

Hidden Messages

Inequities on a Team

Despite best efforts to create an equitable team, negative micromessages may arise when students interact with each other. You can interrupt the inequities you see or hear within your team by addressing them in a way that does not embarrass or ostracize the offender.

For example, you can:

- speak with the necessary student privately and separate the behavior or action from the student.
- lead effective discussions by pausing to make sure you are calm and clear on how to respond before addressing a negative micromessage.



A team must be a safe place where every student, including those from marginalized groups, feels comfortable sharing ideas, trying different roles, and making mistakes.

Acting in a way that interrupts negative micromessages is central to creating a safe space for every student.

The table on the next page provides examples of what to look or listen for and how to respond.

Review the table and then answer the following reflection questions.

Reflection

1. How do you currently monitor team discourse and roles and address negative micromessages within teams?
2. What steps can you take to further disrupt inequities that occur during team interactions?
3. In addition to interrupting negative micromessages, what steps can you take to increase positive micromessages on your team to counter any negative micromessages? Consider strategies mentioned throughout the module.



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What to Look for and How to Respond

<i>What to Look/Listen For</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>How to Respond</i>
Statements that use a student's race, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, or gender as a reason to complete a task or contribute in a specific way.	To an Asian student, "You're Asian, so you must be good at programming." Or to a female student, "You're a girl, so you probably have good handwriting. Why don't you create the poster?"	Ask the speaker to elaborate with phrases such as "I'm curious, what makes you say that?" or "Can you say more about that?" By inquiring about the speaker's thoughts, you can better understand the situation and may help the speaker realize inequities in their own speech.
Statements that critique or rebuff another student's behavior, words, or actions based on a cultural stereotype.	To an African American student, "Why do you have to be so loud? Calm down." Or to a female student, "Why are you being so sensitive? It's not a big deal."	First, reflect on how the speaker has acted and summarize. Next, state that there are different ways to act, then express the need to respect diverse behaviors. For example, "It appears you are uncomfortable with [student's action/behavior]. There are many ways to show [action/behavior]. How can we honor all ways of [action/behavior]? Let's talk about this."
Underrepresented and underserved students being interrupted or treated in a way that devalues their participation.	A female is constantly interrupted when speaking, or a male removes instruments/tools from her hand. Or, to a marginalized student, "I would have never guessed that you could understand this."	Make explicit the action or statement by summarizing what happened, then ask the speaker to reflect on how they would feel if they were treated the same way. Discuss what they can do differently in the future. For example, "How would you feel if this were said to you?"
Using language that demeans marginalized groups.	"That is so gay" or "You throw like a girl."	Address the language and use "I" statements to emphasize how hurtful the language can be. For example, "I feel [feeling] when you say [statement] because it marginalizes a whole group of people that I value."
Inappropriate jokes, statements, or behaviors that explicitly marginalize other students.	Making a racist, sexist, or homophobic joke.	Frankly communicate that these actions/behaviors are unacceptable and state clear expectations for behavior/speech in the class.



This work is adapted from: Kenney, G. (2014). Interrupting Microaggressions. Retrieved from https://www.holycross.edu/sites/default/files/files/centerforteaching/interrupting_microaggressions_january2014.pdf