

RACISM: WHAT CAN I DO?

WHITE PEOPLE

The following information is adapted from a “Now Art” project by damali ayo. The full version is available at www.fixracism.com.

1 RECOGNIZE IT

Recognize white is a color and a race.

Acknowledge racism exists . . . Understand that it is not all about slavery. It is important that white people understand the benefits reaped from historical and current racial practices. Notice where those practices continue, and question if you participate in them. Understand race and racism present complexities and contradictions. Do not try to reduce or simplify.

Take notice . . . Observe how others are treated. Getting in the habit of notices who is around you (and who isn't).

2 LISTEN

Listen . . . Listen to people of color. Just listen. When a person of color is sharing their experiences, resist any urge to jump in and minimize or excuse their feelings. Understand that when a person of color talks to you about racism, they are trusting you. Treat that trust with the utmost respect. **If you offend someone (we all do), instead of saying, “I don’t know why you’re upset,” ask, “Help me understand why you’re upset.”**

Honor experience . . . Remember people of color are sharing their experiences, not merely voicing opinion. Experience trumps opinion. Remember people of color have experiences you don't. being defensive gets in the way of listening.

Honor emotions . . . When people mislabel outrage as anger, it scares other people away from doing anti-racism work and gives ammunition to racists.

Not everyone is either white or a person of color . . . Let people self-define and respect their identities.

Don't impose . . . Think about what you say before you say it. Don't bring up racism just because you're talking to a person of color. If you do have a racial consciousness, seek to deepen understanding instead of getting to a “finished” place.

3 EDUCATE YOURSELF

Know our history . . . And make sure that your kids know the facts. Make sure your kids' teachers know the facts, too.

Do it right . . . Fight the urge to immediately tell a person of color that you have learned something new. Learn about people of color because they are part of your country and society, not because they are “exotic.” Do not view people of color as “different,” as if white people are the “norm.” Study the differences between racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Acknowledge and examine our society's stereotypes . . . Assume you've been influenced by them (we all have). Work on stereotypes of, or prejudices toward, others you may have. Deconstruct your view and see where they have been influenced by internalized racism and strive to overcome those views.

4 BROADEN EXPERIENCES

CAUTION: COMPLETE STEPS 1 – 3 FIRST

Learn about other cultures . . . Not by asking questions, but by spending time with people.

Get out there . . . Put yourself into environments predominantly attended by people of color. Make a commitment to participate in an activity that helps you to shift your awareness.

Make new friends . . . Diversify your circle of friends. Stereotypes have power when we don't know people as individuals.

Raise smart kids . . . Expose them to differences early on. Actively encourage your children and all children to develop relationships with people of color, both adults and children.

5 TAKE ACTION

Consider racism a problem you can help solve . . . Always confront racism and inappropriate behavior/language when you see, hear, read, or experience it. Encourage others to talk about racism. Learning “what not to say” is not the goal.

In the media . . . When a racist incident occurs in the public eye, consider writing a letter to the editor of your local paper.

At work . . . Whatever your place of profession, eliminate institutionalized practices that are discriminatory toward people of color. Maintain a wide range of employees.

In the community . . . Become involved in an organization that is involved with communities of color.

With your kids . . . Since people often live in mostly segregated parts of any city/town, integrate the books and toys in your children's school, and at home. Promoting a racially integrated educational environment is best for white kids as well as kids of color.

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1 BE REAL

Be yourself . . . The best way to eliminate negative images and create positive images is to be who you REALLY are.

Don't play into negative stereotypes . . . You don't have to live down to negative expectations. Practice self-love. Teach your children to love themselves and others for who they are. Be who you are, not what you see on TV.

Love yourself and one another . . . You have too much in common to not support each other. Hold each other up.

2 SPEAK OUT

Remember that you are not powerless . . . Do not be fearful of speaking up if a person, regardless of age or status, says a racist comment or joke.

Share with white people . . . Provide resources and knowledge when they ask what they should do.

3 EDUCATE YOURSELF

Know our history . . . And make sure that your kids know the facts. Make sure your kids' teachers know the facts, too. Teach the children in your life from an early age to have pride in who they are and their race.

Create role models . . . So kids have someone to look up to and hold close to their heart when they face racism.

Acknowledge and examine our society's stereotypes . . . Assume you've been influenced by them (we all have). Work on stereotypes of, or prejudice toward, others you that you may have. Deconstruct your views and see where they have been influenced by internalized racism and strive to overcome those views.

4 BUILD TIES

Join together as people of color . . . Know the interconnected history of people of color in the United States. Put yourself into environments where you are likely to get to know more people of color that are of a race different than your own.

Do not talk about any other group the way you would not want others talking about you . . . Instead, make an effort to learn about all groups.

Not everyone is either white or a person of color . . . Let people self-define and respect their identities.

Make a commitment to recruit white people . . . Cultivate relationships with white people. Create a balanced friendship that includes real sharing about non-race issues as well as an alliance focused on fighting racism.

5 TAKE CARE

- Know that there are white people who care about eliminating racism.
- Train white friends to interrupt racism so when you are together the responsibility doesn't always fall to you.
- Appreciate progress as people are learning
- Walk away when you are too tired, too angry, or just don't feel like confronting racism. Make your health and sanity a priority. A good balance is to walk away but let people know why you are walking away. Then you've said something without getting into a long or frustrating discussion.
- Have a safe person/group where you can vent your anger, sadness, or rage over racism when emotions arise.
- Make sure you have a regular outlet to replenish your energy. Racism takes a toll on your body and mind.