

CLASSROOM TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO HATEFUL, OFFENSIVE, OR AGGRESSIVE LANGUAGE

1. **Support the victim:** Ask the student(s) on the receiving end of the language if they are OK. As privately as possible, offer water or a break to visit a counselor or use the restroom, or ask what else might be helpful. Do not ask victims to speak publicly about their feelings. This risks retraumatizing the victims rather than supporting their safety and healing.
2. **Denounce the act:** Remind the whole class (or those who witnessed the incident) of the school values (such as respect, safety, kindness) and explain how the offending remarks violate those agreements and values.
3. **Apologize to the whole class:** Express authentic remorse that the incident happened and that some members of the community were hurt. Remind students that you and the rest of the staff are committed to protecting their safety and well-being, while providing an atmosphere of growth.
4. **Reinforce school values:** Discuss positive steps that you will take to restore a focus on school and class values. Depending on the incident, this may include specific education (such as why we wear masks or the impact of racially offensive language), journaling exercises in empathy (“How would you feel if...?”), or asking the whole class to recommit to class values.
5. **Determine appropriate next steps for the student(s) who made the hurtful remarks:** After ensuring the safety of the victims, the goal of the next steps for a student who made offensive remarks should be restoration and education rather than punishment, and will differ by age, intent of the actions, and school/district policies. Understand that some students may be repeating phrases or epithets that they have heard at home or on social media but do not fully understand. Others may be reacting out of fear (for example, shaming a person for coughing during a pandemic). Privately discussing the situation and any consequences or next steps (such as apologizing in writing) will help to avoid unnecessary shame and allow for growth and change. Involving a school counselor trained to address bullying may be helpful and allow you to refocus on teaching other students. Remind the student(s) who made the comments that they are an important part of the community and that you welcome them back into the community fully once the consequence has been fulfilled and the student can recommit to the class values.

Sources include the following webinars and documents: <https://www.mesacloud.com/blog/june-webinar>; http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Responding%20to%20Hate%20at%20School%20ONLINE_3.pdf; and <https://webinar.mesacloud.com/administrators-talk-equity>