

## What are ways of being an ally as a mentor?

### EXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

We often make subconscious assumptions that we share backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences with others. As a result, we are unaware that examples we use are less meaningful to trainees from other backgrounds. When you have the expectation that trainees have similar cultural backgrounds to you, come from economic privilege, have parents who attended college, or are heterosexual or cisgender it can make folks outside of the majority feel marginalized. Check in with your assumptions about your trainees!

**There is no need for anyone to disclose their lived experiences here if they are not ready. There are ways to make everyone feel welcome without knowing how everyone identifies.**

### FIGHT THE DEFICIT MINDSET

The deficit model is defined as the perception that members of minority groups are different because they are deficient in important ways from the majority. In a mentor-protege relationship in academia, this can take the form of a one-way learning relationship, where the mentor invalidates the existing knowledge of their mentee and aims to “fix” their deficiencies. These kinds of relationships require that minority students assimilate to survive their environment.

**For further information on the deficit model [click here](#)**

### RESPOND TO BIAS

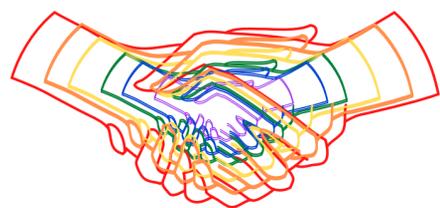
Microaggressions (a verbal or behavioral discrimination that can be indirect, subtle, or unintentional) are painful to receive and observe. They can also have a lasting impact on someone’s mental health. An example of a microaggression against LGBTQIA+ folks would be to say “that’s so gay” to refer to something odd or undesirable, or asking a transgender person about their gender reassignment surgery. Addressing microaggressions and biases are some of the most important things you can do as an ally! These moments can be intimidating and uncomfortable, but try not to freeze.

**Keep in mind that your immediate response does not need to be perfect, just authentic.**

Here are some key points to keep in mind when you notice microaggressions:

1. Silence of bystanders often communicates approval. A general rule is to speak up against discrimination in the moment, but sometimes you need to read the room to determine if speaking up in a public setting could do more harm than good. For example, it can be harmful to speak up in public when someone is misgendered, but they are not out to everyone about their gender pronouns.
2. Apologizing to the target afterwards can add to the insult. It signifies that the perpetrator's comfort is more important than the target's. Stick up for them in the moment!

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### RESPOND TO BIAS (CONTINUED)

3. When bias comes from a boss, it is easy for people to assume that nothing can be done. The boss has all the power, right? As an employee, here are some examples of things you might say to stick up for a LGBTQIA+ co-worker:

- "A lot of different kinds of people work for you, and for this institution as a whole. We all come to work trying our best. What you just said doesn't honor the people that work hard for you."
- "We don't know who is gay and who is straight, who has gay relatives and who doesn't.. Your comment could really upset some people and distract them from their work."

4. Do not ask the target of the microaggression to fix the problem. Say you have noticed someone asking a transgender person for their former name or you notice someone using a transgender person's former name (this is called deadnaming). It is harmful to then tell the trans person how they could speak up for themselves in the future (signaling that you are not willing to speak up on their behalf.)

#### Addressing your own bias:

1. Ask clarifying questions! Be gracious and consider the moment as a learning opportunity. Say something like, "Please help me understand how I have offended you". Thank the person for pointing it out and ask for continued feedback.

2. When you mess up (and we all do), strive to reconnect and ensure that the moment does not inhibit your working relationship. "Is there anything I can do to repair our relationship.. I really want us to keep working together."

3. When you receive feedback, make a continuous effort to change your behavior.

4. Reading testimonials is a great way to identify microaggressions that you may be unaware of.

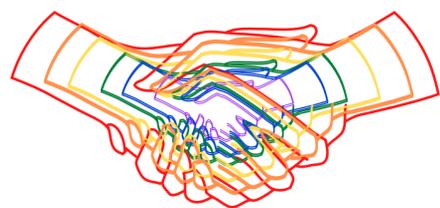
### ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR POSITION

Our identities and access in society are shaped by our positions and power. This concept is called "positionality" (Misawa et al., 2010). Improving as an ally requires that you identify your own degrees of privilege related to race, education, income, ability, gender, citizenship and more. Acknowledging positionality allows you to recognize how students with certain intersecting social identities can have an increased risk of experiencing discrimination and disadvantage. An example is the intersection of being a gender and racial minority.

### BE ACCOUNTABLE & ASK FOR FEEDBACK

It is important to recognize that allyship is a life-long learning process. Be critical of the practices you pass on to your mentees, ask yourself why you have certain standards for your mentees, and most importantly, recognize when there is a need for change.

Ask for feedback in 1:1 meetings with your trainees. Anonymous surveys/feedback forms are also a great way to check that people feel safe and included in lab. The anonymity may take the weight of confrontation off of people that are struggling.



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### SPEAK OUT AGAINST STEREOTYPES

Avoid fostering stereotypes that assign skills or weakness based on a person's race, education, income, ability, gender, citizenship etc. If you observe this happening, stand up against it!

### THE WORDS YOU USE MATTER

Use inclusive language to show respect for the diversity of gender expression and lived experience. For example, it can be harmful to use masculine pronouns to refer to people of all genders. Using phrases like "as we all know" in lectures or meetings, may be isolating when based on inaccurate assumptions about baseline knowledge. Note that as a mentor you have the power to shape the language of a whole lab.

**Examples of non-gendered language: folks instead of ladies/gentleman, humankind instead of mankind, people instead of man/men, first-year students instead of freshmen.**

### PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

Make sure you are providing important opportunities such as conference presentations, publications, and networking events to all of your trainees. Try to personalize those opportunities based on your students' strengths and interests.

### ADVOCATE FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

Consider the power dynamic between mentor and trainee. Be sensitive towards your mentee by acknowledging that disabilities might look different than expected. This is a good opportunity to check in with your assumptions! Imagine how uncomfortable it can be for a mentee when they need to speak up to ask for money for lunch, a ride home, access to a building, or access to an appropriate restroom.

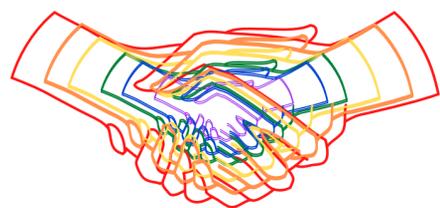
### ASK QUESTIONS

**Does your mentee need help getting to and from training sessions?**

RockEDU provides metrocards for for students from under-resourced schools and/or communities through the LAB Jumpstart program. It is also important to ensure that venues are accessible for disabled folks. Look out for things like access ramps, smooth ground, large doors, elevators and remote options.

**Should I provide food for my meetings with mentees?**

Folks might not be able to easily afford to pick something up at a deli nearby, or have special religious or cultural dietary requirements. Sending out a google form is a really easy way to normalize differences in dietary needs and take the onus off of the individual who needs the accommodation.



## Considerations for students

### ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

Mentorship is a two way street! It is important to reflect on your needs and anything that can affect your work in the lab. This can range from learning style to accommodations based on dietary restrictions. Voice your needs when you feel safe to do so.

If you are struggling to advocate for yourself, you are not alone. It can be helpful to find a third-party, whether that is a fellow student, co-worker, a mentor, a member of the RockEDU BIOME community, etc.

### SEEK OUT NUMEROUS MENTORS

One person cannot fulfill your every need. Find allies where you can, whether that is in peers or folks further along in their careers.

Peer allies may be able to fill a need that a primary mentor cannot, for example, connections based on similar career stages.

### LISTEN TO YOUR PEERS

It is important to recognize what you can do to help others and how you can advocate for them. In learning how to be an ally, we need to hear about and respect the lived experiences of other people.

### BE VISIBLE IN YOUR ROLE AS A PEER ALLY

Everyone is impacted by gender and everyone wishes to be referred to by their correct pronouns. It is important to remember that a lack of investment on the topic of pronouns impacts the way others are treated. Ask folks for their pronoun and then use them. Share yours as well (in person, through email, over zoom, on name tags etc.)

Share resources (like this guide!) and readings with your immediate communities.

Advocate for the needs of minority students. It can be difficult and exhausting for historically excluded people to make their voices heard. An example would be to ask for gender neutral restrooms or provide correct information when you hear myths or misperceptions about a marginalized group.

Despite good intentions, apologize when you make mistakes (we all make them).

**Listening to podcasts is an easy way to learn about LGBTQIA+ experiences in STEM. Check out @LGBTQstemCast, @500QueerSci on Twitter.**