



## **Dealing with Incivility and Unprofessional Behavior Regarding Diversity**

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We've likely all heard friends, family, colleagues and others make disparaging comments and jokes about marginalized groups and those that are common targets of discrimination. What should you do? Below we'll discuss a scenario and four possible actions.

You overhear Robert, a male co-worker, telling a joke about Rednecks. Yesterday you heard him make a joke about people of color and last week you heard him telling a joke about obese women. You know he is trying to be funny, but you find the jokes offensive. While you want the behavior to stop, you work in the same unit and you don't want to make any enemies.

### **Option #1 - The say nothing response**

You don't say anything due to concerns he will turn people against you or start telling jokes at your expense. You may also be concerned about your job security if he's your supervisor or has a higher position in the organization than you. Unfortunately, silence is the same as condoning the behavior. By not saying or doing anything to address racist/sexist jokes, you help perpetuate the problem. In most scenarios, this is the least helpful option.

### **Option #2 - The one-on-one response**

You ask to have a word alone with Robert and let him know his jokes make you feel uncomfortable and you think the office should be a space where everyone can feel at ease. Talking to the person directly is generally a good strategy, but if you feel unsafe or fear retaliation, consider other options.

### **Option #3 - The organizational response**

You tell your supervisor (or if he's at a higher position than you, his supervisor) about the situation. This is a good option, especially if you don't think Robert will respond well to one-on-one discussion. The supervisor can help address inappropriate workplace behavior and issue a warning. However, while Robert might change his behavior, he may not learn anything or gain any new insight from a purely disciplinary approach.

### **Option #4 - The institutional response**

Talk to someone in HR. This can also be a good option if you don't think one-on-one discussion will work. Also, speaking to an outside third party can inform you about your options and any relevant policies that may help you make an informed decision about how to best approach the situation.



Not all options will be helpful or feasible given each individual situation; however, if you're committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment and want it to be clear

that these sorts of jokes and comments are not condoned, it's important to respond. Remember, silence is the same as condoning the behavior!