



## Tips for Intervention and Support

*You don't have to be a lawyer or sociologist to be a Belonging and Inclusion Advocate. At the most fundamental level, a BIA should be a sound communicator that listens well, displays empathy, and can de-escalate a stressful situation. Even then, providing effective intervention and support can be difficult. Below are a few communication tips to consider when providing education and care in the BIS.*

- **Be an Empathic Listener** Coming to the BIS (as a complainant or respondent) may result in emotions including anger, embarrassment, shock, or even fear. Empathic listeners hear the speaker, understand their perspective, and validate people's feelings. You can listen empathically by giving verbal and nonverbal cues that you are listening carefully (e.g. nodding your head, making eye contact), and paraphrasing their words to ensure understanding.
- **Be Teacherly Before Punitive** The BIS is an educational resource. While violating the harassment and discrimination policy carries consequence, the BIA's top priority is to provide education and care. Try to avoid instant punitive action and begin with supportive measures and/or teacherly moments. When talking with a complainant, this might mean saying things like *"thank you for coming to the BIS and bringing this to our attention. If you're willing to talk more about this, I'm happy to listen and help in any way I can."* With a respondent, it could mean explaining to them how their behavior impacts others (ex: *"I know this wasn't your intent, but some people hear \_\_\_\_\_"; and they feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.*). Even when explaining the corrective course of action, try to sound more like a teacher and less like a lawyer.
- **Read the Room** Pay attention to the way your communication lands and be prepared to adjust if necessary. You may have instances where a complainant is frantic and you'll want to slow the conversation down, paraphrase, and clarify for understanding. There may also be moments where a respondent doesn't understand why they've been called to the BIS and you'll want to walk them through the intake process, give them time to react to a concern about them and share their information. If you are paying attention to your audience, it's easier to communicate effectively.
- **Take Your Time** There are many instances where people come to the BIS just so that they can be heard. In those moments, give people a chance to talk. Unless someone is reporting sexual assault or sexual violence, don't feel like you have to rush to action. Sometimes, just sitting and listening can go a long way.
- **Intent vs. Impact** Unwelcome conduct does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents (e.g., microinsults, microinvalidations, & misgendering). The "small" instance that leads someone to the BIS might be the 100th instance they've experienced that day. It is important that respondents recognize the impact of their communication, regardless of intent.
- **Don't Make Up Answers** If you don't have the answer to a question, do not try to make one up. It's acceptable to say, "let me double check with the tournament director," or "I'm going to consult with the official guide provided by the national office." If necessary, you can always contact the NSDA Director of DEI for insight. Correct answers are better than fast ones.
- **Avoid "You" and "But" Messages** "You" messages (e.g. "You did \_\_\_\_\_ and it's bad.") sound accusatory and may elicit defensiveness rather than understanding. "But" messages (e.g. "I hear that you were insulted, but \_\_\_\_\_") sound contradictory and invalidating.
- **Withhold Bias** We all have bias. It's as natural as breathing. And while we cannot reverse our biases, it is important that we are aware of potential mental and emotional blind spots that might cloud our judgment. This is especially important when working as a BIA. Please listen with an open mind and try to recognize instances in which you might be hearing a person with bias, rather than giving fair consideration.

- **Keep Implications in Mind** Regardless if you're the complainant or respondent, coming to the BIS can be stressful. As you engage in an inquiry and determine a resolution, please keep in mind how being in the BIS can affect someone's tournament experience. Try to be teacherly and prevent from causing someone additional stress— especially if it could negatively affect a student's performance or coach's ability to tend to their team or judge.
- **Be in the Moment** Try to keep complaints specific to the tournament you are at. If someone comes to the BIS to raise a complaint about something that happened at a tournament last year or three weeks ago, please encourage the complainant to talk with their coach, parent (if applicable), or school administration.
- **Use Your Cultural Awareness** Speech and debate is a multicultural activity that is open to a wide diversity of participants. Please keep in mind that some methods of communication may be linked to cultural differences. As such, some concerns might be presented as egregious, when they are actually cultural norms (e.g. some people are naturally loud when they speak or get passionate when speaking/performing/debating). This is something to consider when listening to a respondent explain their behavior or determining the level of violation.