

**Sharing Our Journey...**  
**Following the Call to Anti-Bias, Anti-Racism Identity**  
**by Mary Pat Martin**

How do we "stand up," "speak up," "speak out," "take a stand" in a situation that we perceive as unjust, biased or prejudiced? In the last few months, people have shared these experiences with me:

- A white teacher hearing another white teacher tell children doing an art activity, "Oh, no, you don't want to use black. That's yucky. "
- An assistant teacher watching the head teacher treat one boy differently than the other students: The assistant thinks it's because of the boy's weight, which makes him the largest child in class.
- A school-age teacher who is African-American takes her students, who are all African- Americans, on a field trip which includes a train ride from their program in the city to a northern suburb which is predominantly white. Near the suburban train station is a convenience store. Upon arrival, they all go in, chat with the clerk - who is white - and buy snacks. They feel welcomed to this suburb. On the way back, they start to go into the same store to buy snacks for their return train trip. A different clerk, also white, runs to lock the door and yells at them to leave the property or the police will be called. The police officer, who is white, also asks them to leave.

My story: I, a white woman, am attending a special event of an early childhood conference. A variety of performers who specialize in children's music have entertained us with much audience participation. The last person to perform, who is white, stands on the stage holding

up several of his CDs and tapes asking who wants one. A six-year-old child, African-American, would like one. He walks across the floor. The man looks down at the child and, speaking into the microphone, asks, "What are you doing here? Do I have to call Mr. Security on you?" and motions for the child to leave. The child walks back across the dance floor.

I am horrified by 1) the inappropriateness of this kind of behavior to a young child, and 2) the racism. Once more, a white person is insinuating that when an African-American male shows up, "security" needs to be called. I am outraged. I sit there.

Later, I talk with anti-bias, anti-racist colleagues individually and in groups. I wonder if the predominantly white audience would have reacted if the child had been a white girl and the performer's comment would have been sexist. Someone asked me, "What would have happened if you had gone up to the microphone and made a statement about the inappropriateness, both developmentally and racially, of his remarks?" I am stunned. I had not even considered that as an option.

We want every child to develop to their fullest potential. We support children having positive self-identity; respecting and valuing those who are different; and being critical thinkers and finding ways to stand up against unjust situations for themselves and others. We advocate for children and families in our agencies, communities, and legislative bodies. We work with others to strategize, organize, and take action to undo systemic, institutional "isms" that give advantage to some groups of people while oppressing others.

Then something happens where we, or another adult, acts out of bias or reacts to a situation of bias. What do we do? There is not much guidance on this. Here is some collective wisdom gathered from groups, workshops, and individual conversations. These are suggestions to think about and consider:

- First, know that we are called by God to be part of the lifting of oppression.
- Have a commitment to taking a stand against biased remarks and actions.
- Take a breath and check out our own emotions before doing or saying anything.
- Pray for God's courage, wisdom, and words.
- Have some phrases ready to use in inappropriate situations. (For example: "I find that offensive." "That has not been my experience." "I'm not sure I understand what you are saying.")
- Evaluate the situation mindfully, knowing we will take some action, and taking time to look at our choices.
- Approach the person in a respectful way.
- Tell the person we have something to say or ask the person if we can say something.
- Have a goal of wanting to keep the dialogue open and the relationship intact; wanting this to be a learning experience for both.
- Decide to wait; to discuss it with anti-bias, anti-racist colleagues; to look at options; and then to take action.
- Decide to remain silent this time and work on knowing more about how to approach this person or this situation.
- Find ways to intervene that are comfortable for us.
- Having spoken up previously, choose to walk away this time.

- Use moral, rational, economic, developmentally appropriate and/or religious reasons to make our point.
- Have a discussion; make a simple statement; write a note; recommend a book or article; offer to ask to meet again or later; make a phone call; or ask someone else to join the discussion.

In the stories at the beginning of this article, the first teacher implemented a curriculum on the beauty of black and brown. The assistant teacher gets support from anti-bias colleagues while she decides what to do. The school-age teacher had a series of discussions with the students. They chose to write letters to the suburb and the convenience store.

As for me, I'm writing this article. I'm writing to the performer. I've talked with the mother of the child involved. I have talked with the leaders and board members of the conference to find out what action they are taking. I continue to learn from this experience. Today I was telling an anti-bias colleague about the conference incident. She asked, "Why didn't it occur to you to go to the microphone and say something?" Exploring that question will help when the next time comes for action.

What have you learned about "standing up" on your anti-bias, anti-racist journey? Please share your wisdom as we add to or change the above list. This is a journey we can only take together.

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