

# Responding to Oppressive Behavior at RESULTS

## Resource Guide

### Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide tools to define how to respond to oppressive behavior in spaces in which RESULTS engages and operates. This document is provided as general guidelines and tools to help address oppressive behavior. These are tools for learning about addressing oppressive behavior; we believe every member of this community is integral and should have the opportunity to learn. Oppressive behavior often reinforces historical hierarchies of power and belittles the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of historically marginalized communities. Oppressive behavior holds us back individually and collectively from reaching our full potential. Oppressive systems breed poverty, and by working to undermine oppressive systems in our daily life, we strengthen our work towards the end of poverty.

RESULTS is a movement of passionate, committed everyday people. Together we use our voices to influence political decisions that will bring an end to poverty. As poverty cannot end as long as oppression exists we commit to opposing all forms of oppression, including racism, classism, colonialism, white saviorism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, and religious discrimination. There are no saviors -- only partners, advocates, and allies.

### Methods of responding to oppressive behavior

In the social justice community, there is talk about two primary methods of responding to oppressive behavior: call-ins and call-outs. These are not the only methods of responding to oppressive behavior, but tools which the RESULTS community can use to address oppressive behavior in spaces within which RESULTS operates. Some of this language might feel new and uncomfortable, but our hope is that this is a tool RESULTS will use to combat hatred. This guide is meant as a starting point toward that end. We hope that these methods are conversation starters, not conversation enders.

#### Call- ins:

- Are when someone provides new information or insight to anyone engaging in oppressive behavior with the goal of education or behavioral change
- Are about learning
- Can be private or public, although public is preferable because it addresses the impact of oppressive behavior on the entire group.

*\*Public call-ins should be handled with kindness and an eye toward learning.*

### Call-ins may feel constructive:

- When you have the emotional capacity and energy to engage in calling-in
  - It is important for those from historically privileged communities to do the work whenever possible and share the burden so people from communities that have faced trauma aren't left with all of the work all of the time.
- When you think there is an opportunity for learning, and you feel comfortable raising the issue.
- When a person has demonstrated that they care about justice and oppression, and you trust a person to listen
- When oppressive behavior is used with ignorance, not malice
- When you think the person's behavior can change/they are generally open minded

### Call-outs:

- Are when you openly acknowledge oppressive behavior for the physical or emotional safety of individuals or the group.
- Name oppressive behavior because it is a powerful and important part of deconstructing hierarchical oppressive structures
- Are about accountability
- Are public by definition

### Call-outs may feel constructive:

- When a call-in is not feasible (e.g. when a policymaker makes a racist statement)
- When there is obvious malice
- When personal attacks are involved
- When iconography, symbols, or language of historic hate and supremacy movements are involved
- When repeated call-ins have failed.
- When a more public statement will help change behavior beyond just the person prompting the call-out
- When a public call-out is necessary in order to make others in the room feel safe and respected.

### Supporting Our Community

It is important for those from historically privileged communities to speak up when witnessing microaggressions and other forms of oppression whenever possible. Share the burden so people from communities that have faced trauma aren't left with all of the work all the time. If you're a person from a historically privileged community, it's important to ensure you are still leaving time and space for the person directly experiencing the oppression to also voice their concern.

- How do we show support for our colleagues during a call-in/call-out or when witnessing oppressive behavior?
  - Understand that responses can have emotional burdens

- Support colleagues by giving them time and space when needed and stepping up to validate. If you are seeing the same behavior, don't let them be the only one holding people accountable, speak up if needed.
- Understand that there may be consequences or repercussions for both calling-in and calling-out
  - Be a witness, lend support by **naming** the behavior from another perspective
  - Be conscious of any hierarchical power dynamics and ensure that others are not punished for speaking up
- Share the burden:
  - Notice someone on your team regularly doing the work of anti-oppression? Share the load. Give them a break. Use your voice and do the work with them.

### What if I am "Called"?

Often times, the first response to being called-in or called-out can be defensiveness or embarrassment. While these feelings are natural, they are not constructive to building good group dynamics or dismantling oppression in our daily lives. When being called, take a deep breath and take the actions below.

1. Listen
  - a. This an opportunity for learning and personal growth
2. Appreciate
  - a. Say "Thank you". Talking about oppression is hard. REALLY HARD. The person calling on you is investing their time and energy in helping you learn and grow -- and sometimes, it is risky for them. A great way to respond is by thanking them for making you more aware.
3. Apologize
  - a. Unintentionally or intentionally you've caused pain. Let them know you won't make the mistake again and you respect and value them.
4. Accountability
  - a. Take onus for your actions and apologize
  - b. Don't excuse and explain - listen and learn!
  - c. Clarify
5. Learn
  - a. Ask them where you can learn more so you can be more aware. Ask if they would like to talk more about it with you sometime.
  - b. Don't be forceful about learning opportunities or expect them to teach you EVERYTHING. Take time to read up on the issue and learn how you can be more aware.

### Sample language if you are "called":

- Thank you for teaching me that.
- I appreciate you and respect you - thanks for making me more aware
- I didn't realize that was hurtful, I am so sorry

- Can you recommend more resources to learn about this topic? I respect you so much and I am sure you can recommend great places to learn more.
- If you're comfortable, I'd love to talk with you about this more - I appreciate your perspective so much. Let me know if you ever feel up to that.
- I promise to make some time to learn more about this - thank you for bringing it to my attention!
- Thanks for spending some of your time helping me be a better person!

## Situations and Examples

There are no descriptors below of the person exhibiting oppressive behavior because oppressive behavior can come from anyone - including members of marginalized communities.

**Lobby Prep:** While preparing for a lobby meeting, someone looked at an African immigrant and said, "You're African -- you probably have a maternal and child health experience from your village."

Person	Call-in	Call-out
Directly responding	I know that you're trying to understand my experience, but you're making an assumption about me and that's hurtful. Please don't assume that African people have all experienced poverty or are willing to offer up their personal stories about potentially painful subjects. Everyone here cares about maternal and child health, in the future you should pose that question to the whole group regardless of background. There's more to me than my story and I have a lot to contribute.	You've said this to me multiple times in the past and I've expressed how inappropriate it is. This is racist stereotyping of Africans. Stop tokenizing your colleagues.
Responding with support	Let's not assume that because someone is African they have experienced poverty or lack of access to healthcare. Let's also be really cognizant of how we use stories and let people offer them up as opposed to pushing them to share in ways that may feel uncomfortable and inequitable.	Your assumption that an African immigrant has experienced poverty is an example of racist stereotyping, and it's inappropriate to attempt to co-opt the stories of historically marginalized people.

**Over Lunch with RESULTS Member:** At a lunch, two members of RESULTS are speaking Arabic. A fellow RESULTS member comes up to them and says, “Are you speaking your secret language again?”

Person	Call-in	Call-out
Directly Responding	This may have not have been your intention, but when you say that, it makes me feel like you’re trivializing my native language, and when you trivialize my language you “otherize” it. Otherizing sets me apart of the community and in this political atmosphere it can be dangerous to me and my community.	It’s not a secret language, it’s Arabic. What you said is marginalizing and otherizes me. Given the political climate it’s frightening to me.
Responding with support	This may have not have been your intention, but when you say that, it feels like you’re trivializing the native language of millions of people. When you trivialize an entire people’s language, you “otherize” it which can make already marginalized people in our community feel like outsiders.	It’s not a secret language, it’s Arabic. What you said is marginalizing and otherizes them. Given the political climate, that’s dangerous.

**Colleagues asking about family planning while making conversation at a RESULTS event:** A colleague asked another colleague, “When are you planning on having kids?”

Person	Call-in	Call-out
Directly Responding	I know you were trying to be collegial and take an interest in my life, but these are personal decisions and it’s not appropriate to bring up in a professional setting. There are power dynamics at play when asking a woman about personal family planning decisions. Conversations like this have the potential to negatively impact a woman’s career. These are personal and sometimes painful conversations that don’t make good small talk.	You’ve brought this up before and I’ve told you that’s not appropriate to bring up in a professional setting. Fertility is private unless I say otherwise.
Responding with support	This is a personal matter and it’s not appropriate to bring up in a professional setting. Consider the power dynamics at play when asking a woman about personal family planning decisions. Conversations like this have the potential to negatively impact a woman’s career. These are personal and sometimes painful conversations that don’t make good small talk.	Are you planning on asking every man in the office you make small talk with the same question? Either way it’s sexist.

# Call-in EPIC Laser Talks

## Example 1

*While preparing for a lobby meeting, someone looks at an African immigrant and said, “You’re African - you probably have an MCH experience from your village.” (MCH = maternal and child health, which is an issue area in development aid)*

**Engage:** I understand that you’re trying to make a great lobby meeting, and personal stories are a big part of that. It hurts me when you assume that because I am African I have experienced poverty.

**Problem:** By making an assumption of my experiences based on my race/nationality, you are engaging in oppressive behavior.

**Inform:** Please don’t assume that all Africans have the same experiences, have all experienced poverty, or are willing to offer up their personal stories about potentially painful subjects. It’s important that stories are offered willingly and in an empowering way. I am not here just to share my story, I have more to contribute.

**Call to Action:** Everyone here cares about maternal and child health, in the future you should pose that question to the whole group regardless of background. It is also appropriate to ask for permission to share a person’s experiences prior to bringing them up amongst a group.

## Example 2

*While discussing policy, a fellow RESULTS volunteer makes a comment that life must be really hard for poor people to a person who is currently experiencing poverty.*

**Engage:** Hey don’t forget, we say “people who are experiencing poverty” or “people with lived experience now.”

**Problem:** The expression *poor people* otherizes low income people. It conjures up negative stereotypes that undermine our efforts in advocating for the end of poverty.

**Inform:** Language is powerful and can have negative connotations because of the historical and social contexts. It’s important that our language makes it clear that people who experience poverty can still be powerful, self actualized and full of agency. It’s important that language be empowering and challenge long held preconceptions. Please remember we are not an organization that advocates FOR low income people but WITH them.

**Call to Action:** Please say low income or experiencing poverty, not poor people.

### **Example 3**

*A young, female volunteer was told by an older volunteer that it was good she was coming to a lobby meeting with an older, male member of Congress because she was so young and attractive.*

**Engage:** I am offended you think I only have my looks to bring to this meeting.

**Problem:** Your comment is disempowering and assumes I don't have the experience or intelligence to make this meeting successful.

**Inform:** Please don't assume women only have their looks to offer. This is a form of sexism and is completely inappropriate, particularly in this professional setting. Women face disempowering comments like this in the workplace often, and comments like yours trivializes their experiences and value.

**Call to Action:** Don't compliment women on their looks in a professional setting - compliment our work!

### **Example 4**

*Repeatedly asking women if and when they plan to have children.*

**Engage:** This is a private matter, and frankly I do not want to discuss this with a colleague.

**Problem:** Your question assumes that all women want to have children and that it is okay to ask colleagues about private topics, such as family planning. It also ignores personal medical issues like fertility and the potential impact discussing motherhood in the workplace can have on a women's career.

**Inform:** Family planning can have significant impacts on a woman's career and long-term planning. Did you know that motherhood is a major cause of hiring and wage discrimination? It isn't fair to put your colleague on the spot by asking her what her personal plans are as it relates to the workplace. It's sexist and oppressive to assume this a public conversation, especially if you understand the risks for women discussing motherhood at work

**Call to Action:** Take the time to evaluate the impact your questioning can have on the other person. If it isn't something you'd also ask your male colleagues, and the potential consequences aren't the same, it is not appropriate.