Lesson Monday

Intermediate JavaScript (/intermediate-javascript)
/ Asynchrony and APIs (/intermediate-javascript/asynchrony-and-apis)
/ Speaking Up

Text

This lesson is part of our regular Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion curriculum. This week we will discuss speaking up against hurtful language or behavior.

Speaking Up

In an ideal world, we wouldn't have to worry about microaggressions or other hurtful behavior. Unfortunately, we don't live in that ideal world. When we are on the receiving end of — or see someone else on the receiving end of — a microaggression or other hurtful behavior, we need to have tools in place to speak up.

If we wait until the microaggression occurs, we might find ourselves saying something hurtful in return — or pretending it didn't happen even though we might later wish that we'd addressed it in the moment. By thinking about how we'll address these situations ahead of time, we can be better equipped to deal with them when they do happen.

The tools we discuss in this lesson are adapted from the workshop materials provided by Frame Shift Consulting (https://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/). When addressing a microaggression or other hurtful behavior, the following approaches can be helpful:

- **Keep your response short, simple, and firm.** Here are some sample responses:
  - "That wasn't funny."

- "Can you phrase that differently?"
- "Why would you say (something like) that?"
- "What you just said bothered me."
- "That makes me uncomfortable."

- **Engage with the other person.** We are under no obligation to engage with someone that behaves in a hurtful way, even if we believe that person was well-intended or didn't mean to be hurtful. However, we may find it helpful to engage with the other person and start a dialogue. Asking an open-ended question can help clarify what was said or done — and also lead to others examining their behaviors more closely. Here are some examples:

  - "What did you mean by that?"
  - "Why do you feel that way?"
  - "Where did you get that information from?"
  - "Can you confirm what you just said?"

- **Don't try to be funny.** If someone committed a microaggression or said something hurtful, they weren't being funny. While humor can be a great way to defuse tension and connect with others, it's also very subjective — and can undermine how people are feeling. We don't need to amuse or entertain people to get our point across.

- **Practice simple responses.** It can be hard to come up with a good response in the moment. Practice responses ahead of time. For instance, if we have experienced or witnessed microaggressions in the past, we can think about simple responses for similar situations in the future. We can also practice more general responses including the ones above.

- **Pick your battles.** We may not always have the energy or the emotional bandwidth to speak up, or we may find ourselves in a situation where we are dealing with others that are engaging in openly hostile behavior. Sometimes it's best to pick our battles and be discerning about which ones we can take part in and which would be better left alone.

- **Don't respond with hurtful behavior.** This includes comments or behavior that marginalizes another group. It is never acceptable to be sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, or to body-shame, make fun of how people look, or engage in other stereotypes or hurtful behavior. While this might seem obvious, in the heat of the moment, we can say things that we regret.

- **Check in with support staff.** Speaking up doesn't always mean speaking up in the moment or directly to a person that says something hurtful. You can also check in with other support networks at Epicodus or your workplace. Please speak up and let Epicodus staff know if an issue comes up while you are a student.

- **Beware of tone policing.** According to the Ally Skills Workshop handout (https://files.frameshiftconsulting.com/Ally%20Skills%20Workshop%20handout%20 %20Letter.pdf) from Frame Shift Consulting:

> When members of marginalized groups advocate for themselves or their ideas, it violates expectations that marginalized people should be submissive and quiet.
>
> The same behavior in a person with a lot of privilege may be described as "passionate" or "committed."

In other words, people from underrepresented groups are often held to a different standard when it comes to communicating. As a result, they often have to deal with more of a backlash if they speak up because they are expected not to. Part of speaking up is allowing everyone to speak up and advocate for themselves regardless of background.

In general, speaking up can be very challenging. If you have been the target of previous microaggressions and hurtful behavior, speaking up can be particularly exhausting. Even if you aren't from a minority group, you may feel that speaking up will put you on the spot or make others feel bad. Don't forget that it's okay to make mistakes — especially if you are willing to learn from them.

The tweet below sums up this process well.

It reads: "PSA: There is no shame in adding that you were previously speaking from a less informed place. There's a lot of info in the world. No one has all of it. We do our best, and at our best, we help each other learn."

We also recommend watching No, Hard Work Does Not Speak for Itself (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TtOdtK86c4), a Ted Talk by Crystal Martin on the importance of speaking up for others and yourself.

Also, the following articles from Harvard Business Review provide excellent resources for responding to offensive comments and calling out racial injustice in the workplace:

- How to Call Out Racial Injustice at Work (https://hbr.org/2020/07/how-to-call-out-racial-injustice-at-work)
- How to Respond to an Offensive Comment at Work (https://hbr.org/2017/02/how-to-respond-to-an-offensive-comment-at-work)

Ready to Write Your Reflection?

There is a reflective assignment for this lesson. If you are ready to write your reflection, head on over to Epicenter to find the prompt. If you are logged in to Epicenter, you can access the prompt by navigating to this link:

🔗 **Reflection Prompt: Speaking Up (https://epicenter.epicodus.com/journals?title=Speaking+Up)**

Otherwise, you can find detailed instructions on accessing the reflection prompts in the DEI Reflective Assignments (https://www.learnhowtoprogram.com/introduction-to-programming/getting-started-at-epicodus/dei-reflective-assignments#finding-the-reflection-prompts) lesson.

Do you have feedback?

We want to hear about your experience of the DEI curriculum. We outline all of the ways you can give feedback in the student handbook (https://www.learnhowtoprogram.com/introduction-to-programming/getting-started-at-epicodus/student-handbook#giving-feedback).

Lesson 22 of 33
Last updated more than 3 months ago.

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