

Call in/call out: A guide to responding to oppressive incidents

Introduction

Here at RESULTS, our values drive our work, and our values center on equity and anti-oppression. RESULTS pledges to create a space for all voices and ensure those who've experienced poverty are leading and shaping the work we do. We will address oppressive behavior in our interactions, families, communities, work, and world. Our strength is rooted in our diversity of experiences, not in our assumptions. [Read RESULTS' full values statement here.](#)

The guide provides recommendations and resources for how to respond to oppressive comments or behaviors in RESULTS spaces. "Calling in" or "calling out" are common ways to address oppression in places that value inclusion. This guide will help you navigate how to respond to oppressive comments and behaviors in a way that provides accountability, grace, understanding, and growth.

We encourage you to report any incidents that do not align with RESULTS values by [filling out this form](#). If you have questions or need support, please email antioppression@results.org.

Note: We acknowledge how uncomfortable these conversations can be. Calling someone in or out can also elicit negative reactions. RESULTS supports you in setting boundaries for yourself. It's okay to avoid confrontation with someone you do not feel safe interacting with. Don't hesitate to ask for help from a RESULTS staff member if you need support.

Calling someone in

Call-ins are when someone provides new information or insight to anyone engaging in oppressive behavior with the goal of learning and growth. Calling someone in can happen in a one-on-one or small group setting. It's designed to bring attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior.

Call-ins may be appropriate if:

- You have influence with this person through a personal or professional relationship,
- You believe the person will be open to learning and behavior change,
- You have the emotional capacity and energy to call someone in from a place of grace and kindness, and/or

- A one-on-one or small group conversation will not compromise your safety or well-being.

Calling someone out

Call-outs are when you need to bring attention to an individual, group, or organization's harmful words or behavior. Call-outs emphasize that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated because it threatens the physical or emotional safety of an individual or group.

Call-outs may be appropriate if:

- A call-in is not possible or previous call-ins have failed,
- There is an urgent need to intervene to prevent further harm to others or yourself, and make it clear the behavior is not okay,
- There is a specific power or relationship dynamic that would render calling in harmful, unsafe, or ineffective for you or others in the group, and/or
- When images, symbols, or language of historic hate and supremacy movements are involved.

How to respond if you are called in or called out

If you have a brain, you have bias. Our biases can sometimes lead to oppressive incidents, whether unintentionally or intentionally. How you respond when someone expresses that something you said or did caused harm is crucial. While these situations can cause feelings of embarrassment, guilt, or defensiveness, it is also an opportunity to reflect, learn, and repair relationships.

You are not a bad person. You are an ever-changing and evolving person, and this is one step in your growth. When being called in or out, take a deep breath and follow the steps below.

1. **Listen.** This is an opportunity for learning and personal growth.
2. **Acknowledge and own your impact.** Say "thank you for bringing that to my attention". Calling someone in/out is difficult. The person doing the call in/out is investing time and energy in helping you learn and grow at the risk of a negative reaction or further traumatization. Take responsibility for the impact of your words and actions. Do not try to explain your original intentions, your impact is the focus.
3. **Apologize.** Whether your comment or behavior was intentional or unintentional, it caused harm. Ask questions to understand why what you said caused harm, like the questions below. Let the person know you respect and value them.

- a. Can you explain more about why what I did/said caused you harm? I want to understand how I could've approached the conversation in a better way.
- b. Would you be willing to recommend any articles or resources I could read to better understand why what I did/said caused harm?
- 4. **Hold yourself accountable and make repair.** Don't make excuses or try to justify what you said or did. As stated in #2, focus on impact, not intention. If necessary, ask how the relationship can be repaired and take those steps.
- 5. **Learn.** Learn more about why what you said was oppressive. Be more aware of your comments and behavior in the future. Don't avoid interactions with the person who called you in or out because of fear. Mistakes happen. It's how you move forward that matters.

Call-in/call-out examples

These are examples of situations that are opportunities for calling-in and calling-out. Situations 1-3 involve situations between volunteers. Situation 4 involves an interaction with a legislator. You may experience something that does not relate to the examples below. If there is a situation where you don't feel comfortable using the call-in/call-out method, don't hesitate to reach out to a RESULTS staff member for support.

Situation 1: While preparing for a lobby meeting, someone says "You've been homeless before. After we cover the facts about homelessness, you should share your personal experience."

Call In Response	Call Out Response
<p>I acknowledge that you are trying to be supportive, but the way you're asking me is tokenizing my experience. Please don't assume that because I have experienced homelessness and have talked about it in the past, that I'm always going to be willing to share that. In the future, I'd appreciate it if you'd ask me what I'd like to share in the lobby meeting and let me decide. There's more to me than my story and I have more than my story to contribute to our lobby meetings.</p>	<p>You've put me on the spot multiple times in the past and made me feel pressured to share my personal experiences. Homelessness is traumatic and I do not owe anyone my story. If I want to share my story, I will offer to do that myself. Please do not pressure me to share again.</p>

Situation 2: A group of volunteers are having a conversation, and someone says, “Kids in Africa need RESULTS aid and attention much more because poverty is so much worse there.”

Call In Response	Call Out Response
<p>We shouldn't compare experiences of poverty because poverty doesn't exist in a vacuum. It looks different based on so many things including geography, race, gender, class, and access to resources. Africa is a continent with over 50 countries. There's a lot of variation in the wealth and economic status of the people who live there, just like it is here. Saying poverty looks worse for one group or another devalues that person's experiences and trauma. It's also making assumptions about the experiences of those in Africa. We don't need to compare poverty experiences. It's essential to advocate for an end to poverty, regardless of where you live in the world.</p>	<p>Saying poverty is worse in Africa than the U.S. is an assumption, not a statement of fact. It is disrespectful to those who've experienced poverty in the U.S. It's not okay to compare or speak to the experiences of others. Statements like those contribute to a harmful culture and don't align with RESULTS values. Please do not make harmful statements like that.</p>

Situation 3: A fellow advocate says, “I never understand what these global speakers say. Their accents are so heavy, and I don't want to listen to someone I don't understand for long periods of time.”

Call In Response	Call Out Response
<p>I understand it can feel frustrating when you don't understand someone. That might make you want to give up on trying but you shouldn't. Many people have biases and preferences for the accents and language we grew up around. It's important to recognize that many non-native English speakers face linguistic racism and discrimination. This has a negative impact on their</p>	<p>Criticizing someone's accent is unhelpful and demoralizing. Everyone, not just non-native English speakers, have different ways they communicate. How would you feel if someone devalued your contributions to a conversation because they didn't understand?</p>

<p>ability to be access jobs, health care, and education. We often expect people to conform to speaking in the way we prefer instead of putting in effort to understand them better. Understanding accents is a learnable skill. With time, patience, and determination, your mind will pick it up. If you don't understand something, ask clarifying questions, ask the person to speak slower, and practice active listening.</p>	<p>Would you want them to stop listening altogether? Or would you want them to ask questions and learn to understand you better? We all deserve mutual respect and understanding. You should take accountability for what you can do better to understand them more.</p>
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Situation 4: A legislator or aid says, "We don't need people living in affordable housing projects. It's not good for the housing market or the neighborhood."

Call In Response	Call Out Response
<p>There are a lot of misconceptions around affordable housing. People will say property values go down, crime goes up and claim the new residents won't fit into the neighborhood. None of these statements are accurate. There are plenty of studies that show affordable housing does not cause these problems in most cases. In fact, affordable housing is a great way to boost local economies. It increases the money spent in local communities. There are fewer evictions which means more financial stability and social well-being. And affordable housing creates more job opportunities. I'd be happy to email some great resources and articles to you about this after this meeting.</p>	<p>You are making a lot of inaccurate and harmful statements. The people who need affordable housing are only trying to make a living like you or me. Don't you agree that everyone deserves access to safe, affordable housing for themselves and their families? As our elected official, it is your responsibility to support policies that ensure all your constituents can have their basic needs met. That includes access to housing. You should take the time to speak to your constituents who use affordable housing and do some research on the benefits before passing judgement. I'm happy to email you some great resources I have.</p>

Helpful resources

The links below are other helpful resources for having challenging conversations like these.

- [Interrupting Microaggressions](#)
- [Creating Space for Critical Conversations](#)
- [Making an Inclusive Case for Ending Global Poverty](#)
- [6 Signs Your Call-Out Isn't Actually About Accountability](#)
- [When Calling Out Makes Sense](#)
- [You've Been Called Out for a Microaggression. What Do You Do?](#)
- [What Do I Do If I Can't Understand Someone's Accent?](#)
- [Harvard Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging - "Calling in and Calling out guide"](#)