

Conscious inclusion

Why it matters and how to practice it



Communication is a fundamental part of living in society. Everyone deserves to be heard and respected as a member of their community.



Sometimes, our previous perceptions or biases—which we may come by through conversations, entertainment and media, or other interactions—can influence how we feel about some groups of people. Our word choices often show these biases, which in turn can be damaging to individuals and to our communities.



When we think we are being open and fair but are actually influenced by or acting on these biases, it is called unconscious bias. When we talk about conscious inclusion, we are making an effort to be aware of these biases and to counteract their effects.



How can you be consciously inclusive in your everyday communications?

Five ways to be consciously inclusive in how you communicate

1 Use inclusive language

- Don't make assumptions about what an individual or group wants, needs or prefers: ask.
- Avoid using gender-specific words, such as "ladies," "dudes," "men," "guys."
- Use the correct pronoun: ask people for their pronoun if you don't know or they haven't stated. Asking is a sign of care for the person you are talking to, and a way for them to feel comfortable with you and their identity.

2 Avoid language and words that could be perceived as pushy or aggressive

- Respond from a place of personal experience when stating an opinion, e.g., *"In my opinion," "According to my experience,"* or *"Based on what I've read and learned."* This demonstrates respect and an openness to other opinions and perspectives.
- Don't dismiss contributions from others, regardless of whether or not you agree with what they are saying. Listen to their perspective and be open to considering other viewpoints — this helps/keep the conversation open to all.

3 Ask yourself and others (the right) questions

- If you find yourself in unfamiliar situations or in an uncomfortable conversation, ask questions. This can slow the pace of conversation and provide an opportunity for you to become aware of your potential biases — which may surface as insecurities, shyness or irritability — and deconstruct them, helping you to interact more consciously and inclusively.

4 Make a conscious effort to interact with and listen to people from diverse groups

- Expand your viewpoint by expanding your world: get to know people around you by exchanging perspectives with people from diverse groups, or by seeking opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds.

5 Be aware of non-verbal communication, like facial reactions

- Making faces or expressing immediate feelings through body language while interacting with others may freeze, discourage, or make them uncomfortable. Remember to remain neutral through your facial expressions and words, and think of how to express agreement or disagreement by simply carrying on the conversation.

And, most importantly...

Stay open, stay curious, and don't let fear of making mistakes stop you from reaching out.