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Speak Up Against Bias and Stereotypes

“Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech.” - Susan Sontag

Have you ever been present when someone makes a disrespectful comment or joke about people in a certain age group, race, gender, or other group? Sometimes we are aware that a comment is disrespectful, and could hurt the feelings of others present, but we are not sure what to do.

Sue Pearman, UNL Extension Educator, Central Sandhills Area, has this advice: You have a choice. You can reinforce the comment by laughing, joining in the conversation, or saying nothing. The alternative is that you speak up.

You may think that saying nothing is the best method, but often your silence sends a message that you agree, or at least you do not object. Is that the message you want to send? If not, then what can you do?

A program called “Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts” has defined six ways to speak up against bias and stereotypes:

- 1) Ask the question “What do you mean?” This lets the speaker explain the situation. They may not realize they were insulting certain individuals, and this allows them and others in the group to understand the comment was biased and may be hurtful to a certain group.
- 2) Assume the person has good intent and does not realize the statement is hurtful. One way to respond to this is to say, “I know you mean well, but that hurts.”
- 3) Interrupt and redirect. If the intention of the comment is obvious, a “Let’s not go there” gets your message across.
- 4) Make it individual. Ask “Are you speaking of someone in particular?” This gives the person speaking time to think about their comment and what individuals this may affect.
- 5) Broaden the comment to universal human behavior. “I think that applies to everyone.”
- 6) Say “Ouch!” This definitely pauses the conversation and gives everyone time to think.

Remember, just one person speaking up can inspire others to do the same.

Based on the book by Leslie Aquilar, [Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts: Communicating Respectfully in a Diverse World](http://www.Ouch-Video.com), www.Ouch-Video.com.