

Co-workers facing racial trauma together



Racial trauma is a stress reaction that results from ongoing exposure to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. Both personal and collective experiences as well as what is heard in the media can impact racial trauma.

Passive-aggressive actions, omission or exclusion due to the color of someone's skin, failure to intervene or offer support during overt racism, physical harm or injury, humiliating or shaming based on race, and unintentionally harmful comments, can all contribute to racial trauma. Examples of racism that exist today include but are not limited to: being pulled over by police, being followed around a store, not being offered a job or being told to go back to one's country simply because of one's race.

Creating a culture of support

Co-workers have the opportunity to foster a culture of inclusivity, belonging, and support by having honest and direct conversations around race issues, and by caring for oneself and others in the face of racial trauma. Utilizing best practices for having difficult conversations in the workplace can facilitate productive conversations around race and discrimination leading to a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

Best practices for difficult conversations

- Remain calm, respectful and reasonable.
- Choose words and body language that communicate respect and compassion.
- Communicate clearly and directly.
- Maintain an intention to compassionately understand others.
- Have empathy for perspectives different than your own.
- Listen actively. Be aware of feelings being expressed, as well as words spoken.
- Avoid assuming negative things about the other person's intentions.
- If you're unsure, seek clarification.

Communication pitfalls to avoid

- Refusing to acknowledge and appreciate the perspective of those who hold a different perspective than you.
- Using an aggressive, confrontational, and non-conciliatory demeanor.
- Refusing to listen.
- Taking a rigid, inflexible approach. It's your way or the "wrong" way.
- Avoiding the true nature of the issue for fear of a negative outcome.
- Prioritizing "winning" or being "right" over working towards healing and a supportive, inclusive environment.

Caring for yourself

- Acknowledge what you are feeling. It can be tempting to try and ignore feelings of pain, however doing so may actually intensify them. Journaling, talking with a good friend, or reaching out to a mental health clinician for support can all be helpful.
- Connect with others in your community who have had similar experiences. Support one another.
- Take care of your basic needs. Exercise, eat well, get enough sleep, take time to relax.
- Channel anger into actions that can make a positive impact. Join an activist group, vote and encourage others to do so, or be there for others who have also experienced racial trauma.

Caring for others

- Listen. Be a safe person for others to talk to about their concerns.
- Be purposeful about learning what others have experienced and expressing compassion.
- Take action to promote inclusion, diversity and a sense of belonging for all in your workplace and at home.

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