

Supporting a Peer Experiencing Overt or Implicit Bias

Gustavus Adolphus College Counseling Center

1. Advocate for your peer. If you are present when the biased incident occurs, try to speak up for the person(s) who may be victimized. Know that it can be incredibly stressful or traumatizing for persons who feel victimized to have to speak up and/or take on the role of educator towards the perpetrator.

- Be specific about what bias has occurred, drawing specific attention to the behavior that is problematic.

2. Ensure safety. Ensure that the person feels safe or has a safe space they can be if they are feeling vulnerable. This may be a physical space on campus or it may be a space with specific people this person feels safe being around.

- If you are not sure how to help the person, friends who know the person better can be helpful.

3. Process with them. If the person wishes to verbally process their experience, actively listen to them, providing compassion and empathy for what they went through.

- Use body language to show you are listening to them.
- Stay fully present and engaged with them in the moment.
- Ask clarifying questions about what occurred and how they are feeling.
- Avoid interrupting or interjecting your own thoughts or feelings about the event, this isn't about you.
- Ask for permission before trying to process the event with your peer, just in case they may want space to themselves to process it first and there may be another person they feel more comfortable and safe processing the event with.

4. Validate the person. One of the most important things you can do to support a peer who has experienced bias is to validate their feelings and experiences. Validation makes us feel heard, understood, respected, and normalized in our emotional experiences. When a person feels validated, they can better regulate their emotions.

- Validation can be as simple as saying “what the person did was wrong”, “you’re right, that was hurtful”, or “it is okay for you to feel the way you are feeling”.
- It is important not to victim-blame. Remind them that what happened is not their fault, that it was wrong and unjust. Do not make excuses for the perpetrator.
- Try to not be dismissive or invalidate the person’s experience as this can cause further emotional damage. Avoid invalidating responses such as “it could be worse” or “just try to be positive.”

5. Seek support. Offer to help the person seek resources on campus for support. This may involve reporting the incident. Consider connecting the person with their Area Coordinator, The Center for Inclusive Excellence, The Counseling Center, Office of the Chaplains, Campus Safety, or the Bias Response Team, etc.

- Respect their autonomy. Your job is to help them be aware of what their resources are.
- Do not pressure the person to utilize these resources or report the incident, leave the decisions up to them.

6. Stay in touch. Check in with your peer to see how they are coping and managing everything.

- Continue to offer your support and help them if and when they express the need for it and you feel you have the capacity to do so. If it is not something in your power or control to help with, direct them to resources who can be effective.

7. Determine your needs and limits. Remember that it is not all on you to help make the situation better. You can also rely on your peers and the above mentioned resources for further support with handling these situations.

- Check in with your own emotional experiences and support as needed. Process with someone else if you need to.

Resources:

For further support and resources, check out The Counseling Center's website. We have a page with resources specifically for BIPOC students and Anti-Racism materials.

On Campus Support:

Counseling Center (507) 933-7027 or CounselingCenter@gustavus.edu

Center for Inclusive Excellence (507) 933-7449

Office of the Chaplains (507) 933-7446

Campus Safety (507) 933-8888

Bias Response Team gustavus.edu/deanofstudents/BiasResponseTeam

Dean of Students Office (507) 933-7526 or dos@gustavus.edu