



When Stereotypes Lower Expectations

Negative stereotypes lower our expectations of groups of people and ourselves.* Here are some ways you can help to reduce the negative effects of stereotype threats:

- **Counter the stereotypes**—Highlight specific, positive stories and examples that show the flaws of a stereotype that groups everyone in a particular group as having negative qualities or lesser abilities. Some ways to do this include:
 - Find positive role models who defy negative stereotypes. This may include people you personally know, current leaders or celebrities, and historical figures.
 - When stereotypes are reinforced in the news, on the Internet, at school, or with people you know (including in your family), debrief and debunk the stereotype.
- **Affirm personal strengths and the importance of effort**—Repeat specific affirmations about your abilities when feeling threatened or pressured because of a stereotype. Build confidence that you can do well, with effort and support.
- **Highlight other factors**—When facing a difficult task or situation that might trigger stereotypes, show that many different people find the situation challenging, not just those in a particular group. Examples might include:
 - “This test or competition will be hard for everyone.”
 - “Everyone is new in this school, so everyone is anxious about fitting in.”

This approach doesn’t take away the negative feelings. But it reduces the power of the stereotype, allowing us to navigate a situation that is challenging for most people.

- **Build relationships**—Stereotypes and stereotype threats increase when you feel like you don’t belong. Finding other people to connect to can change this dynamic.
- **Take action to reduce stereotypes**—Stereotypes reflect deep social problems that require critical masses of people and a tremendous amount of energy and time to end. You and your family may be motivated to take action to participate in those kinds of social movements, which is a critical part of building a better society.

* Stereotype threat is most often studied in terms of academic or job performance. But researchers believe it has broader implications for many groups that are stigmatized (with different degrees of intensity) in different ways, including racial or ethnic groups, gender or gender identity, age, low-income, religious tradition, immigrant status, sexual orientation, to name a few.

More information: Steele, C. M. (2011). *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. New York, NY: Norton. Also see: www.reducingstereotypethreat.org.

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