

Cultivate awareness of their biases	Develop cross-group friendships in their own lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are human and therefore influenced by psychological biases, like the fundamental attribution error, when we assume that others who behave in a certain way do so because of their character (a fixed trait) rather than in response to environmental circumstances. In-group bias leads us to assign positive characteristics and motivations to people who are similar to us. <i>Biases</i> like these are natural, used as cognitive shorthand for making quick social judgments in ambiguous situations, especially those involving people from unfamiliar ethnic or social groups. They become a problem when we're not aware of their impact on other people. And if we're part of a majority group with more social, economic, or political power than a minority one, then accumulated unconscious bias can be extremely destructive, limiting the life opportunities and hurting the well-being of the minority group. Many researchers believe that becoming more aware of our biases can help us improve our interactions with others, decrease our sense of unease in interracial contexts, and make better decisions. Though most of this research has been done with other professional groups or the general public, the same lessons are likely to apply to teachers. However, many teachers feel pressures not to cop to those biases, perhaps out of fear they will be accused of racism. This leaves them blind to the ways that biases work at an unconscious level. Pretending to be colorblind is <i>not</i> helpful and in fact adhering to a color-blind philosophy has been shown to increase implicit bias, at least in college students. Admitting that we are all subject to biases creates a safer space to examine them more carefully and to take steps to fight them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While it's important to take steps in the classroom, the relationships we form outside of the classroom can also have an impact on bias. <i>Cross-group friendships</i> have been shown in several studies to decrease stress in intergroup situations, to decrease prejudice toward outgroup members, and to decrease one's preference for social hierarchy or domination over lower-status groups. These findings alone might encourage teachers to seek out cross-group friendships in their lives so that they can be more receptive to the diverse students they find in their classrooms. Another reason for teachers to consider developing cross-group friendships is that they may influence their students to do the same. When people see cross-group friendships working out in positive ways, they tend to be more willing to engage in cross-group friendships themselves. In addition, positive cross-group friendships can have contagion effects in other people within social groups, turning whole communities into warmer, more receptive spaces for cross-group interactions. All of this bodes well for teachers role-modeling the kind of behavior they want to see in their students. Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean teachers should indiscriminately approach someone just because they are from a different racial group. Instead, teachers can reach out to colleagues at work, or get involved in activities or perhaps attend events where people with different backgrounds and perspectives come together for a common cause. Developing friendships can be one of the best ways to break down barriers of prejudice, and it's more easily done when people have some common interests.

Practice mindfulness and loving-kindness	Work to increase empathy and empathic communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mindfulness practices</i>—such as paying attention in a nonjudgmental way to one’s breath or other sensations—has been shown to decrease stress in teachers, which can indirectly have an effect on reducing bias. But according to some research, mindfulness may also have a direct effect on bias reduction as well. • In one study, young white participants who listened to a 10-minute audiotope with instructions in mindfulness showed less implicit bias towards blacks and older people than those who listened to a 10-minute discussion of nature. This suggests that nonjudgmental awareness, even when not specifically focused on reducing prejudice, can help reduce unconscious biases. • Loving-kindness meditation—a practice that involves consciously sending out compassionate thoughts toward others—may also help. In a recent study, the random assignment of a short-term loving-kindness meditation reduced implicit bias toward a targeted group, though it didn’t decrease implicit bias for other groups not targeted by the meditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Empathy</i>—the ability to understand another’s perspective and emotions—is important in all human social encounters, including teaching. Yet, often teachers have little understanding of the communities where their students live and have trouble understanding their perspectives, leading them to treat these students more harshly. • One solution: learning about the lives of students and showing that you care. At least one study has found that actively trying to take the perspective of another person—as opposed to trying to be “objective”—increased one’s ability to not fall prey to stereotypical views of others. Actively inducing empathy for another person has been tied to a willingness to consider environmental circumstances more closely when handing out punishments for misbehavior. And, one recent study has found that training teachers in empathy cut down student suspension rates in half. • Though perhaps more research has been done on empathy in other professionals (such as physicians and police officers), teachers may want to take note of the ways that they have learned to increase their empathy through a combination of stress reduction, learning how to manage difficult emotions, and practicing empathic communication. Treating students with kindness and consideration is a sure way to bring out kindness in them, too.