

Be the Sixth Player

OFF THE COURT

4

Responding to Hate in Casual Conversations

HATEFUL COMMENTS IN DAILY LIFE

You know the situation—you're hanging out with friends, chatting with coworkers, or catching up with family when a comment drops that completely derails the vibe. Casual hate and biased remarks often slip right into everyday conversations. Sometimes it gets passed off as "just a joke," but words have power, and letting them slide sets a dangerous standard that this kind of speech is acceptable.

Hurtful language isn't always easy to spot; it often wears a mask of casual commentary. It can sound like:

- ▶ *"Women are just too emotional to handle high-pressure situations."*
- ▶ *"She probably only got that position to fill a quota."*
- ▶ *"Girls just aren't as naturally cut out for hard science or competition—it's just biology."*

When you hear these things, you're the teammate on the spot. You can stand on the sidelines as the clock runs out, or—because you know the person and they are likely to listen to what you have to say—you can step in and change the direction of play. What do you do?

KNOWING WHEN TO BLOW THE WHISTLE

Imagine someone on your team at school or at work says a girl or woman shouldn't do something because "guys are just better suited for it." If you say nothing, your silence is taken as team approval. Calling out harm doesn't have to be aggressive; it can be setting a boundary right then and there, as simple as, "That's no way to talk."

Or, the comment might happen closer to home, like a family member making a derogatory remark about someone at Sunday dinner. Instead of attacking their character, focus strictly on the matter at hand: address the specific words used and why they cause harm. For example, if someone talks about women being unfit for a high-pressure position, you could respond with, "I am confident a woman could do it." Or, if someone makes a joke about women being bad at sports, you could ask, "I don't get it. Can you explain why it is funny?" It's also possible that you won't know how to respond in the moment or there might be a power dynamic that makes you uncomfortable. Following up after is another option to address the harm, such as, "I was thinking about what you said, and it made me a bit uncomfortable because my aunt is really good at her job leading a company, and I want to make sure that people at our workplace feel women can also be in these kinds of roles." Your job as a good teammate isn't to fix everything in one go, but to ensure that harmful behavior doesn't get a free pass in your presence.

Being a great "Sixth Player" means showing up, recognizing when a line has been crossed, and stepping in to protect the integrity of the room.

Be the Sixth Player

OFF THE COURT · THE GAME PLAN

4

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't laugh along
- ✗ Don't ignore it
- ✗ Don't get into a screaming match or physical altercation

DO

- ✓ Do say something simple, like "I don't agree with that."
- ✓ Do address it by saying something like, "I don't think that's true."
- ✓ Do focus on the comment, not the person
- ✓ Do check in later

If you need an easy playbook to remember in the heat of the moment, use the [5 Ds of Bystander Intervention](#) Direct, Distract, Delay, Delegate, and Document.

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Want to know more about calling foul on hate and harassment? Click on the resources below to learn more:

- ▶ [PERIL. Not Just a Joke: Understanding & Preventing Gender- & Sexuality-based Bigotry \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [PERIL. Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [University of Illinois. Bystander Intervention Strategies.](#)