

Racism and bullying

Racism can manifest itself in many ways in a learning community – including your own unconscious biases – and can have a significant impact on a child or young person’s social and emotional wellbeing.

“Racism is not confined to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – racism is very real for fairer-skinned Aboriginal people and can leave them feeling like not belonging in either place.”
– Community member

It can be as overt as offensive name-calling or physical bullying based on skin tone – whether light or dark – or Language Group. Be firm that racism and bullying will not be tolerated in your learning community. Develop strategies to de-escalate conflict with the AIEO or ATA and the school’s senior staff. Be clear about the consequences of such behaviour and apply them fairly and consistently.

“There was concern about saying a child was Aboriginal for fear of how that information might be used and whether their child would be treated differently, based on being Aboriginal.”
– Aboriginal medical service worker

Be wary of your own unconscious biases. These could be having low expectations or not calling on Aboriginal students because you assume they can’t answer a question, being dismissive or demeaning to an AIEO or ATA, being condescending or paternalistic towards Aboriginal children or their caregivers, or assuming particularly disruptive children are always at fault.

For example, you might have punished a child for disruptive or aggressive behaviour when they may have been responding to racist name-calling or covert bullying from a classmate. You will need to address their conduct. But reprimanding them without understanding why they were being disruptive may alienate the child, reinforcing beliefs that their perspective or wellbeing isn’t important, that they don’t belong or that the learning community – and the world in general – is inherently unjust. More importantly, this doesn’t address the racism or bullying that led to their actions. Schools are required to encourage a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Work with the AIEO or ATA to create a space where children and young people feel comfortable to discuss racism or bullying experiences and why they may feel or behave the way they do. This is an opportunity to show you value their views and feelings. You or the AIEO may need to speak with the child or young person one-on-one, outside the classroom environment, which may make them feel more comfortable to speak freely.

For anti-racism resources you can check out the Australian Human Rights Commission's Racism. It Stops With Me campaign (<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>), racial equality project All Together Now (<https://alltogethernow.org.au/>) or Cool Australia's lessons exploring the key themes of the Adam Goodes documentary *The Final Quarter* (<https://www.coolaustralia.org/the-final-quarter-curriculum-resources/>).

Be You has lots of resources about bullying, such as 'Recognising bullying behaviour' (<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/recognising-bullying-behaviour>) and 'What schools can do about bullying' (<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/what-schools-can-do-about-bullying>).

Be patient, be open-minded – make education a two-way learning experience for you and your students.

