

## SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

<b>Example</b>	<b>Response 1</b>	<b>Dos and Don'ts</b>	<b>Response 2</b>
<p>Your class is reading the autobiography of young Muslim activist and Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai. In a small group discussion with your classmates, one student complains, “This book is boring! Why do we have to read about terrorists anyway?” How would you respond to your classmate?</p>			
<p>Your school announced a new backpack-check policy to increase safety. Everyone is talking about it over lunch. A classmate you don't know well says that he's happy about the policy because there are so many Muslim students in your school and “you just never know....” How would you respond to your classmate?</p>			
<p>Your class is studying the events of September 11, 2001. The teacher begins the discussion by singling out the one visibly Muslim student in the class. The teacher asks the students to explain to everyone why the United States was attacked. The student looks very uncomfortable. How would you respond?</p>			

# SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE GUIDE

## DON'T

- **Stay silent.** No response signals approval.
- **Get trapped** in the controlling narrative by replicating Islamophobic framing or language.
- **Attack** the speaker personally.

## DO

- **Ask questions.**
- **Listen for keywords** to use to shift the conversation to a new narrative.
- **Talk about a shared, positive worldview.** A simple statement such as “everyone deserves to live in safety and peace,” can be remarkably effective.



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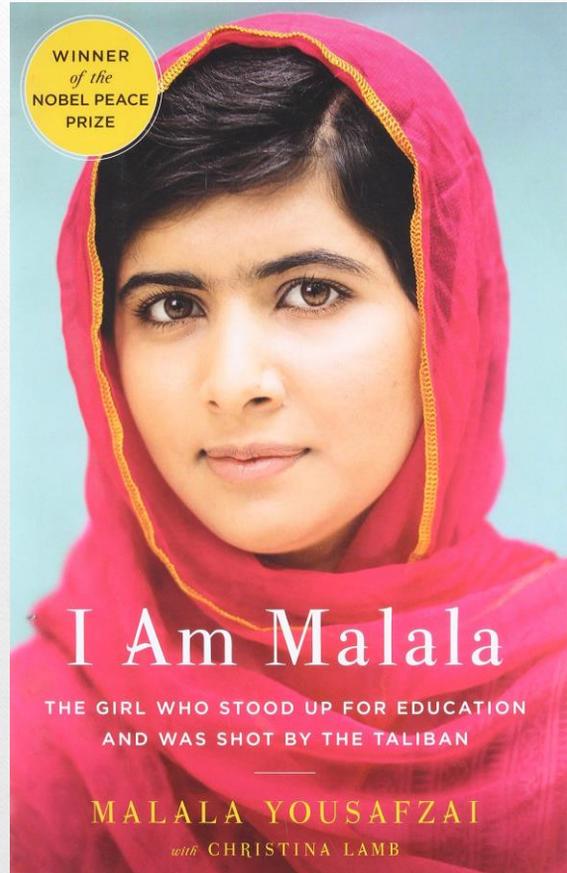
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# **Shifting the Narrative**

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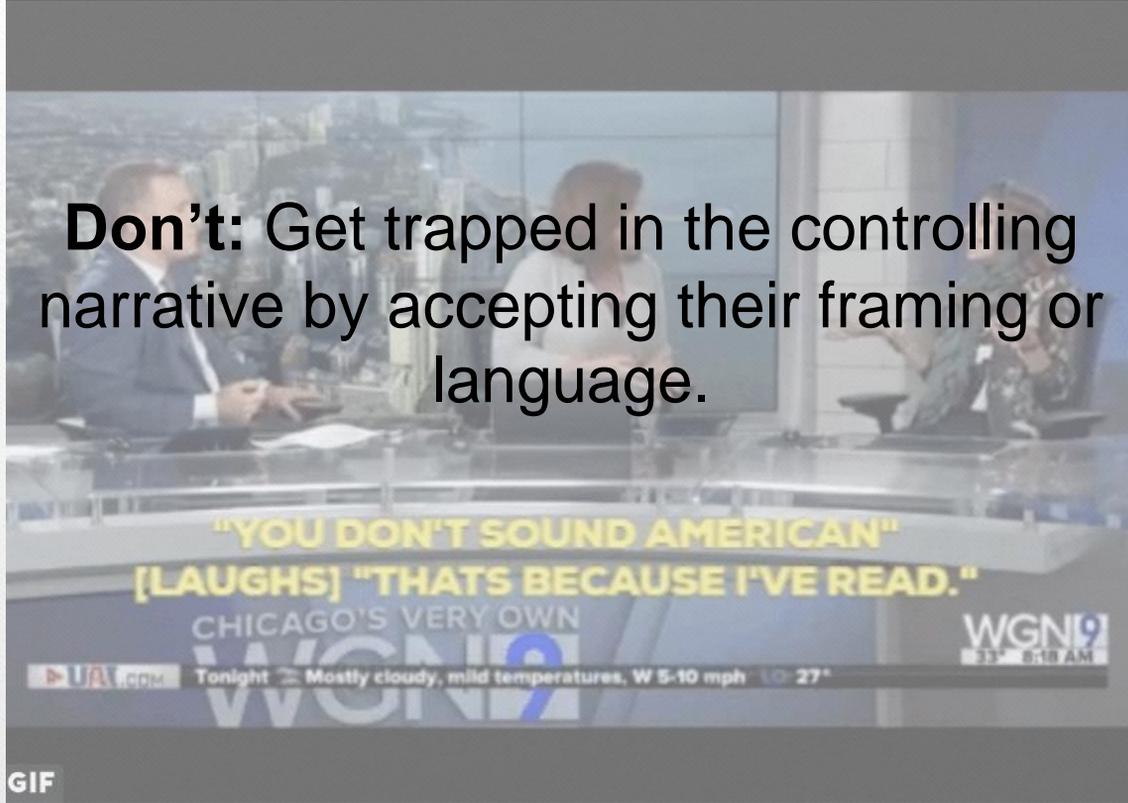
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How would you respond?



**Don't: Stay silent.**

**Don't:** Get trapped in the controlling narrative by accepting their framing or language.



GIF

# Don't: attack the speaker personally.



**Gigi Hadid** 

@GiGiHadid



Laura, I hate to give you the attention, but I need to tell you-  
You're a f\*\*king moron. [twitter.com/lauraloomer/st...](https://twitter.com/lauraloomer/status/916111111111111111)

12:28 PM - Nov 1, 2017

 260K  K people are talking about this



Today 5:18 PM

I don't get it, why is that funny?

Delivered

**Do:** ask questions.



**Mariam Veiszadeh** @MariamVeiszadeh

12h

New Campaign: Reclaiming the word "JIHAD" which means to struggle. #MyJihad is against bigotry (and chocolate). What's yours? Pls RT & share

Retweeted 45 times

Expand



**CAIR-Chicago** @cairchicago

5h

#MyJihad is to always stand up against bigotry and hate. What's yours? #CAIRChicago @CAIRNational

Expand

**Do: listen for keywords.**



**Ahmed Rehab** @Ahmed\_Rehab

5h

Najwa Latif's #Jihad is 2 touch people w/ beautiful music in an industry that doesn't welcome Hijabis [youtu.be/AGIlgO\\_mBoEn](https://youtu.be/AGIlgO_mBoEn) #MyJihad

View media



**CAIR New York** @CAIR\_NY

10h

#MyJihad: A campaign to educate Americans on the proper meaning of Jihad [fb.me/G21j50uu](https://fb.me/G21j50uu)

Today, 7:24 PM

Everyone deserves to live in safety and peace...

Read 7:24 PM

Yes, that makes sense.

**Do:** Talk about a shared, positive worldview.

**Try responding again!**

**1** **PATHOS**  
VALUES | EMOTIONS



**2** **ETHOS**  
CREDIBILITY | TRUST

**3** **LOGOS**  
LOGIC | REASON | PROOF

**Ethos-Pathos-Logos**  
The Three Pillars of Persuasion!

*Ethos*  
  
**Ethos:**  
Appeal to Ethics/  
Credibility/ Morality

**Pathos:**  
Appeal to Emotion/  
Passion  
*Pathos*  


  
*Logos*  
**Logos:**  
Appeal to Logic &  
Factual Reasoning

## Telling an Affirming Story: The Pitfalls of Myth Busting

2015

**Source:** The Opportunity Agenda

**Available at:** <https://opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/telling-affirmative-story>

We're all faced with misleading, inaccurate, and untruthful statements about our issues. And we certainly can't allow misinformation to go unchallenged. But the best way to counter false information is to tell our affirmative story in ways that overcome the other side's falsehoods. By contrast, we should avoid myth busting, or restating the false argument and then explaining why it's wrong.

Research and experience show that this only results in deepening the myth in our audiences' minds. The repetition of misinformation can cause us to better remember it, but we won't necessarily remember that it was wrong information. This is particularly true when information is stated in the affirmative, as happens with the "Myth/Fact" format of disputing untruths, for example: "Myth: The flu vaccine can sometimes cause the flu. Fact: The flu vaccine does not cause the flu." The better approach is to proactively put forward what is true. "The flu vaccine prevents the flu."

### Alternatives to Myth Busting

It's obviously important to get the truth into public discourse, particularly when lies and myths are dominating. But knowing that restating, or even referring to, the myth may only strengthen it, what can we do?

**First, center on the truth, stating it up front.** If you can ignore the myth entirely, without even referring to it, do so.

**Instead of:** There's a myth that affirmative action results in unqualified students being admitted to schools they're not prepared for, but let me explain why that's just a myth.

**Try:** Affirmative action helps to maintain visibly open pathways to opportunity for well-qualified students from a range of backgrounds. We know it works, because of the improved success of all students who've benefited from diverse classrooms and campuses.

**Instead of:** Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes. Fact: All immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other.

**Try:** Immigrants are significant contributors to our economy, both as consumers and taxpayers, through sales, property, income, and other taxes.

**If the lie is dominating headlines, refer to the story, but not the myth.** “Immigration and stories about people coming to this country to work have been in the headlines lately. I want to tell you a few things we know about the mothers, fathers, workers, and so on who make up this group of people.”

**Examine the intention behind the myth being spread.** Is it merely ignorance of the truth? Is it designed to make headlines and bring attention to the myth spreader? Is it based on an untrue but long-standing historic narrative that must be first addressed? Examining why the myth is out there in the first place will help you think through your goals around countering it. In some cases, you might just need to inject some truth into the conversation. In other cases, engaging in the topic at all may only bring more headlines and attention to the myth spreader.

**Remember that an affirmative position is more powerful than a defensive position.** Once you’ve made the decision to engage a messaging opponent on their terms, within a conversation that they started, within their metaphors, you are facing an uphill trek. They have stated something as truth and you are stuck saying “no, it’s not.” That’s not as persuasive as starting with your own truth and your own argument, and then pointing out why other arguments are misguided or incorrect.

#### **More Research and Resources to Avoid Myth Busting**

- **Is Mythbusting Counterproductive?**, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- **When Evidence Backfires**, Simon Oxenham, Big Think
- **The Myth About Mythbusting**, Alan Jenkins, The Opportunity Agenda
- **When a Lie Becomes Memory’s Truth: Memory Distortion After Exposure to Misinformation**, Elizabeth F. Loftus, University of Washington



# COMMUNITIES AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

A project of the American Friends Service Committee



Photo: Felipe Luiz on Unsplash

## How to counter Islamophobia with social media

After you leave this training, you can use social media to continue the work to change the narrative on Islamophobia. You have influence in your community and among your friends and family and now you are part of a network that is working to build more inclusive communities to end Islamophobia. Can you share your knowledge to engage your friends and build this movement?

### Consider who you're talking to

Are your friends and family already politically engaged and concerned about the treatment of Muslim people in our communities? Is this an issue they have been thinking about already? Would thinking about Islamophobia be totally new to them? If you are trying to persuade, it is important to meet people where they are.

### Find the values you share

Maybe your online friends are committed activists who share all of your values. But not necessarily! Think about the people you are trying to reach and what they value and love—whether it is family, human rights, safety in the community, or good food.

### Talk about values when you talk about Islamophobia.

In AFSC's research study, "Opening Lines," we found that certain values resonated with people when talking about Islamophobia. Two frames were most likely to move people to action. One is "everyone deserves safety and peace" and the other is "respecting human rights." The most important thing is to find values that your friends and family share and will respond to.

### Uplift the stories and voices of Muslim people.

Part of challenging Islamophobia is building empathy and connections between members of our communities. Unfortunately, our media tends to present stories about

Muslim people in one-dimensional and stereotypical ways, focusing on either extremism or victimhood. Follow Muslim artists, writers, activists, and thinkers online, share their work, and center Muslim people's voices in the stories you share online.

### Share stories of resistance and resilience to inspire.

Once you have learned about Islamophobia, you will see that many stories that circulate online reinforce hateful and stereotypical ideas about Muslim people. Don't re-post or retweet these stories to argue against them. Research shows that repeating negative stories can accidentally amplify them and put them in front of more eyeballs. What should you post instead? Stories about communities resisting and working together to push back against Islamophobia and hate.

### Offer solutions and actions people can take.

Islamophobia does not just live in individuals' hearts. It is embedded in our communities through policies, especially in profiling and surveillance. But just because it is a deep complex problem doesn't mean people can't take action to make things better. Be sure to talk about specific steps people can take, like contacting elected officials to end surveillance and change policing practices, supporting the efforts of local organizations that serve immigrants, refugees, and Muslims, offering support to Muslim friends and family, and showing up at local marches and rallies in support of inclusive communities.

### And if somebody writes something racist or Islamophobic on social media...

Remember that silence can be dangerous—it communicates approval. Depending on how well you

know the person, you might try to:

- Engage the comment directly by asking questions to break down somebody's entrenched ideas.
- Take the conversation offline—it might be time to ask your friend or family member to coffee to talk face to face.
- Post a fresh comment instead of replying to a negative one. Getting into a back and forth argument with a stranger might not be worth your time. But you can make sure a negative comment doesn't stand unchallenged.
- If someone is posting hate speech, it might be time to block them.

## Get started!

- **Share** your experience at the training on social media, including a group photo, so that your family and friends can see that many people understand how important it is to end Islamophobia, and there is a movement to do so.
- **Display** a "Sanctuary Everywhere" or "We all Belong Here" poster in a public place, take a photo, and share on social media, explaining why it is important to you to show that you care about this issue.
- **Follow** Muslim writers, artists, and activists on social media and amplify their voices by sharing their work.
- **Thank and retweet** people who inspire you and get it right.

## Chicago area's Muslim youth fight stereotypes, suspicion

February 2016

**Source:** Chicago Tribune

**Available at:** <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-muslim-youth-bullying-met-20160204-story.html>

Aasiyah Bhajji knew the boys in her class were just clowning around, but their words stung just the same. As they headed inside from an ultimate Frisbee game at Springman Middle School in Glenview, one of them wrapped his team's colors around his head like a turban.

"Are you trying to go Muslim style, terrorist style?" his buddy asked. Aasiyah's stomach burned. "Stop it," she snapped.

"You can't tell me he doesn't look like Osama bin Laden," the kid shot back, Aasiyah would later recall. She explained to a friend later why she took offense, even though the boys hadn't directly insulted her.

"My religion is me," Aasiyah said.

Aasiyah, 13, and her peers weren't alive for the Sept. 11 attacks on the U.S. Her 16-year-old sister, Saarah, was an infant at the time. But both Glenview teenagers have grown up beneath a cloud of suspicion about their faith. Classmates come to school repeating what they've heard at home or amplify tropes on social media that liken all Muslims to murderers.

During his first visit to an American mosque as president, in Baltimore, on Wednesday, Barack Obama lamented the pain that divisive language on the presidential campaign trail has caused for America's youth. Though religious literacy, cultural awareness and sensitivity have evolved since 2001, political rhetoric and the rise of Islamic State have sparked a new wave of Islamophobia that plays out either in the form of bullying or passive-aggressive comments directed at no one in particular but overheard by those they hurt.

"People don't realize you're Muslim, so they think they can make all kinds of remarks without people judging them," said Aasiyah, who doesn't wear a head scarf.

As a result, some teachers, counselors and school administrators have stepped up to stop bullying before it starts.

Shortly after the Paris terrorist attacks Nov. 13 that killed 130 people, Saarah Bhajji's French teacher at Glenbrook South High School broke out in English, usually forbidden inside his classroom. He didn't want anyone to miss what he had to say on Saarah's behalf.

"How could you think what's going on in Paris and what's going on with ISIS is representative of Islam if you have people like Saarah?" she recalls the teacher, Matt Bertke saying, using a popular acronym for Islamic State. "I didn't have to get up to say it. He did it. I got lucky."

Bertke said he simply could not stay silent. He felt obligated to set an example amid the political invective churning in the 24-hour news cycle and the careless remarks that go viral on Facebook and Twitter.

"Respect — that's the most valuable lesson we could possibly teach," Bertke said in an interview. "On all of these social media, it's so easy to see the hatred out there in the world."

For Mohsin Waraich, 18, a Muslim and a senior at New Trier High School, one of his worst confrontations unfolded on Facebook. When a player on his former park district basketball team posted anti-Muslim messages, Waraich wrote a friendly private message to the boy to correct his misunderstanding of the faith. The former teammate ignored it, and his anti-Muslim posts continued, including that Muslims get offended by cartoons and not beheadings.

"I laughed a little that people are this blinded and not educated about it," Waraich said. "Some kids just want to hear what they're thinking, and some actually want to know."

Waraich isn't afraid to face down people who unfairly tarnish his faith or misrepresent it. He also isn't afraid to fast for Ramadan during football season or take a break from video games at a friend's house to go pray. When New Trier hosted a diversity day for students on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, he did two presentations about Islam.

But for American Muslim teens, learning how to balance their multifaceted identity can be a challenge.

"For every child, identity is really important: 'Who am I? Where do I fit in?'" said Aliyah Bannister, 28, a Muslim guidance counselor at the Islamic Foundation School in Villa Park. "But Muslim kids have to deal with that crisis of identity along with 'What's my ethnic identity? How does that fit in? How does being an American fit in? How does being a Muslim fit in?' You have to resolve all these issues as a youth when you're already feeling that all you want is to blend in."

Najma Adam, a Muslim clinical social worker in Northfield, said the negative encounters, if not addressed, can have a detrimental effect. But they also can strengthen a child's coping mechanisms.

As a mental health professional, Adam said she encourages introspection. So while some young Muslims choose to distance themselves from their faith to avoid conflicts with classmates, she has seen the negative attention empower others to learn precisely what their faith teaches and embrace it.

"(In Islam) to know yourself is to know God," she said. "It's not just a mental health pursuit or a worldly pursuit — it's also a spiritual pursuit.

"This idea of Islamophobia is in some ways building the spiritual character of people," she continued. "Now, for the first time, they're saying 'What does that mean?' That's a good struggle to have."

Hiyam Abusumayah, 15, a Muslim and a freshman at Tinley Park High School, said she considered wearing a hijab in sixth grade but decided then that she wasn't ready. Shortly after the Dec. 2 San Bernardino, Calif., shootings that left 14 dead, a boy in her gym class invited her to join his friends' fight against Islamic State.

When she asked him if he knew what Islamic State was, he said, "it's a bunch of your people, a bunch of towel-headed people."

"It made me realize there are a lot of ignorant people out there, and they're not afraid to come up to you and say something like that," she said.

She doesn't know where she found the composure but told him calmly that it was called a hijab, not a towel, and that her mother wears one. In 2009, shortly after an Army major who is Muslim went on a shooting rampage in Fort Hood, Texas, Hiyam's mother, Amal Abusumayah was approached in a grocery store checkout line by a woman who pulled her headscarf. The woman was charged with a hate crime.

Knowing that future acts of terror could spark new waves of wariness, Amal Abusumayah has been working with officials at Tinley Park District 146 to develop a cultural sensitivity program for teachers and students.

"Some of these students being labeled as terrorists don't even know what terrorist means," Amal Abusumayah said. "They're just trying to complete their day at school or they're getting prepared for a math test or they're thinking about a soccer game they're going to go play. We need to be careful about what is said around other students."

In a poll released by the Pew Research Center the same day Obama spoke at the Baltimore mosque, nearly half of Americans said they thought at least some U.S. Muslims are anti-American. Two-thirds of Americans said people, not religious teachings, are to blame when violence is committed in the name of faith. However, when respondents were asked which religion they consider troubling, Islam was the most common answer.

Abusumayah said she urges her children to ask others who make anti-Muslim remarks why they have these ideas.

"There always has to be a positive coming out of this," she said. "When you see somebody hating on you or trying to bully you for something, it's because they're uneducated and they need answers, and this is their way of dealing with it."

Bannister said she encourages kids to develop a repertoire of snappy retorts that don't get them in trouble and leave bullies scratching their heads.

"With kids it's kind of like a jungle," she said. "You have to show the other children you're not one to be messed with. Bullies go after the kids who are weak and not going to say anything back."

She counsels Muslim parents to prepare their children for the potential of being bullied, and to ensure they know the blame belongs to the bully, not them. Denying the problem or avoiding the issue won't prevent others from confronting their children.

Hiyam is still nervous about wearing the hijab, especially given what happened to her mother. But she plans to give it another try this summer.

"When you wear the hijab, everyone knows you're a Muslim," she said. "They're going to pay more attention to you because you stand out and you're different. I want to stand out and I want to be different. If they think Islam is horrible, I want them to come up to me and ask me about it. I want everyone to know that Islam isn't terrorists."