

# Interrupting Problematic Language

**Objective-** Interrupting comments that are homophobic, racist, classist, ableist, etc., in an immediate and safe manner will help create an environment that respects all people at all times. Respond to problematic language understanding that everyone has varying experiences and knowledge, and that interruption can be done with compassion and education. There are many different ways that problematic language can be interrupted, and the best way to get good at these and other strategies is to practice, practice, practice, so that when you do have to interrupt, you can do it quickly and effectively.

Some of our favorite tools include:

- 1) **Questioning/Playing dumb**—What do you mean by a “gay” shirt?
- 2) **Personalize**—Hey! That offends me!!
- 3) **Humor**—So if that shirts gay then does that mean it is attracted to other shirts of the same gender?
- 4) **Education**—Do you realize what you are saying is derogatory? How about coming up with five words that better describes what you are trying to say?
- 5) **Assume the Best**—I know you’re a good person and aren’t meaning to be hateful when you say that.
- 6) **Fall back on rules or policy**—It’s not ok to use language like that here.

## **Key Points-**

--The most important thing is to stop the problematic language and make the environment safe again.

--Choose your battles. You will not be able to interrupt every comment that is made. It is important to make the environment as safe as possible *without* burning yourself out.

--Consider time and place; sometimes a direct intervention may not be possible or ideal.

--Consider pulling the person/people aside to talk to them privately. This is especially important if you need to be considerate of confidentiality.