

INCLUSIVE TEACHING RESOURCE

THE THINGS PEOPLE SAY

A self-reflection on intent vs impact

This resource is part of the **Inclusive Teaching Toolkit** which is designed to assist faculty in understanding the concepts of inclusive teaching and incorporating these ideas into your classroom. This toolkit is part of the [GWSPH DEI Initiative](#) that is being developed to respond to a societal call for social justice by changing the way GWSPH works to integrate DEI into every sphere of our work. This initiative encompasses Academics, Research, Practice, and Operations. The **Inclusive Teaching Toolkit** is one of many aspects of the Academic branch of the initiative

BACKGROUND

This self-reflection is intended help you to broaden your perspective, gain insight into the perceptions of others, and consider unintended negative consequences of things people often say. You play an important role holding yourself and others accountable. For each of the following statements, consider the difference between the possible intent behind someone who might say them versus the potential impact the statement may have on those who hear them.

1. "I know exactly how you feel!"

Intent: An attempt at showing empathy.

Impact: The reality is that we don't know exactly how others feel. Saying this may cause people to shut down because they feel the speaker will not listen to their perspective. This statement steers the focus away from the speaker. [Explore more](#).

2. "I don't see color" or "I'm color blind" or "I don't see difference. We're all part of the same race, the human race."

Intent: An attempt to demonstrate their fairness and that they do not discriminate.

Impact: Statements regarding not seeing color can render a person invisible and dismiss their life experience, resulting in mistrust and possibly provoking other negative emotions such as anger. Statements about not "seeing difference" can send the same negative messages. People want their identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual preference)

acknowledged and doing so can inform others about how we see and experience the world.

3. **"She/he is a good person. She/he didn't mean anything by it."**

Intent: An attempt to alleviate harm someone may have experienced and give the "harmer" benefit of the doubt.

Impact: Saying this is dismissive. What matters is not whether good people do harm intentionally and unintentionally. What matters is acknowledging potential harm and asking questions to better understand the situation.

4. **"All lives matter."**

Intent: An attempt to demonstrate equality by saying that everyone's life is important.

Impact: This statement is often used to criticize the Black Lives Matter movement. The reason BLM exists is because systemic racism, police brutality and murder against the Black community that shows over and over again that Black lives don't seem to matter. In fact, all lives can't matter if Black lives don't matter. Saying "all lives matter" renders invisible the difference between how Black lives are treated versus how other lives are treated in this country.

5. **"When I've said the same thing to other people like you, they didn't mind."**

Intent: This is usually said when one is defensive (or confused).

Impact: This statement infers the problem is with the listener, not the speaker. It is heard as judgmental and can create new/more conflict. If someone reacts negatively to something said, a simple brief sincere apology is the best bet.

6. **Calling women "Girls, Honey, Sweetie Pie" or other familiar terms.**

Intent: An attempt to create a casual, friendly environment,

Impact: It can be perceived as condescending and disrespectful. Better to save this language for friends and family. [Explore here](#) for more on using so-called "terms of endearment" in the workplace.

7. **When people of faith say, "Love the sinner, hate the sin."**

Intent: An attempt to offer compassion while not condoning one's actions. Often used when referring to LGBTQ individuals.

Impact: The thing that is being referred to as a sin (e.g., being gay) cannot be separated from the rest of the individual. From the perspective of the person receiving this comment, it is the same as being hated.

8. When white men say, "We are the ones who are being discriminated against now!"

Intent: This is usually said when someone feels put on the spot or defensive.

Impact: This statement is inaccurate and is a demonstration of white privilege. To understand the underlying facts about racial discrimination, [explore more here](#).

9. When people say they shouldn't have to be "politically correct."

Intent: This statement might be said when someone is frustrated by being told what they can or cannot say or if someone has been told they said something that was a microaggression.

Impact: Using the PC label is a common way to diminish an experience or viewpoint. It closes the door to any conversation and promotes the "us" vs "them" mentality. Statements like this do not add value and only serve to provoke unproductive reactions.

10. When people say "Yes, but you are a 'good' one."

Intent: This statement is meant as a compliment. The speaker is indicating the person is exceptional and acceptable.

Impact: By saying "You are a good one" the speaker is implying the rest of that person's group (a particular race, religion, gender, etc.) is bad or unacceptable. It also implies that the person is a good one because they are more like the speaker and less like others in their group. The message is assimilation is best.

Sources:

- [35 Dumb Things Well-Intentioned People Say: Surprising Things We Say That Widen the Diversity Gap](#) by Dr. Maura Cullen
- [Racism, white privilege: How to talk to your family, friends about it](#) by Sara M Moniuszko
- [Stop Saying "That's So Gay!": 6 Types of Microaggressions That Harm LGBTQ People](#) – Psychology Benefits Society
- [Discrimination at work: honey, I just got sued](#) by Philip Landau
- [The Truth about Anti-White Discrimination](#) by Keith Payne