



Interrupting Inequities

Developed by Dave Lehman with thanks to friend and colleague Anne Rhodes for the original version of these adapted activities.

Purpose

- to gain a deeper awareness of hurtful heterosexist and homophobic things being said and done among students and staff in your school.
 - The focus could be adapted to address racist, sexist or classist remarks and practices as needed.
- to work on ways to effectively interrupt inequitable behaviors that are biased and unfair to members of your school community

Time: 1-2 hours

depending on the size of the group and the number of incidents discussed.

Part I: Recognizing Heterosexist & Homophobic Incidents of Bias

The list that follows are actual homophobic or heterosexist incidents of bias which have taken place in middle and high schools. *[Participants may read these silently at first, then add their own examples of incidents they have witnessed or heard about at their school]* (10-20 minutes depending if participants add their own incidents).

Have pairs or small groups discuss the impact of the incident on the students and staff involved and on the whole school community. Each pair/small group will report out to the larger group. (20-30 minutes).

Individual Writing Time

for each of the incidents chosen write down any suggestions about what could be done immediately, soon after or in the long term- notice especially which interventions you think would be difficult for you personally and why. (10-15 minutes):

- a) **immediately** in the situation (to interrupt the behavior)
- b) **next**, soon after, later the same day or the next day (to educate)
- c) **long term/proactive** (to create student and staff leadership in this area)

Whole Group Discussion

participants share with the large group their suggestions related to the 3 steps above - a) immediate, b) soon after, and c) long term/proactive (10-30 minutes depending on the number of small groups and incidents discussed):

Debrief Part I of the protocol (5-10 minutes)

Part II: How do you interrupt or intervene when you see/hear heterosexual or homophobic speech/practice?

Brainstorm in the whole group possible kinds of interventions [the following is a partial list] and ask for an example of each (10 minutes):

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Humor. | Turn it around. |
| Offer correct Information. | Ask for more information. |
| Ask questions. | Address underlying hurt. |
| Exaggerate original comment. | Listen carefully. |
| Join with the other person. | |
| Show pleasure for opportunity to discuss. | |

In choosing what intervention to make, consider — What, When, Where, How?

Discuss in general the following questions in the whole group — Would it be more effective now or later? Would it be more effective one-to-one and private, or with the whole group? Is this something that one person needs to change, everyone needs to learn, or the whole community needs to establish norms about? (10 minutes)

By way of review/overview, put the following chart on newsprint (chalkboard, overhead, or power point) and distribute it as a handout as well; ask for any clarifying questions (5 minutes):

Levels/Stages of Intervention — Progression toward long term change

1. Interrupt the behavior, or change the dynamics that support it — Stop! Invoke rules or guidelines. Consequences / discipline. Alter the context.
2. Educate — Why should they stop? Why the behavior is hurtful. Provide information, correct misinformation.
3. Create opportunity for leadership — Validate the person. Encourage self-examination. Provide way to practice new skills.

(Optional) — Put the following chart on newsprint (chalkboard, overhead, or power point) and distribute it as a handout as well; ask for any clarifying questions (5-10 minutes):

how to choose?	what helps?
+ your relationship with the person	EMPATHY
+ the situation	CONNECTION
+ how much time you have	OPPORTUNITY
+ your energy level	NO DEFENSIVENESS
+ impact on other in the situation	SELF-AWARENESS
+ how clear or confused you are	NO BLAME
+ their mood	

3. Create opportunity for leadership — Validate the person. Encourage self-examination. Provide way to practice new skills.

Continue with Part II for practice on specific examples of incidents of bias or prejudice that need interrupting.

Debrief the process.



Interrupting Inequities The Incidents

1. You hear students walking down the hall together using the word “faggot” as a way to put each other down.
2. A staff member is overheard in the office referring to the student organized day to address homophobia as “sexual confusion” day instead of an “infusion” day.
3. A boy in the school reports that his father objects to his learning about homophobia in school and says that “Gay men and their homosexual activities are the cause of AIDS.”
4. Male staff members over react in embarrassment and have to joke about it and slap each other on the shoulder when they accidentally touch each other.
5. Student is overheard saying that: “...all dykes hate men; they’re all ball-busters.”
6. You hear through the grapevine that some young women in the school are upset because someone yelled “Dykes are ugly,” and everybody laughed.
7. A staff member at a staff social event is talking about what he perceives to be a lack of empathy among students for the work that teachers do. He says “when they get married and have kids and have a full time job, maybe then they’ll understand.”
8. In a class discussion, a student of color says that “all gays are white,” and that homophobia is not an issue for people of color.
9. In an informal discussion, one student confronts another about a homophobic comment, and is told they were just kidding and to “lighten up.”
10. A staff member says that homophobic harassment and violence is not a problem here.
11. Students discussing another student who is not present comment on her black boots and short hair, and laugh when somebody says she’s probably a lesbian.
12. Staff members covering historical or current events fail to mention that some of the prominent people discussed are gay or lesbian.
13. Staff member teaching Sex Ed in a Health class does not mention gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality, and only talks about intercourse.

14. Gay and lesbian students come into school extremely upset because a gay student at another local high school was beat up. Other students tell them that it was his own fault because he “should have known not to dress like that and tell people he was queer.”
15. Students are encouraged to ask their mother and father if either would be interested in participating in a committee at school.
16. Staff attitudes about heterosexual romances at school are positive and supportive, but lesbian dating is seen as a “fad” or as another way for girls to rebel or be “different,” like getting a nose ring.
17. Students in school are spreading a rumor that a gay student is suicidal after being rebuffed by another boy. Neither boy is out to the staff.
18. A presenter from a local organization talks to students about date rape and violence from a completely heterosexual perspective.
19. Staff person questioning why staff has to go to these sessions says they “don’t understand why we are taking so much time to focus on this issue.”
20. Staff members are talking about a student whose parents are gay. One of them says “I bet you a hundred dollars that kid turns out gay too.”
21. Except for the out members of the staff, people in the school assume that everyone is exclusively heterosexual, particularly if they see a partner of the opposite sex.
22. Staff members gossiping together assume that a single older staff member must be gay.
23. A bisexual student reports to you that a friend told them “You’re confused. Just make up your mind what you want to be.”