

Did you put out this statement in response to specific incidents at Aurora?

Yes. People are made to feel unwelcome in various ways (sometimes subtly and often unintentionally) in theaters and workplaces and public spaces throughout the country, and Aurora is not immune to that just because we're in Berkeley. The specific incidents that led to this statement have fallen under the definition of "[microaggressions](#)" as opposed to overtly hateful attacks, and many of them have come from apparently well-intentioned patrons. These incidents have made audience members, artists, and staff members feel unwelcome at Aurora. One of the primary purposes of our statement is to help well-intentioned people understand the possible impact of their statements and actions.

This statement feels condescending, or inappropriate, or makes me feel uncomfortable. Why is Aurora doing this?

We wish that this conversation were unnecessary, and that no one in our audience needed a reminder about the effect of their behavior. We want everyone to feel welcome at Aurora, and that includes you. Our hope is that some people will read the statement and be inspired to think harder about the effect their actions might have on other people. We've received an outpouring of positive feedback for the statement -- many people are thrilled to see that Aurora is attempting to surface and address these issues. It's a complicated and messy and difficult and often uncomfortable conversation, but it's one that we believe is tremendously important for our community, and as the storyteller for our community we feel a responsibility to actively engage with the conversations that inspire and define us.

I like to make conversation with people. How can I avoid accidentally offending someone? How do I know if something is inappropriate to say?

A common way to make conversation with a stranger or new acquaintance is to notice something about the other person and comment on it -- complimenting their shoes or hair, for example. This is often a great way to start a conversation, but it gets complicated when the comment is coming from a member of the "dominant culture" and the subject of the comment has a historical connection to marginalization. In examples like this -- which are extremely common, because people tend to notice and comment on differences -- the comment can inadvertently (or purposefully) serve as a reminder of that history of marginalization, which can understandably make the recipient feel unwelcome. A typical example is a white person commenting on a black woman's hair, or asking a person of color about their family's country of origin. Though this is often done with good intentions, it is also a common tactic that has been used by people purposefully trying to make someone feel unwelcome. Instead, try starting conversations about the content of the play you're seeing, or anything else that avoids pointing out someone's differences.

How am I supposed to avoid making assumptions and also avoid asking questions about the same thing? Isn't that contradictory?

While it certainly makes sense to ask questions about differences in order to avoid making assumptions, it's important to remember that sometimes those questions create discomfort for the person being asked. Rather than choosing between making assumptions and asking questions that might make someone uncomfortable, a third option is to simply accept that you might not get to know a person's country of origin, for example, or the gender they were assigned at birth. Taking on the discomfort of not knowing can be worth giving the other person a break from the discomfort of being asked. And there are so many other things to talk about! In the long run, making folks feel welcome and accepted is worth making some small adjustments in our own expectations.

I think I might have accidentally offended someone when I was just trying to make conversation or offer a compliment. What should I do?

If you realize in the moment that you caused a negative impact, often the best thing to do is to quickly apologize and move on. Don't make a huge deal out of it, and don't make it about you. Everyone makes mistakes, and mistakes are an opportunity to learn. Accept that you might not get an immediate statement of forgiveness. Acknowledge, apologize, and move on.

Some responses we have received to our Commitment to the Community statement:

This is BEAUTIFUL!!! THANK YOU and the Aurora Board and staff for this affirmative and respectful statement!
BRAVA!!! BRAVO!!!

Thank you for sending a copy of the mission statement and the outline of commitment to the community. I like it!

Wonderful statement. Thank you from a long time Aurora Theatre goer.

Thank you so much!! This is really appreciated - as someone who has been asked "are you _____?" by total strangers, followed by 40 guesses as to my ethnicity.

Thank you for setting a standard for Aurora and the rest of the larger community!