COUNTER SPEECH

What is Counter Speech?

Counter speech is any direct response to hateful or harmful speech which seeks to undermine it. Just as influential speakers can make violence seem acceptable and necessary, they can also favorably influence discourse through counter speech. The most direct way it can succeed is to have a positive effect on the speaker, convincing him or her to stop speaking dangerously now and in the future. It can also succeed by having an impact on the audience – either by communicating norms that make Dangerous Speech socially unacceptable or by 'inoculating' the audience against the speech, so they are less easily influenced by it.

Note to counter speakers: Every situation is different, and counter speech doesn't always work. Sometimes people are determined to hurt, are convinced they're right, or both. At those times it might be best to disengage or use other tactics, so use your best judgment. If you choose to engage, here are some tips for getting positive results.

Before You Start

1. **Protect yourself** – take steps to protect yourself from retaliation (see the resources at iheartmob.org/tech). Think about how your online identity or profiles could be used against you.
2. **Remind yourself** that behind each comment – no matter how hateful – is a human being. Treat them as you would want to be treated.
3. **Think about what you want to accomplish**. Do you want to change the person's mind, or how they post or tweet? Stop them from attacking someone else? Change other people's minds or behavior?

Counter speech DOs

Things you can try when you feel safe:

➢ **Stay calm**. If you're upset, wait a bit before responding.

➢ **Ask questions**, like "Why do you think that?" or "What do you mean?"

➢ Refer to potential outcomes, like "That could hurt someone."

➢ **Label the comment, not the person**, like "That word comes from a racist stereotype."

➢ **Show empathy and connection** with the target ("I'm Asian American too, and…") or with the speaker ("I'm angry about this too, but…").

➢ **Start a supportive hashtag** like #LoveForLeslieJones.

➢ **Try humor**. If your intent is kind and you're not mocking the person, humor can soften the exchange and attract others to show their support.

➢ **Counter with images** that are silly, clever, or funny – not hurtful – to de-escalate.

Counter speech DON'Ts

➢ **Don't label people** – for example, calling them a bigot.

➢ **Don't assume** the person has bad intentions.

➢ **Don't be hostile, insulting, or aggressive** – it can escalate the conflict.

➢ **Don't talk down** to the person – it can shut down communication.

➢ **Don't nitpick** or correct spelling or grammar. Use a civil tone and link to a source if you want to correct false information.

➢ **Don't silence** the person with threats, social exclusion, or other punishment.

Resources & References

➢ **http://dangerousspeech.org/counterspeech/**

➢ **https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/cntr-trrrsm/r-nd-flght-182/knshk/ctlg/dtls-en.aspx?i=119**

➢ **https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/take-action/engage**