



Creating Safe Spaces

A Guide to Having Courageous Conversations about Diversity and Allyship

AAA School Safety Patrol & Playworks

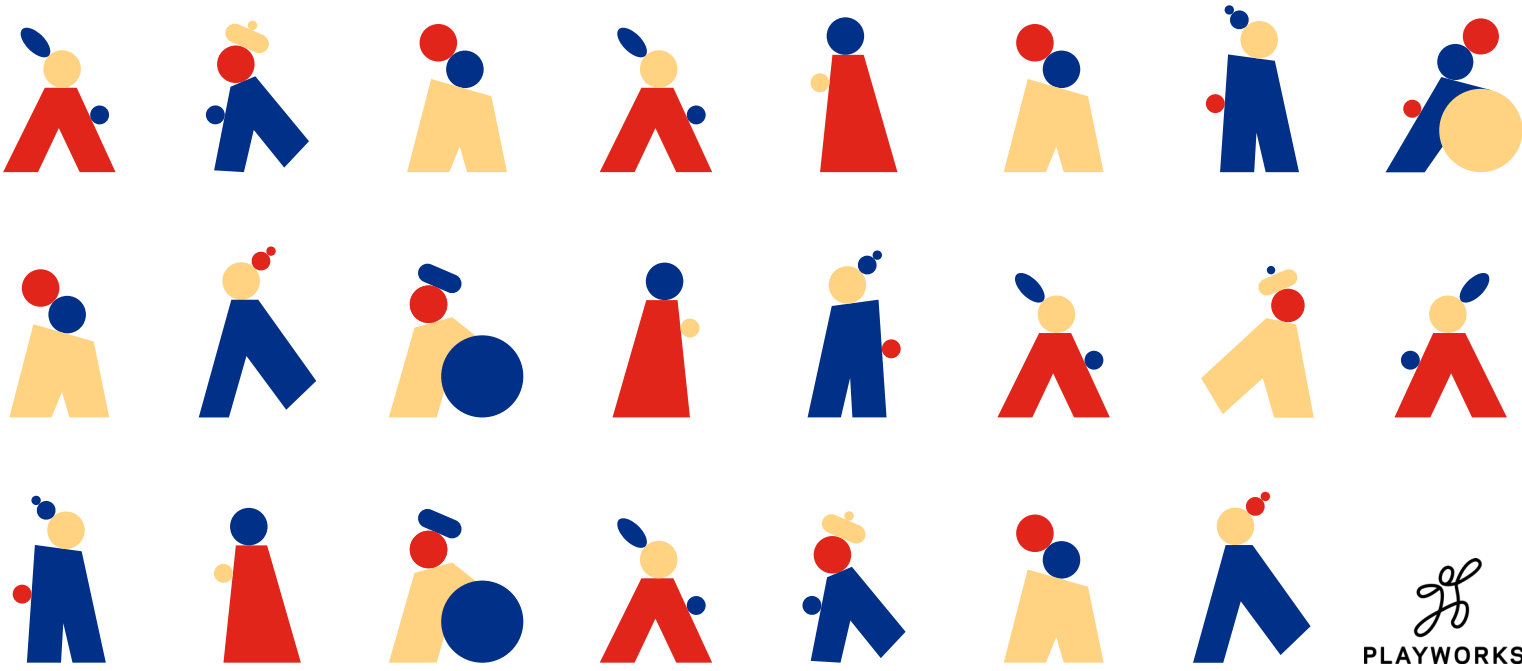


Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Be the Change	4
What does it mean to be a changemaker?.....	4
The Young S/Hero Snowball Activity.....	5
Equality and Safe Spaces — A Path for All	6
Creating Safe Spaces through Active Listening and Learning.....	6
Privilege Ball Toss Activity.....	8
Why Diversity is Important — A Rainbow Road	10
Embracing Diversity to create Safe Spaces.....	10
“I love my neighbor who...” Activity.....	11
Allyship for Kids — A Route to Freedom	13
Understanding Allyship and Standing up for others.....	13
Ally Up Activity.....	14
Allyship in Action	16
Using Artivism to be an Ally.....	16
Art for a Change Activity.....	17
Resources	19
For Educators.....	19
For Parents/Caregivers.....	19
Glossary/Key Concepts.....	20

Introduction

What started out as a traffic safety program in 1920, AAA School Safety Patrol, has transformed over the years to provide students with all the tools necessary for them to become today's leaders on campus and tomorrow's leaders in society. As AAA School Safety Patrol hits its 100 year anniversary, we continue to strive to bring important safety and leadership topics to students at home and in the classroom. The content of this lesson is made available by AAA as a part of our AAA School Safety Lesson Plan.

This particular series of lessons was designed with the intention for teachers to use them at the beginning of the school year as a means to create a culture of safety, inclusion and empowerment in the classroom. In her article [Opening the Doors to Learning Through Safe Spaces in K-12 Schools](#), Annie Murphy Paul notes that “research shows a sense of belonging is essential for learning. We humans are social beings, wired for membership in a group.” When our mental resources are “devoted to monitoring one’s environment for cues of rejection” then they can’t be used to comprehend and remember academic content. In the K-12 arena, we must help students feel included, safe, and strong enough to learn. It is our hope that this mini-unit will help you set up a culture of safety in your classroom by learning how to celebrate and address differences from the beginning of the school year.

Before beginning this mini-unit, make sure to review the content thoroughly. Lessons can be completed consecutively or spread out in the first few weeks of school. Due to the nature of the topics, some challenging conversations may arise. Assure students that it’s okay to ask questions along the way and to always be respectful of others. As the moderator, it is important to familiarize yourself with the content in this lesson prior to digging into the work. There are two articles in the “additional resources” section at the end of this mini-unit that are highly recommended as pre-reading. The tools shared in this mini-unit around creating safe spaces, celebrating diversity and having courageous conversations can be used throughout the school year.

About Playworks

AAA has partnered with [Playworks](#) to bring you an educational guide on creating safe spaces, diversity and allyship. Our partner, Playworks, is a national nonprofit committed to leveraging the power of play to transform children’s physical, social and emotional health.



Be the Change

Objective

Learn about what it means to be a changemaker and be inspired to become one.

Time

 30 min

Keywords/Ideas

Social Justice

Activist

Safe Space

What does it mean to be a changemaker?

Background Information

Our classrooms are a microcosm of the world; our students come to us with so many different experiences, beliefs and opinions. The more we learn about how to have conversations about our differences, value everyone's experiences and use our voices to make the world a kinder place, the stronger our communities will be. It is so important to learn how to do this as part of creating safe spaces in our classrooms. As mentioned in the introduction, when our students have a feeling of belonging and don't have to worry about being judged, they are able to focus on the learning at hand.

To Say

Over the next few days we will be talking about what it means to be a changemaker. Many times in our life we will see people being treated unfairly, sometimes we might even be that person. It is important to learn how to be a changemaker so that we can help make sure that everyone feels like they belong. It is so important that everyone understands that they belong in this classroom no matter what/who or how they are. We want this to be a safe space for everyone so it is important for us to create that together.

To Do

Ask students what are some of the things in the world they would like to see changed. If they are struggling with the question, you can give examples or ask them if they have ever heard anyone in their family talk about how they would like things to be different/better. Tell students that Social Justice is the fancy term for the world being fair and equal for everyone and everything (even plants, animals and

Be the Change (cont.)

the land). Someone who is an Activist stands up for Social Justice.

Patroller (Student Leader) Involvement

If you have a AAA School Safety Patroller(s), or other student leaders in your classroom, call on one to lead the conversation with their peers.

The Young S/Hero Snowball Activity

To Do

First, ask students to think about a time that they did something courageous and stood up for something they believed in - either at home, school or in their community. If they can't think of anything, they can share a friend, TV character or real life hero's story that they were inspired by.

Then, instruct students to write their story down on a piece of paper. Once they are finished, prompt students to crumple the paper up into a ball. Tell students that they are going to have a friendly snowball fight! They can throw their papers into the middle of the room. Have students pick up other paper balls and throw them around the room again. Once everyone has a new "snowball," go around the room (or pick 2-3 students) to read the story on their paper snowball.

(Note: these paper snowballs can be reused for the next activity).

Reflection Questions

- Is it easy or hard to stand up for something you believe in? Why?
- Why do you think it is important to be a changemaker?

Equality and Safe Spaces — A Path for All

Objective

Students will improve their listening skills and learn about privileges in order to create safe spaces.

Time

 50 Min

Keywords/Ideas

Active Listening

Privilege

Equality vs. Equity

Racism, Sexism, Ageism and Homophobia

BIPOC and LGBTQIA+

Marginalized Group

Creating Safe Spaces through Active Listening and Learning

Background Information

Background Information: Some people are born into the world with more privilege than others. This does not mean that they are inherently better and also does not mean that they are at fault for anything. Privilege just means that they have fewer obstacles to overcome throughout their life. For a long time it was common to associate social justice with equality - the idea that everyone should be treated equally. However, because so many groups of people (marginalized folks like minorities, women, lgbtqia+ communities) have been historically excluded from access to equal education and wages it only makes sense to give them more access now so that they can level up and we can eventually get to a place where we are all equal.

Note: BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ are terms that are becoming more common when referring to marginalized communities.

Equality and Safe Spaces — A Path for All (cont.)

To say

Everyone should feel safe and valued at school and in their community. To be in a safe space means that everyone can be themselves and share their ideas without being scared of being made fun of, judged or teased. It can be challenging to talk about our differences without judgement, but what we will discuss today will help you understand how we can create safe spaces. It is important to remember to “be curious” about someone’s experience. Instead of shutting people down and saying “we don’t believe you”, we can ask questions like “what experiences lead you to believe that?” or “how did that make you feel?” Prompt students to think of other things to say to encourage conversations instead of judging people and making them feel bad.

We can also use “I” statements, like “I wonder,” “I feel,” “I think” and “Speaking from my experience.” When using these types of statements, we don’t assume what anyone is thinking and are not pointing blame at anyone. We will practice this soon! However, there is no guarantee that someone’s feelings won’t get hurt, and if that happens, it is important for us to learn how to apologize and try to do better next time. Sometimes when having these conversations people can get angry or frustrated and raise their voices. It is important to understand that this is because they are feeling unheard and one of the best things to do in this case is to listen.

Patroller (Student Leader) Involvement

If you have a AAA School Safety Patroller(s), or other student leaders in your classroom, instruct them to read aloud the 5 tips for active listening below.

Here are some tips for active listening:

1. Active listening involves attentively seeking to understand a speaker’s message, rather than passively hearing the words that a speaker says.
2. Active Listeners provide verbal and nonverbal feedback to show their sincere investment in what the speaker is sharing.
3. Listen with openness: suspend your judgments and biases and listen for those things with which you agree as well as those you might challenge.
4. Listen with curiosity: engage your desire to learn, rather than to try to “fix” anything.
5. Listen without asking questions that interrupt the speaker: jot down your questions and save them for later.

These listening tips have been adapted from Bellarmine University and StoryCorps.

To do

Play this 3 minute audio clip between a teacher and their student to hear an example of good listening behavior. In the audio clip, this student told their teacher that they were experiencing homelessness, and what you will hear is their follow-up chat. Point out what statements the teacher makes that lets the

Equality and Safe Spaces — A Path for All (cont.)

student know they are cared for and in a safe space. [Click here for the audio clip](#) (found under “Activity: Celeste Davis & Aaron) and [click here for the transcript](#).

This audio clip and activity have been adapted from StoryCorps, Lesson: The Power of Active Listening.

Use the “I” statement flashcards included in the AAA School Safety Teacher Packet to practice good communication. Pass out the cards to students or groups of students and have them finish the “I” statement with a positive remark to a made up negative scenario. One example could be “Someone on the playground is making fun of someone else, instead of saying to the bully “you are mean/racist/not fun”, what could you say to them using an “I” statement?”

Privilege Ball Toss Activity

To say

Let’s take what we just learned and put it into action. This activity will demonstrate what privilege is and how it works.

To do

To start, students will sit at their desks or be scattered throughout the room. Every student should have a crumpled up piece of paper with them. Ask students to throw the wadded-up paper into a recycling bin that’s placed at the front of the room. Some students sitting in the front of the class may make it in and others in the back won’t.

To discuss

(Remember to use some of the discussion tools we talked about earlier!)

Talk about how the odds of making your piece of paper into the bin was higher, the closer you were to the bin. For those in the front/back of the room how did they feel? Have a discussion about fairness and advantages. It’s likely that the people in the front are less likely to be aware of their advantages. Being aware of certain advantages and disadvantages people have is important. Talk with students about what privilege is. What would we need to do to give everyone a fair or equal chance? If we can’t move our seats what could we do to make it equitable? Advocate for those in the back row, if you are sitting in the front. This discussion can be closed out with the knowledge that we will be giving students ways to take action for positive change.

This activity has been adapted from smallactbigimpact.com.

Equality and Safe Spaces — A Path for All (cont.)

Reflection Questions

- How did we work towards creating a safe space in our classroom today?
- How does this privilege show up in society?

Note: students may bring up experiences dealing with race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and so much more. You can help them put words to these experiences by sharing the terms racism, sexism, ageism and homophobia

Why Diversity is Important — A Rainbow Road

Objective

To explore the origins of racism while establishing ways to celebrate diversity.

Time

 60 Min

Keywords/Ideas

Diversity

Racism

Race vs. Ethnicity

Embracing Diversity to create Safe Spaces

Background Information

In this lesson we will be exploring race which is a specific way in which folks are marginalized. We will focus on this because it is the most visibly apparent in everyday society. According to Psychology Today, by the age of 3, toddlers can associate good and bad with skin color, this is way earlier than most adults are comfortable talking about race and racism. For years, it was common to take a “color blind” or “melting pot” approach to diversity. We now know that this erases the beauty of our individual experiences. Check out this article for a more in-depth discussion of this outdated approach: [Why we are moving away from “color blind” and the importance of embracing our differences.](#) The idea of race as we know it is now understood as a social construct. It was made up to create a divide between groups of people. Ethnicity refers to a person’s cultural identification. Part of creating a safe space in our classrooms is making sure that there is no room for racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, etc. In this lesson we will be exploring our differences and celebrating diversity.

To say

We can start by asking ourselves to imagine what the world would be like if we were all the same. Our differences are essential in making the world so much more interesting and alive. Not only that but our differences help push creativity and innovation. Today we are going to play a game that helps us see our similarities and differences.

Why Diversity is Important — A Rainbow Road (cont.)

“I love my neighbor who...” Activity

To say

This next activity will help us understand all the beautiful and diverse characteristics the people in this room have. It will also help us get to know each other better!

To do

Start with students sitting in a circle with one person in the middle. The person in the middle says ‘ I love my neighbor who _____’ (examples: was born out of the state, loves basketball, has a pet at home, is an only child, etc). Have everyone in the circle raise their hand if they relate to the statement. Choose one person who identifies with the statement, to switch seats and be the person in the middle. You can make rules such as no running/pushing/moving to the seat next to you, etc.

Patroller (Student Leader) Involvement

If you have a AAA School Safety Patroller(s), or other student leaders in your classroom, have them be a role model and start as the first person in the middle of the circle.

To Discuss

Have students take notice of who moved at different times, who shared things, who was different? Ask students if they have something in common with someone that they didn’t know about before. What do they think is cool about all of this?

To learn more about the original activity this activity was inspired by, visit the Playworks’ website: “[I love my neighbor who...](#)”.

This activity has been adapted from Playworks.

To Discuss

(Remember to use the active listening skills from our last lesson!)

Unfortunately, a long time ago, groups of people used things like skin color to say they were better than others and this was the beginning of racism. Ask your students if they have seen racism before either in real life, books, magazines or on TV. Ask students what are/were some examples of racism that they have seen. Let students know that race is a made up concept and we can help shift our culture by celebrating our differences.

Why Diversity is Important — A Rainbow Road (cont.)

Reflection Questions

- How can celebrating our differences help create a safe space in our classroom?
- What are things we should stop doing that make people feel bad about their skin color?
- How can we make everyone feel beautiful about themselves just the way they are?

Allyship for Kids — A Route to Freedom

Objective

To understand and practice how to be an ally.

Time

 60 Min

Keywords/Ideas

Ally

Understanding Allyship and Standing up for others

Background Information

Let's start with a quote from Ruby Bridges: *"We may not all be equally guilty. But we are all equally responsible for building a decent and just society."*

What Ms. Bridges is referring to in that particular quote, is in essence - allyship. An ally is someone who stands up for people who are being treated unfairly. Allyship inherently involves some level of risk. When put in practice, folks are using their privilege to stand up for someone else. For example if kids are playing basketball and there is a girl trying to play, oftentimes regardless of how good she is she will be picked last. Allyship would be one of the boys picking her and saying "_____ is a great player, it doesn't matter if she is a girl." That child is risking the other kids laughing at him but is doing the right thing anyway! Now imagine him doing that for someone who is queer, non-binary, etc. It takes a lot of strength for someone to stand up against societal norms! It is important to talk to kids about the risky nature of allyship, we can refer them back to their "I" statements and ground them in the idea of being courageous to help them understand that allyship isn't easy, they may make mistakes or be made fun of but it is the right thing to do.

Here are some examples of how you can empower yourself and your students to be an ally:

Note: these tips refer to race but can also be applicable to gender, sexual orientation and so many other marginalized communities.

- Take on issues of racial injustice as your own. The fight belongs to all of us, not just Black people and people of color.
- Keep learning about race and racism. Learn the true history and contributions of Black people and people of color, both in the United States and across the globe, to understand how racism

Allyship for Kids — A Route to Freedom (cont.)

has impacted communities of color.

- Get comfortable being uncomfortable. If you are not used to talking about race, it can be uncomfortable. Being uncomfortable is necessary to grow and move forward.
- Look for examples of solidarity throughout history and currently of people who have put their lives and livelihoods on the line to disrupt racism and violence against people of color.
- Acknowledge that you will make mistakes. Whether you get called out, or called in, the best way to respond is to apologize, repair the harm caused, and change your behavior moving forward to not repeat harm.

This content comes from Nickelodeon and the Conscious Kid. [Click here to learn more on their website.](#)

To say

Through the last sections, we have been learning about privilege and diversity. Today we are going to take it further and learn what it means to be a changemaker. Another word for “changemaker” is “Ally” which is someone who stands up for everyone’s equal rights. They are someone who uses their privilege to support people or groups of people who are being treated unfairly due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Watch the video below to see what some examples of allyship are.

To do

Play this 2 minute video to better explain the concept of “allyship:” [Kids Explain Allyship.](#)

Ally Up Activity

To Say

Being an ally can be scary! Remember when we did our snowball activity and you shared how it felt to stand up for what you believe in? In order for these situations to be less intimidating, we need practice. Today we are going to practice by coming up with different real-life situations and role playing. We will come up with some scenarios of when people are being treated unfairly because of their race or skin color and practice what to say to the person that is bullying them. When we respond to their bully there are lots of ways to do it - we can get an adult, we can be firm in what we say to the person or we can make jokes to show them that what they said is wrong.

To Do

Break students into groups of 5-6. Ask them to write a short script that highlights a way someone is being picked on because of their race. You can give each group a general scope of the scene they are to write and act out (On the playground, in P.E. class, in the classroom, at the store, etc).

Allyship for Kids — A Route to Freedom (cont.)

Patroller (Student Leader) Involvement

If you have a AAA School Safety Patroller(s), other student leaders in your classroom, have them practice their leadership skills and be the point person for each group.

Here are some examples from the [learning for justice website](#):

1. You're on the playground and one of your friends tells you not to invite Marcus to be in the game because he's a "homo." What do you do?
2. Three of you are planning what to do over the weekend, and one of your friends proposes a plan that you know the third person won't be able to afford. What do you say?
3. One of the students in your reading group starts making fun of a student in a lower reading group, calling him a "retard" and telling him he reads "baby books."

As the moderator, be cautious of:

- Not allowing students to use the "n word" or any other derogatory words
- The "white savior complex" and pointing it out if need be. Here's a 14 minute video to explain the concept, if needed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2qAbp-t_FY

To Discuss

Ask students how it feels to be an ally? What is scary about it? Why is it important to be an ally?

Reflection Questions

- How can you commit to being an ally?
- How is being an ally important to making sure we all feel like we are safe and appreciated for our differences in this classroom?

Allyship in Action

Objective

Students will practice using art to help create safe spaces and stand up for others.

Time

 60 Min

Keywords/Ideas

Allyship is a Verb

Activist

Artivism

Using Artivism to be an Ally

Background Information

There are so many ways to be an Ally, and allyship takes constant practice. When we say Allyship is a verb we mean it goes beyond just believing everyone should have equal rights, it means standing up for people and giving them the space to be heard. Allyship can be scary for people of all ages. Having courageous conversations takes constant practice, creating safe spaces takes constant reflection and discussion. This lesson will be a chance for your students to put some of this work into practice by becoming an activist, a social activist who uses art as their medium of expression!

Here is an article about Artivism to check out for more information: [5 Ways to Bring Art + Activism to the Classroom](#)

To Say

We have been talking about a lot of challenging things lately, learning how to listen and be bold, discussing privilege and racism, sexism and homophobia. These are all really difficult conversations to have and I am so glad we are learning how to understand and appreciate everyone's different backgrounds.

A lot of times when we talk about injustice and things that aren't fair, it can make us really angry or sad. This is normal and sometimes it is because we feel helpless. When we feel this way, one thing we can do is find a way to make a difference and be an ally or changemaker! Today we are going to be activists, a person who uses art for social change!

Allyship in Action (cont.)

To Do

Play this 7 minute video about activism: Art as Activism:

[Kate DeCiccio, Community Artist | Adobe Creative Cloud.](#)

This video can be helpful if students are allowed to use social media at your school:

[ABC News Piece: Activism finds a new place: TikTok.](#)

Art for a Change Activity

In groups or individually, create a song in any genre about how to be an ally! Other options for this activity can include making a Sketch Comedy Skit, Short Video, Meme series or Piece of Visual Art (Digital Collage, Painting etc.). If your school allows students to use phones and social media, have students create a TikTok video or an Instagram Reel about anything we have covered in this unit including:

- Listening Skills
- The Beauty of Diversity
- Privilege
- Allyship

This activity can vary in length depending on time restraints. At the end of the activity, feel free to close it out with an “art show” where students can share their productions and work.

Patroller (Student Leader) Involvement

If you don't have time for the entire class to share, ask the Patroller or student leader to be a leader and showcase their art, if they are comfortable doing so. Ask them to explain why it's important and special to them.

Reflection Questions



- Why is it important to always work on creating safe spaces?
- What do you think was the most important thing you learned about how to create a safe space in this unit?

Learn More






Resources

For Educators








These two articles are highly recommended pre-reading for this mini-unit:

-  Article: [Opening the Doors to Learning Through Safe Spaces in K-12 Schools](#)
-  Article: [Understanding Race and Privilege - From the National Association of School Psychologists](#)

More Resources for Educators

-  Article: [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education](#)
-  Webinar Recording: [Activities for Anti-Bias Education](#)
-  Website: [Lesson Plans and Activities that focus on Race and diversity- From RaceBridges Studio](#)
-  Book (PDF): [For Teachers who want to take on training staff around social justice issues](#)
-  Book (For Purchase): [Rethinking MultiCultural Education](#)

For Parents/Caregivers

-  Article: [Why we are moving away from “color blind” and the importance of embracing our differences](#)
-  Article: [An Age-by-Age Guide to Explaining Privilege to Kids](#)
-  Article: [How to Talk to Your Kid about Race](#)
-  Article: [How to teach kids about social allyship - an ABC Guide](#)
-  Article: [Children Notice Race Several Years Before Adults Want to Talk About It](#)
-  Book List: [Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s Picks: Anti-Racist Books for Kids](#)
-  Website: [The Conscious Kid](#)

Resources (cont.)

Glossary/Key Concepts

Key concepts are defined by various educational institutions and reputable organizations and are linked as reference.

Activist

A person who works towards creating a positive change in society.

Active Listening

Active listening: a process of hearing and understanding what someone is saying by empathizing with the speaker(s) and considering their perspective(s).

Ally

An active verb; leveraging personal positions of power and privilege to fight oppression by respecting, working with, and empowering marginalized voices and communities; using one's own voice to project others', less represented, voices.

Ageism

The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress young and elderly people.

Ally

An active verb; leveraging personal positions of power and privilege to fight oppression by respecting, working with, and empowering marginalized voices and co

Artist

Artivism is the intersection of art and activism. Propaganda tells you exactly what to think, feel, and do, whereas good activism should inspire critical thinking and empathy." - Dannie Snyder.

BIPOC

A term that refers to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (Often the preferred collective term for referring to non-White racial groups).

Diversity

A multiplicity of shared and different individual and group experiences, values, beliefs, and characteristics among people..

Ethnicity

A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Homophobia

On a personal level, homophobia is an irrational fear, aversion, or dislike of homosexualities and people who identify as homosexual; on a social level, homophobia is the ingrained structural discrimination against homosexuality and those who identify as homosexual that prevents access to certain resources or opportunities and inhibits individuals from feeling safe or able to be socially recognized as homosexual.

LGBTQIA+

The umbrella community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, two-spirited, queer, questioning, intersex, and/or asexual.

Marginalize

The systematic disempowerment of a person

Resources (cont.)

or community by denying access to necessary resources, enforcing prejudice through society's institutions, and/or not allowing for that individual or community's voice, history, and perspective to be heard.

Privilege

Unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it. Another way to frame privilege from Marie Beecham "Privilege isn't the presence of perks and benefits. It's the absence of obstacles and barriers. That's a lot harder to notice. If you have a hard time recognizing your privileges, focus on what you don't have to go through. Let that fuel your empathy and action." Privilege can operate through skin color, gender, age, ability for example.

Race

A term used to to identify and define individuals as part of a distinct group based on physical characteristics and some cultural and historical commonalities; once used to denote differentiation in humankind based on physiology and biology, race is now understood as a social construct that is not scientifically based, though is still commonly associated with notions of biological difference; race is still sometimes perceived as innate and inalterable.

Racism

An ideology and institution that reflects the racial worldview in which humans are divided into racial groups and in which races are arranged in a hierarchy where some races are considered innately superior to others; racism is the effect of domination of certain racial groups by other racial groups, historically the domination of people of color by white/European peoples.

Safe Space

Spaces in which people, often of marginalized or underrepresented social groups, can say, be, and share their experiences without fear or judgment.

Sexism

The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress women.

Social Justice

The practice of allyship and coalition work in order to promote equality, equity, respect, and the assurance of rights within and between communities and social groups.