

# Position Paper: Racism, Bullying, and Targeting at Telos and in Youth Residential Programs

*Telos Programs' Commitment to Emotional Safety and Zero Tolerance for Staff Misconduct*

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## I. Statement of Principle

Telos Programs affirms the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. We believe that meaningful therapeutic work cannot occur in an environment where racism, bullying, harassment, or targeting is tolerated.

We maintain zero tolerance for racism, discriminatory behavior, or bullying by staff. Any employee who engages in such conduct (or who is passive in allowing it to occur among students) will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

An emotionally safe environment is not optional in youth treatment. It is foundational.

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## II. Why Emotional Safety Matters

Research consistently demonstrates that racism, bullying, and identity-based targeting cause measurable harm to young people—particularly those already struggling with trauma, anxiety, depression, or identity development.

### Documented Harms of Racism and Bullying

- Increased rates of depression and anxiety
- Elevated suicide risk and self-harm behaviors
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms
- Academic decline
- Social withdrawal and impaired peer development
- Long-term physical health effects due to chronic stress

The following research bodies summarize these findings:

- [American Psychological Association](#) – Research on discrimination and youth mental health

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) – Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance data on bullying and suicide
- [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) – Reports on the health effects of racism
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) – Policy statements on the psychological harm of racism in children

Representative research summaries:

- [APA: “Discrimination and racial stress are associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems in youth.”](#)
- [CDC: Youth who experience bullying are significantly more likely to report suicidal ideation and attempts.](#)
- [AAP \(2019 Policy Statement\): Racism is a “social determinant of health” with direct mental health consequences.](#)

These findings are not theoretical. Many of the young people we serve arrive with histories of trauma, social rejection, marginalization, or developmental immaturity that make them particularly vulnerable to further harm.

For this reason, Telos treats racism and bullying not merely as behavioral infractions, but as serious threats to therapeutic safety.

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### **III. The Clinical Reality: Developmental Immaturity**

Telos acknowledges an important clinical truth:

Many adolescents and young adults struggle with:

- Poor impulse control
- Underdeveloped empathy
- Social immaturity
- Trauma-driven reactivity
- Learned prejudice or culturally inherited bias

Some may say insensitive, offensive, or discriminatory things without fully understanding the impact.

While we cannot prevent every immature or impulsive remark, we will never condone or normalize it.

Treatment is not a space where harmful behavior is excused. It is a space where harmful behavior is addressed, repaired, and transformed.

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## IV. Zero Tolerance for Staff Conduct

Staff members hold positions of authority and trust. Therefore:

- Any staff member who engages in racist, discriminatory, or bullying behavior will face immediate investigation.
- Any staff member who witnesses such behavior and fails to intervene may be subject to discipline.
- Discipline may include retraining, suspension, or termination depending on severity.

We expect staff to:

- Model inclusive language
- Intervene immediately in targeting behavior
- Protect emotionally vulnerable students
- Report incidents transparently
- Participate in ongoing training in inclusion and belonging

Emotional safety is a professional obligation.

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## V. Client Targeting Policy

When a student engages in racial slurs, homophobic slurs, discriminatory remarks, harassment, or targeting behavior, Telos responds with both protection and clinical intervention.

### A. Immediate Response

- Staff intervene immediately.
- The targeted student is protected and supported.
- An incident report is completed.
- Clinical leadership is notified.

### B. Targeting Watch

Clients who engage in identity-based targeting will be placed on **Targeting Watch**, a structured accountability and safety protocol.

Under Targeting Watch:

1. Certain privileges may be temporarily placed on hold.

2. The client remains in closer proximity to staff supervision.
3. The behavior is processed in individual therapy.
4. The client participates in peer accountability discussions when clinically appropriate.
5. Restorative repair is pursued when appropriate and when the harmed party is willing.

Targeting Watch is not punitive in nature. It is corrective, protective, and therapeutic.

The goals are:

- Accountability
  - Empathy development
  - Behavioral change
  - Restoration of community safety
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## **VI. Restorative and Therapeutic Repair**

Where appropriate, Telos utilizes restorative principles:

- Understanding the impact of harm
- Naming the wrongdoing clearly
- Making amends when appropriate
- Rebuilding trust through consistent behavioral change

However, restorative conversations are never forced upon the harmed party. Protection of the targeted individual remains paramount.

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## **VII. Culture of Inclusion and Belonging**

Telos works proactively to cultivate belonging through:

- Ongoing staff training in inclusion and bias awareness
- Clear behavioral expectations
- Transparent reporting systems
- Clinical programming that promotes empathy and emotional maturity

We recognize that perfection is an aspirational goal. Emotional safety requires vigilance, humility, and continual improvement.

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## VIII. Our Commitment

Telos Programs commits to:

- Zero tolerance for racist or discriminatory behavior by staff
- Immediate intervention in student targeting
- Clear accountability structures
- Clinical pathways for growth and repair
- Protection of vulnerable individuals
- Ongoing improvement in inclusion practices

An emotionally safe environment is not merely a compliance requirement.

It is the soil in which healing grows.

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### References & Research Resources

- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Stress in America™: The Impact of Discrimination*.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2019). *The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health*.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*.