

# ADDRESSING BIAS ON CAMPUS



This packet was developed by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) as part of the recommendations of the [New Jersey Youth Bias Task Force Report](#). It is designed to provide a brief plan for addressing bias on campus and to offer additional resources for delving more deeply into bias response. The three handouts in this packet – on preventing, intervening in, and responding to bias – focus on a whole-campus response that includes not only the individuals involved in an incident, but the broader community of students, faculty, and staff. The handouts also highlight ways to meaningfully address underlying issues and implement proactive measures that can affirmatively create a culture of equity and inclusion. Schools and administrators remain responsible for ensuring compliance with state and federal antidiscrimination laws, and with any other legal obligations or mandatory reporting requirements to which they may be subject.



# HOW TO PREVENT BIAS ON CAMPUS

Students have a right to feel safe and included on their campuses. Below are strategies to help prevent bias and foster safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.



## 1 BUILD EFFECTIVE BIAS-RESPONSE SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

- Enact strong anti-bias policies (please review the Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment [Resource Guide](#) on Promoting Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments, which includes a section on sample bias policies);
- Implement a Bias Education, Prevention, Support or Response Team (examples include Rutgers–Newark: [Bias Education and Response Team](#), The College of New Jersey: [Bias Education & Support Team](#)); and
- Ensure students know how to report and feel comfortable reporting bias, both internally through campus reporting systems and externally to local law enforcement and the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. ([File a Civil Rights Complaint](#))

## 2 ASSESS CAMPUS CLIMATE

- New Jersey institutions are mandated by [P.L.2020 c.104](#) to administer campus climate surveys at intervals no longer than four years. The findings are used to inform action plans that respond to strengths and weaknesses identified by institutional stakeholders. As a resource, the Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment Working Group created an [inventory of campus climate surveys and best practices](#) for institutional use.

## 3 PROVIDE ANTI-BIAS TRAINING TO STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF

There are a variety of training programs available that can educate students, faculty and staff on how to:

- Recognize interpersonal bias and stereotyping among students;
- Identify systemic and structural biases that perpetuate inequities on campus; and
- Address issues of interpersonal, systemic, and structural biases among students.

Useful resources include Campus Pride: [Stop the Hate Train the Trainer Program](#); Anti-Defamation League: [Educational Programs and Training](#); and NJ Division on Civil Rights: [Having Anti-Bias Discussions in Class](#)

## 4 FOSTER A STUDENT-CENTERED, TRAUMA-INFORMED, ANTI-BIAS CULTURE

- Build anti-bias commitments into student honor codes;
- Fund student-led, peer-to-peer anti-bias programming; and
- Provide students with access to on- and off-campus resources for mental healthcare, how to report bias, and other support services (see, for example: [TalkCampus](#) (peer-to-peer mental health support network)).

## 5 RECRUIT, RETAIN, AND PROMOTE DIVERSE FACULTY

Diversifying campus faculty and staff strengthens the institution by encouraging the exchange of new ideas and perspectives, helping to fulfill stated values of equity and inclusion, and better serving and reflecting an increasingly diverse student population. To increase faculty diversity, campus leadership can:

- Create diverse search committees that include members of underrepresented groups;
- Design job descriptions to attract a broad pool of candidates;
- Prior to interviewing candidates, discuss and agree upon objective criteria for judging candidates' qualifications; and
- Implement professional development and mentorship programs that improve retention.

Useful resources include Columbia University: [Best Practices for Faculty Hiring](#); and Princeton University: [Best Practices for Addressing Systemic Racism in Academia](#)

### Additional Resources

- SAMHSA: [In the Wake of Trauma: Tips for College Students](#)
- Learning for Justice: [Ten Ways to Fight Hate on Campus](#)
- New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education: [Maintaining Mental Health amid COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Rutgers Student Affairs: [Principles of Bias Prevention](#)
- New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education: [Maintaining Mental Health amid COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



# HOW TO INTERVENE WHEN BIAS OCCURS ON CAMPUS

When bias occurs, we all have a responsibility to intervene.  
Below are some strategies for responding to bias in the moment.



## 1 THINK FIRST

- Is my goal to just stop the behavior or to create a learning opportunity?
- What is my relationship with the person?
- What is the context or setting?
- Would it be better to respond now or later, publicly or privately?
- How can I assume a tone or posture that will be non-confrontational and allow my words to be heard?
- What biases does this situation bring up? How can I keep from letting my own prejudices drive my behavior?

## 2 INTERVENE IN RESPONSE TO EXPLICIT BIAS OR HARASSMENT

(attend a DCR training on bystander intervention)

- Use the 5 Ds – determine a strategy that fits the situation and your own risk tolerance level. ([Attend a Right to Be training on the 5 Ds](#))
  - **Distract:** De-escalate by interrupting indirectly. Engage the target of the bias or harassment, talking about something unrelated.
  - **Delegate:** Get help from others. Find someone in a position of authority and ask for assistance.
  - **Document:** Record the situation. Check with the target and local laws before you share or post recordings.
  - **Delay:** After the incident is over, check in with the target. Ask if they are okay and how you can support them.
  - **Direct:** If it feels safe, confront the aggressor by naming what is happening firmly and directly.
- When responding directly:
  - Safety first – your wellbeing comes first; remove yourself from the situation at any time if things escalate.
  - Be firm and clear in telling the aggressor to stop. Point out that they are violating a law, policy, or regulation. For example, bias-based harassment may violate [New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination](#) and may also violate campus anti-bias or anti-discrimination policies or honor codes.
  - Challenge the stereotype or prejudicial remark. Express why it is offensive and how it makes you feel.
  - Emphasize how the conduct conflicts with community values or principles.

## 3 ADDRESS IMPLICIT BIAS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

(attend a DCR training on these topics)

- Stay calm – try not to get emotional or put the other person on the defensive.
- Assume good will – start with the presumption that the person's intentions were not malicious; practice empathy by looking for the person's underlying feelings or motivations.
- Invite dialogue – challenge the assumption and ask questions:
  - Ask for more information – "What do you mean by that?"
  - Clarify – "I think I understood you to say \_\_\_\_\_. I want to understand why you think that way."
  - Use "I" statements – "That joke makes me feel uncomfortable because..."
  - Paraphrase or repeat back – "so you are saying that..."
- Focus on the behavior – the speaker may not be a bad person, but the action was harmful.

## 4 PLAN FOR SELF-CARE AND FOLLOW-UP

- Make a plan to report the incident. New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination protects you from retaliation for reporting bias-based conduct, and requires campus officials to take appropriate action to stop bias-based harassment.
- Talk to a friend, RA, counselor, or other trusted individual about your experience.
- Support peers who have experienced bias – listen and validate, don't try to fix the problem.
- Get involved in anti-discrimination efforts in an ongoing way – be an ally, advocate, or activist.

### Additional Resources

- University of Michigan: [Guidelines for Discussing Incidents of Hate, Bias, and Discrimination](#)
- Right to Be: [Bystander Resources](#)





# HOW TO RESPOND AFTER BIAS OCCURS ON CAMPUS

After a bias incident occurs, schools have a responsibility to investigate and take appropriate action to address the incident, including speaking out against the act, planning a response, and supporting the community through the healing process. Below are some essential strategies for responding to bias.



## 1 COMMUNICATE

- Communicate directly with the involved students (both the targets of bias or harassment and the aggressors) and be prepared to communicate with their families if appropriate (only do so in consultation with students, with respect for the students' wishes, and if doing so would not violate legal or policy requirements).
- Make a clear public statement denouncing the act and sharing plans to investigate in a timely manner. Circulate it to all members of the campus community, including students, faculty, and staff, via email, and any other means likely to ensure students and faculty see it.
- Prepare faculty and staff who may be the first lines of communication with students (such as academic advisors, residence life staff, mental health professionals, and diversity and inclusion leaders) to communicate appropriately with their students about the issue. Focus on the need to present a unified anti-bias commitment and support both the direct targets of bias as well as those indirectly affected (for example, Muslim students in general in addition to individuals who may have been targeted by Islamophobic acts). Ensure that faculty and staff follow all laws and regulations governing student privacy in their communications.

## 2 INVESTIGATE

- Launch a timely and unbiased investigation of the incident, including interviews with involved parties and witnesses, a review of security footage, and preservation of evidence. Consider whether this was an isolated incident or part of a pattern of harassing conduct, and take appropriate action to stop any bias-based harassment, as required by New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination.
- If the biased content is online, determine whether it should be removed, taking into account legal and free speech considerations.
- Notify and coordinate with local government and law enforcement as appropriate.
- Share accurate information with the community to correct misinformation and rumors, while maintaining the anonymity of involved parties as appropriate.
- Seek assistance as needed from local organizations with relevant expertise, including civil and human rights groups, other non-profit organizations, faith groups, and mental health agencies.

## 3 SUPPORT

- Support the direct targets of the bias through counseling and trauma-informed mental health interventions; make these services available to indirect targets to help with the healing process in the broader community.
- Ensure there is a plan in place to educate the aggressors in addition to any disciplinary action taken; implement restorative conferencing or other restorative practices if there are skilled facilitators available and the circumstances warrant this type of mediation/healing.
- Train staff and student leaders to facilitate discussions about the incident and bias issues in a variety of forums, such as residence halls, advisory meetings, counseling centers, and social media platforms (if appropriate); bring in outside speakers and experts for community forums as appropriate.
- Establish physical and virtual safe spaces for students to dialogue, receive support, and plan activities that promote feelings of allyship and inclusivity, e.g., town halls, vigils, reflection meetings, and other anti-bias campaigns.
- Provide ongoing communication with students, families, and faculty and staff so that everyone is aware of how the incident is being addressed and can unify around campus anti-bias efforts.

## 4 ASSESS

- When things have settled down, evaluate the incident and the response to it with relevant leadership teams to identify ways to strengthen bias prevention strategies and bias response protocols; include student representatives who bring diverse perspectives in this process.
- Identify short- and long-term diversity and inclusion strategies for building bridges of understanding across differences on campus; implement them via academic courses, student life, and campus rituals and events.

### Additional Resources

- Anti-Defamation League: [Hate/Uncycled](#)
- Rutgers University: [Bias Prevention](#)
- Not in Our Town: [Rapid Response to Hate: A Brief Guide for Schools](#)

