1. [AAFP](https://www.aafp.org/home.html)
2. [Publications](https://www.aafp.org/pubs.html)
3. [FPM](https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm.html)
4. [Blogs](https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm/blogs.html)
5. [Quick Tips](https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm/blogs/inpractice.html)
6. [How to avoid bias in patient care](https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm/blogs/inpractice/entry/bias_in_patient_care.html)

[](https://www.aafp.org/content/brand/aafp/pubs/fpm/blogs/inpractice.html)

How to avoid bias in patient care

Implicit bias is the unconscious collection of stereotypes and attitudes that individuals develop toward certain groups of people. If left unchecked, it can affect patient relationships and care decisions.

For example, “similarity bias” can cause individuals to favor others who are like them, to show greater empathy toward them, and to use actions, words, and body language to signal feelings of relatedness. “Experience bias” can lead individuals to overestimate how much others see things the same way they do, to believe they are less vulnerable to bias than others, and to assume that their intentions are clear and obvious to others.

To avoid bias when caring for patients, the following tactics can help.

**Consider other perspectives.** How do things look or feel from another point of view? For example, maybe your practice’s waiting room is filled with images of people from only one race, so patients of other races don’t feel represented.

**Slow down.** To recognize biases, don’t rush through an interaction and respond instinctively. Instead, pause and think about what you’re feeling, why you might be reacting in a biased way, and how to react better next time.

**Get to know the individual.** Gather specific information about the other person to prevent stereotyping. You can likely find a shared experience (e.g., parenting), common interest (e.g., sports teams), or mutual purpose (e.g., surviving cancer) that will help you build empathy and trust.

Here are a few resources that can help:

[Implicit Bias Training](https://www.aafp.org/family-physician/patient-care/the-everyone-project/toolkit/implicit-bias.html) — A health care team training guide from the AAFP.

[Project Implicit](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/) — Implicit association tests by Harvard University.

“[Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3603687/)” — A multi-faceted intervention for reducing implicit race bias published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

[The Equity and Empowerment Lens](https://www.multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens) — A quality improvement tool for creating more racial equity at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

Read the full *FPM* article: “[How to Identify, Understand, and Unlearn Implicit Bias in Patient Care](https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2019/0700/p29.html).”

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