



Check Your Bias

Unconscious bias or implicit bias is when a person holds particular attitudes that affect the way they behave toward, categorize, stereotype, and treat others based on their own subconscious thoughts about different groups of people. Working through these biases takes intentional practice.

Want to get better at checking biases that sometimes come naturally? Consider these scenarios:

- ❑ In the school setting, do you make up scenarios in your mind about how a teacher or student lives? What proof do you have that your thoughts are right? Are these thoughts helpful?
- ❑ Do you assume that people who are overweight eat unhealthy foods and don't exercise? There could be other issues, such as metabolic or other health problems, that contribute to a person's weight gain.
- ❑ If you wanted to invite a child's parents/caregivers or a co-worker's significant other to an event, would you automatically envision a heterosexual, married couple? Would you envision a couple the same age, race, or ethnicity? Making assumptions about a couple's relationship, ethnic heritage, age differences, or orientation can lead to hurtful encounters. Keep an open mind about who you are going to meet.
- ❑ Imagine going to the doctor's office to consult with a new surgeon. Think about walking into the office and greeting the front desk staff. You go into an exam room and sit down. The doctor comes in. What do they look like? Is the doctor a woman? A man? Are they white, black, Indian, Asian, Native American, Jewish, Greek, Latino/a? Are they wearing a hijab or a turban? What about a yarmulke? How did you decide how they might look? We often assume doctors, attorneys, and other professionals are supposed to look a certain way. Try to start with a blank canvas and let the paint show up naturally instead of walking in with a pre-painted canvas in your mind about how others should/should not look.
- ❑ When you hear the names Leticia, Joshua, Abraham, Maribel, Tyrone, Shravya, and Kija, what images come to mind? Did you think about the ethnicity, age, or gender of the people with these names? People of all ages, races, and religions who are male, female, transgender, or non-binary can go by any of these names.
- ❑ Think about your last great find at the grocery store. Imagine chatting with a group of parents/caregivers at school and you mention your find. Some parents/caregivers chime in and a couple of others don't. You make a comment like, "It's only \$30 at the local grocery. Who can't afford that?" What if you were on the receiving end of that comment? What might others be thinking? Just because their kids go to school with yours doesn't mean they have the same life experiences. Perhaps they don't have access to the same stores. Perhaps they live in a food desert. Maybe they cannot afford the \$30, they prioritize their spending differently than you do, or have dietary needs that you don't know about. It may seem like a harmless conversation, but we don't always know someone else's story.
- ❑ Imagine that you have two colleagues of Asian American or Pacific Islander heritage. For some reason, you constantly mix up their names. Imagine how they might feel. Would you ask them for recommendations about the best place to get sushi or Chinese food? Why? Do you assume that a person of Asian American or Pacific Islander heritage represents all these communities?
- ❑ In another scenario, Sarah is the only person from Spain on her team at work. Her manager spreads responsibility for office party planning among staff but seems to stick her with planning Cinco de Mayo every year. Is it okay to assume that Sarah is the best person to plan this party when she may not celebrate this Mexican holiday? It is important to reach out to staff members who do celebrate cultural holidays to ensure you are respecting and honoring the culture appropriately.