

6

Things School Staff Can Do to Interrupt Unconscious Bias

“Bias is a universal human condition that must be recognized and managed, not a personal defect. We all carry biases from swimming in the waters of a racialized, inequitable society.”

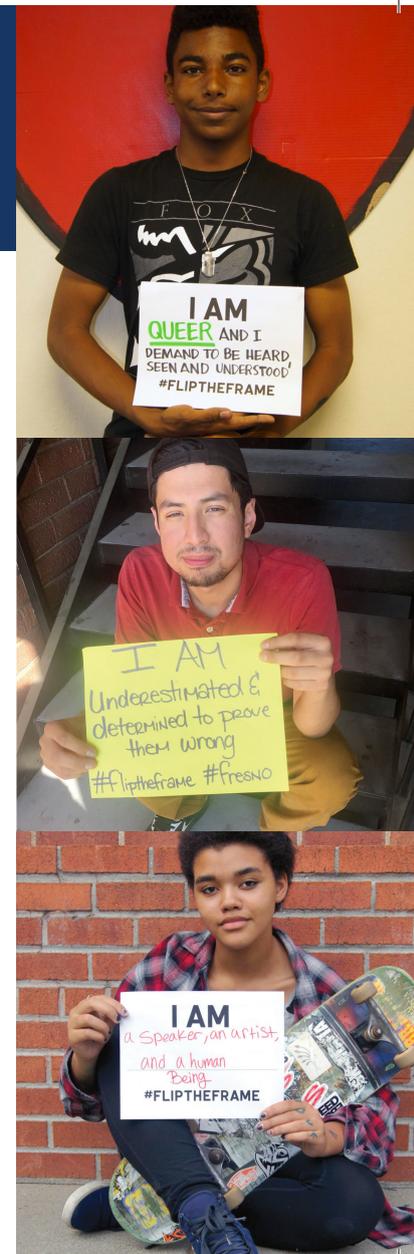
- Shane Safir, educator and author of [The Listening Leader](#)

“Biases are the stories we make up about people before we know who they actually are.”

- Vernā Myers, inclusion strategist and author of [Moving Diversity Forward](#)

- 1 Notice:** In order to interrupt our racial and other biases we must first become aware of them. If you find yourself struggling with a particular student, parent, or colleague, take a 10-second pause to ask yourself: *“What are my biases toward this person? How can I disrupt my autopilot thoughts so that I can genuinely see and listen to them?”*¹
- 2 Listen:** Slow down your interactions and deeply listen, not to solve, correct, or fix, but to take in someone’s story. Notice what’s said and unsaid—tone, body language, and emotions. *“Listening helps us take in a person’s multiple stories and disrupts biased thinking.”*²
- 3 Reflect:** Read, discuss, journal—ask yourself: *“Where do I see implicit biases playing out in our school? What fear or apprehension do I have about addressing this issue?”*³
- 4 Connect:** Build in time for dialogue in classroom and staff spaces through circles, small groups, or one on ones that create openings for students and staff to talk about race and identity. *“How am I getting to know students as complex individuals? How are we building trust?”*⁴
- 5 Affirm:** Intentionally embrace and affirm students’ identities around race, class, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, etc. to counter stereotypes and bias. Ensure students see themselves reflected in the diversity of staff, culturally relevant curriculum, and visual landscape of the school and classroom.
- 6 Act:** 1) Practice slowing down, noticing your biases, and looking for options to interrupt your patterns. 2) Call on colleagues to listen, reflect, and learn about their own biases. 3) Choose an equity challenge in your classroom or school and work with students of color and those most impacted as co-creators, trainers, or evaluators.

¹⁻⁴ Safir, Shane. (2016, March 14). 5 Keys to Challenging Implicit Bias. Retrieved March 28, 2019, from <https://www.edutopia.org>



Equity Starts with Relationships



Students of color across California have identified relationships with their teachers and school staff as the #1 factor in closing the belief gap so that students of color can reach their full potential regardless of race or zip code.

RESOURCES:

- **Tools for building relationship centered schools:** <https://edport.caljustice.org>
- **Unconscious bias resources:** <https://humaneeducation.org/blog/2017/9-resources-teaching-unconscious-bias>
- **Listening circles:** <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/bring-listening-circles-to-class-shane-safir>
- **Talking about bias—sentence starters:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/resolution-not-conflict/201201/6-safe-sentence-starters-sensitive-discussions>



Ideas to Start With:

1. **Prioritize your well-being.** Stress and cognitive overload keep us from disrupting our biases. This work is not easy, and we need staff who are nurtured and sustained to make long-term commitments to students and their families.
2. **Give micro-affirmations** by smiling and welcoming students and staff by name, offering support when they are distressed, or using non-verbal cues and facial expressions to convey affirmation.
3. **Practice mindfulness.** As you cultivate nonjudgmental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations, you begin to notice when your mind is biased against someone, and can replace those thoughts with kindness and compassion.
4. **Spend a day shadowing a student** to connect with the experience of students of color who are struggling on your campus. From the bus stop to classes to lunch—listen and observe to develop ideas to improve school from their perspective.
5. **Focus on a small group of students who are not experiencing success.** Observe their learning conditions and daily experience. Ask for their stories and feedback. By changing practices or processes to meet their needs you build the capacity of students and staff to impact the whole.

Inspiration taken from: Shane Saafir, *The Listening Leader: Creating Conditions for Equitable School Transformation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

To get more ideas, or join our movement to create Relationship Centered Schools go to:

 caljustice.org/our-work

 [@Cal4Justice](https://twitter.com/Cal4Justice)

 facebook.com/caljustice