mean to say something hurtful when you said that?”
- “How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone else might misinterpret your words/actions?”
- “Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?”

Intent Versus Impact

Educators can address some biased comments by directly naming that the intent, or how a speaker meant a statement to come across, might not align with the impact, or how a statement actually affected the recipient. This technique frames the remark and speaker as well-intended, preserving the interpersonal relationship and minimizing potential defensiveness, while labeling the comment as biased.

For example, after hearing a biased remark, you could reply, “I don’t think you meant to racially stereotype anyone when you said that, but I think it’s important to realize that others might interpret it that way.” This promotes further dialogue regarding the statement’s impact and underlying biases, regardless of the original intent.

A common response from students when they are called out for a biased remark or action is, “They don’t care! I was just joking.” This is a perfect situation for bringing up intent versus impact. If a student tries to deflect responsibility for a harmful comment by claiming it was just a joke, you could try saying something like, “I’m not going to get into a discussion with you about if you were joking or not because it’s easy to say ‘just joking’ as an excuse to get away

with this kind of comment. Regardless of the intent of your comment, it had a harmful impact on those around you.”

Don’t Let it Go Unaddressed

It is important for educators and administrators to call out biased actions and comments. Sometimes in the moment, we don’t handle situations of bias perfectly. Remember, it is never too late to address a biased incident. If you walk away from a situation and think to yourself, “I wish I said _____,” or “I should have said _____,” circle back to the conversation with your students the next day so you can all learn from the experience. While it is easier to just leave it in the past, if biased incidents go unaddressed it can send an unintended, yet powerful, message to all who witnessed it that that kind of behavior is acceptable to you.

Immediate Response Steps

When an incident occurs, it is important for the district and/or school professionals to take immediate steps to secure the physical and emotional safety of those involved.

The following are high level considerations and resources to support that process.

1. Assess the situation for the physical and emotional safety of:
 - a. the person(s) at whom the biased incident was directed
 - b. those who are responding to the incident
 - c. witnesses to the incident
 - d. the broader school community
2. Decide what type of response (in-person, by phone, or by email) aligns best with district policy and maintains your safety and the well-being of others involved.
 - a. Ensure your response acknowledges the impact of bias on the person(s) at whom the biased incident was directed. In many cases this will include African American/Black people, people of color, members of Tribal communities, LGBTQI2SA+ people, the Jewish community, and others from historically oppressed backgrounds.
 - b. Focus on incident impact, not the intent of the person(s) who caused harm.
 - c. Be aware of the impact of unconscious bias on decision making.
3. Select an immediate response that maintains your personal safety, aligns with district policy, reduces harm to those involved, and ensures a safe environment for all.
4. Listen empathetically to gather information and problem-solve.

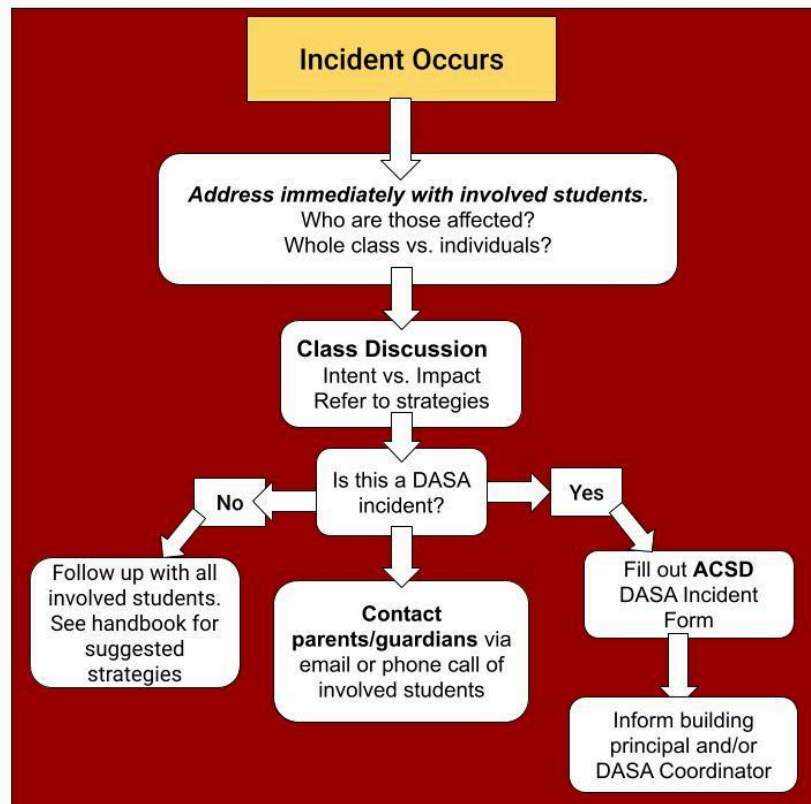
(Taken from [“Every Student Belongs Bias Incident Response Guide”](#).)

For additional help, contact your building DASA coordinator.

In-The-Moment Basic Strategies for Handling Biased Incidents:

- **Interrupt** it every time, in the moment. Try not to let the moment pass. The more often the behavior is interrupted the more likely it will stop.
- **Question** in a gentle “tell me more” way, which allows the speaker to think about his/her language and bias.
- **Educate** about why the word or phrase is offensive. Give the speaker the benefit of the doubt, and allow them to make a change. Sometimes kids know a word is negative so they use it as a put-down without understanding the true meaning. Use the opportunity as a teachable moment. 1:1 discussions and whole group lessons can be useful means to educate. Role play with students about how words can hurt and the importance of being an ally.
- **Echo** the first person who interrupts the bias by thanking them for speaking up or reiterating what he/she said. When one person speaks up it’s powerful, but when 4 people speak up it can have a bigger, more influential impact.

Reporting Flow Chart



Examples/Case Studies

The following are scenarios that have actually occurred in Arlington Central School District. Although some scenarios and strategies have been provided, every situation has its unique challenges. These strategies aren't the only avenues to address these situations. As an educator, knowing your students as well as you do, you have the autonomy to choose which strategy will mitigate harm the most, and keep your students' dignity intact.

Example 1: You overhear a group of students who are playing during recess. They have their hands bent at the wrists and are moving them side to side while saying "Hey, we're trans women, look at us walking like trans women." Another student laughs along and says "You're all so gay." How would you react?

Strategies to consider using:

- a. Call out/Interrupt: Go over to the students involved and tell them they need to stop because what they are saying is offensive.
- b. Call in/Question and Educate: Ask the students why they are saying these things, and then provide reasons as to why it's offensive.

Points to ponder: You don't always know who is in the area and who is affected by others' words. Someone may have a transgender family member or be questioning their gender identity. One should always intervene no matter who is in the area. Even if nobody directly affected appears to be in the area, it is still important to educate students in these moments.

Example 2: During class, a child of color walks into the room. You hear a student in the back of the room make monkey noises.

Strategies to consider using:

- a. Call out/Interrupt: Students in the class need to hear that this behavior is not tolerated or accepted in the school community. Direct language to stop the behavior is important here. Questioning is not appropriate in front of an entire classroom (this could cause more trauma because of repetition).
- b. Educate: Depending on the age and classroom dynamic, this may be appropriate for the individual student or the whole class.

Points to ponder: It is important for students to see you interrupting these behaviors. If students don't see adults intervening, they may not know that the behavior is addressed or even that it is problematic.

Example 3: You overhear two students in the hallway talking about another student's clothes. You hear them say “Of course his shoes are dirty, he gets hand-me-downs because he’s trailer trash.”

Strategies to consider using:

- a. Intent vs. Impact: Speak with the students about the impact of their words, even if their intention was not malicious.
- b. Educate: Talk with the students about different socioeconomic statuses while maintaining the privacy and dignity of the other student.

Points to ponder: When we think about biased incidents, we often think of race or sexuality. A lot of biased incidents are based on other factors which can include socioeconomics. Any situation where a child's dignity can be violated based on characteristics out of their control is a biased incident.

Example 4: A student comes to you off the bus and reports that they overheard someone calling another student “Ret***ed” during the morning bus ride. Additionally, the student was making mocking noises and gestures.

Strategies to consider using:

- a. Echo: Support the student in recognizing that this was a problematic situation. Praise them for sharing with you and acknowledge the courage it took to come forward.

Points to ponder: Just because you weren’t there for the incident doesn’t mean that you are not responsible to report or support the student. If a student trusts you enough to tell you of a biased incident, it is important to support them in addressing it.

Example 5: At lunch, a student brings a traditionally ethnic food and opens it at the lunch table. Other students nearby say “Ew, what is that?” and “What is that smell?”

Strategies to consider using:

- a. Call Out/Interrupt: Gently remind students that it’s inappropriate to make these comments about others' food.
- b. Educate: Remind students that we are a diverse community that can learn from each other. Encourage students to ask appropriate questions.

Points to ponder: Not all biased incidents are “jaw drops” - some are “head tilts” that are less obvious, like microaggressions. Each situation is deserving of your attention and intervention, no matter the intensity of the incident.

Definitions and Explanations

- **Bias:** showing favor for one group or person over another without being objective
 - **Biased Incident:** a discriminatory or hurtful act that appears to be motivated or is perceived by the victim to be motivated all or in part by race, ethnicity, color, religion, age, national origin, sex, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation. *To be considered an incident, the act is not required to be a crime under any federal, state or local statutes*
 - **Implicit Bias:** Negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and that affect our understanding, actions and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden biased
- **Cultural Appropriation:** The inappropriate use of cultural elements by people outside of the cultural group, including symbols, art, language, and customs, often without understanding or respect for its value in the context of its original culture
- **DASA:** The Dignity for All Students Act which prohibits bullying, harassment, discrimination, or cyberbullying against students in school. See **Discrimination** for examples of protected groups
- **Disability:** Physical, mental, or learning differences that affect a person's life
- **Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of members of various groups, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, including
 - Race
 - Color
 - Weight
 - National origin
 - Ethnic group
 - Religion/Religious Practice
 - Disability
 - Sexual Orientation/Gender/Sex
 - **Anti-Semitism:** hostility or prejudice against Jewish people
 - **Sexism:** discrimination, especially toward women, on the basis of sex
 - **Xenophobia:** dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries
- **Gender:** The characteristics and expression of men, women, boys and girls that are socially constructed (not based on biology)
 - **Gender Identity:** Distinct from the term “sexual orientation,” refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others
 - **Gender Non-conforming:** An individual whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender

- **Cisgender:** A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior aligns with those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth
- **Harassment:** The use of comments or actions that can be perceived as offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning and unwelcome
 - **Microaggression:** Verbal or nonverbal slights, insults or actions, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile or negative messages to target another person
 - **Prejudice:** A preconceived judgment or preference rooted in stereotypes
 - **Stereotype:** A false assumption or categorization of a person that can result in discrimination, based on little information that does not recognize the individual differences.
- **Race:** A group of people who share physical characteristics such as skin color and facial features or shared ancestry
 - **Racism:** discrimination against people based on their race, ethnic, or cultural background
 - **People of Color:** A collective term for people of Asian, African, Latinx and Native American backgrounds
 - **BIPoC:** An acronym used to refer to Black, Indigenous and People of Color
 - **Color Blind:** The outdated belief that everyone should be treated “equally” without acknowledging societal, economic, historical, racial or other differences
- **Sexual Orientation:** An individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual
 - **LGBTQIA+:** An inclusive term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual
 - **Queer:** people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender

Some definitions adapted from College of the Environment, University of Washington

District Resources

Anti Defamation League

https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/responding-to-biased-incidents-guide_0.pdf

Dutchess County Commission of Human Rights

<https://www.dutchessny.gov/Departments/Human-Rights/Human-Rights-Commission-Resources.htm>

Dutchess County Hate Crime Task Force

<https://www.dutchessny.gov/Departments/Human-Rights/hate-crimes-task-force.htm>

Learning for Justice

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/identifying-and-responding-to-biased-incidents>

Addressing Hate and Bias at School

<https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Addressing-Hate-and-Bias-at-School-Guidance.pdf>

New York State DASA Resources

https://www.nyscfss.org/_files/ugd/60b30b_001c49dbcab5415e8112c891b2421242.pdf

Responding to Microaggressions

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e32157bff63c7446f3f1529/t/6197fa0664014c4fe6ab1da9/1637349894713/Responding+to+Microaggressions+and+Unconscious+Bias.pdf>