



# How Classroom Educators Can Create Safe(r) Spaces

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- Make your expectations about positive language and respect for each other clear, and enforce them every time
  - *My most enforced classroom rule (because you do have to pick your battles) is that pejorative language absolutely cannot be used. Any break in this rule means a student has a one-on-one with me in the hall. These are not punishment moments, they are teaching moments. (“What could you have said instead of ‘that’s so gay?’”)*
- Keep your classroom highly structured
  - *Not every part of creating a safe space is about social justice. A lot of it is just about being a good teacher. When students sit in assigned seats and do meaningful, engaging work from bell to bell, there is much less space for teasing and bullying to occur.*
- Encourage feedback from students
  - *I build time for anonymous feedback about my teaching into class at least once a semester. Students will be honest! I’ve been told “you need to be more strict because it’s too chaotic in here.” If you trust students to give you honest feedback, it can really help you reflect.*
- Allow students space to be themselves.
  - *I often start class with “highs and lows” which is a time for students to share (only if they wish) the bad points and good points of their day. This is a good way to understand students better and get a “pulse check” on how students are feeling. (Be sure to monitor this well so that it stays positive and students don’t use it as a place to gossip.)*

## Using “Microaffirmations” to Combat Microaggressions

- ▶ Classroom Decorations
  - ▶ *“Safe Space” signs and social justice oriented decorations. Check out Syracuse Cultural Workers online. They have great ones.*
- ▶ Model Inclusive Language
  - ▶ *For example, use “partner” instead of girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, or husband.” Think twice before saying “sir” or “ma’am.”*
- ▶ Include curriculum that challenges heteronormativity
  - ▶ *Even in small ways, like a math story problem or a vocab sentence example: “When John saw his ex-boyfriend coming down the hall, he veered into the nearest classroom.”*
- ▶ Use preferred names and pronouns.
  - ▶ *I ask every student what they prefer to be called on the first day of class. For example, Makayla may just want to be called “Kayla.” But also Scott might want to be called “Daisy.” Or Matt might want to be called “7,” his football number. It’s not hard to honor whatever that request is.*
- ▶ Use biased comments as teachable moments.
  - ▶ *Don’t punish when a student commits an inadvertent microaggression. Explain why it’s a problem and help the student come up with solutions.*
- ▶ Respect students’ privacy.
  - ▶ *Never ask a student their sexual orientation. Wait till the student decides to tell you...or maybe they won’t tell you. That’s okay too. Never act like you know if you are only assuming.*
- ▶ Be out...as queer or as an ally.
  - ▶ *This is certainly a complicated situation in some schools (and something SafeSchoolsNC can provide more guidance on if you’d like to reach out), but I definitely encourage adults in a school to be out with whomever possible, whether you are LGBTQ+ or an ally. Students need to see this modeled.*
- ▶ Listen and learn!
  - ▶ *When in doubt, this is your fallback. Let the student’s needs guide you.*

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