

## How can I respond to demonstrators conveying offensive content?

Individuals have a First Amendment right to peaceably assemble in designated areas on campus and express their views (with some exceptions - see below), even though their views may offend others. This may be hard to accept when the language is particularly offensive, so what can you do about it?

### *Your rights include:*

- Feeling offended and even angry (we all have the right to our feelings).
- Sharing your thoughts and feelings and seeking support from trusted others.
- Making your voice heard through peaceful protest.
- Educating others who use hate speech – here is a [helpful guide](#) for how to respond to bigotry in daily life through legal and protected means.
- Ignoring the person(s) expressing the offensive views, to help limit the audience.
- Entering or exiting buildings without being blocked.

### *Your rights do not include:*

- Making threats of violence toward others.
- Acting violently toward others.
- Crossing barriers set up by campus security or police, or otherwise disobeying them.
- Drowning out the demonstrators' speech with amplified music or other created noise.

### *What is hate speech?*

Hate speech is when a group of people is attacked based on factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. According to the [Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement](#) at UC Berkeley, hate speech includes written and verbal communication.

### *When does hate speech become a crime?*

While typically hate speech has to be acted on to turn into a crime, there are exceptions. Speech that directly threatens or harasses individual people or incites others to carry out violent acts is not protected by the First Amendment. There is also a ["fighting words" exception](#), which applies to intimidating speech directed at a specific individual in a face-to-face confrontation that is likely to provoke a violent reaction. But courts have interpreted this inconsistently in the past several years.

*Although we cannot support violating others' Constitutional rights, we care very much about how our students, faculty and staff are affected by offensive speech. If you need to talk to someone, feel free to contact Counseling Services at (610) 861-5342 (Bethlehem) or (570) 369-1842 (Monroe). Please see other side for details on NCC's values and self-care suggestions.*

Northampton Community College is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion. Our Position Statement on Diversity (<https://www.northampton.edu/about/diversity-and-inclusion.htm>) includes the following:

- We see each individual as unique and valuable.
- We value differences as strengths that contribute to a rich college environment.
- The college community is united in the condemnation of acts of hatred and intolerance.

Please keep these principles in mind and know that hate speech does not reflect our values.

It is our sincere hope that the following suggestions, enacted routinely as well as after hearing offensive speech, will help prevent or minimize any negative impacts of hate speech.

### **Self-care before and after experiencing hate speech**

To function at our best, we all need to take some time to care for ourselves. This is a right we have, not an indulgence, and it takes discipline. There are several types of self-care.

#### *Replace hateful messages with healthy, self-affirming beliefs*

- Being a member of a marginalized group does *not* make you inferior, mentally ill, immoral, etc. You are who you are, and are a valuable, unique individual.
- You are not “overly sensitive” if you are offended or call out someone who denigrates you or others based on identity; you have every right to feel what you feel.
- Recognize that you are not alone; you have allies, including those within and outside of your identity group.

#### *Engage in healthy behaviors*

- Exercise.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Spend time with others who value you and treat you well.
- Assert your needs (e.g., say “no” to things you don’t want to do).
- Express your feelings by using “I” statements (e.g., I feel frustrated because...).
- Identify and utilize your strengths.
- Do meaningful work (e.g., study for classes).
- Let others take care of you (including significant others and professionals such as counselors). <https://www.northampton.edu/student-services/counseling-services.htm>

#### *Avoid unhealthy behaviors such as...*

- Alcohol or other drugs
- Seeking or remaining in toxic relationships
- Self-harm
- Harm to others