

Examples of Racial Microaggressions How Do You Respond?

Microaggression	Why it's offensive?	What to say?
<p><i>You're so articulate.</i></p> <p><i>You don't sound black.</i></p>	<p>This remark seems like a compliment, but it's offensive to many Black people. It assumes that Black people do not sound articulate or speak proper English. The Black person didn't fit the person's offensive stereotype, so the person complimented them for surprising them.</p>	<p>I know you meant that as a compliment, but unfortunately that connects to a larger history of people being surprised that Black people can speak so well. It's best to respond to the content of what was said rather than on someone's general speech.</p>
<p><i>Can I touch your hair?</i></p>	<p>Curiosity is normal, but crossing personal boundaries is not. The question may seem innocent, but it can make a Black person or a POC feel as if she's an animal on display — since the perpetrator likely wouldn't ask that of a person of any other race.</p>	<p>Inform them that such a question is an invasion of personal space. It also taps into a history of Black people being treated as curiosities and animals, without full rights to their own bodies. Tell them they can learn about such differences online. They can also compliment the person instead or ask them why he/she felt the need to ask that question.</p>
<p><i>When I look at you, I don't see color.</i></p>	<p>The intention is inclusive, but POC are saying their color and identity matter and impact how they experience the world. But the statement is offensive because it could indicate that you aren't listening to or are dismissing what people of other races are telling you.</p>	<p>We need to try different tactics because saying we're colorblind doesn't acknowledge the implicit bias that still goes on and the systemic laws and policies that have made life harder for Black people and other POC to feel like they're able to fully survive and thrive. To say, 'I'm colorblind' is to dismiss, ignore and make invisible the pain and suffering of POC.</p>
<p><i>Clutching your purse, dodging while passing a Black man or unnecessarily calling the police.</i></p>	<p>These behaviors suggest that Black men are menacing. They stem from fear that responds to a stereotype that classifies Black men as threats.</p>	<p>If you're present during this situation and tensions are high, de-escalate the situation by asking the perpetrator to take deep breaths and explain to you what makes them think the person is a threat to them. Doing so invites them to reconsider and reprogram their gut response before calling anyone.</p> <p>If authorities do come, stick with the person perceived as a threat through that experience, speak on their behalf regarding what actually happened and act as a witness for what happens during questioning.</p>

Examples of Racial Microaggressions Continued

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<i>Calling a Black woman or man 'sister' or 'brother,' respectively.</i>	<p>If the perpetrator doesn't give everyone these nicknames, either statement claims kinship that probably isn't there. It's claiming familiarity and intimacy and it's actually in a situation where the White person is trying to gloss over real hierarchy of status or conflict.</p> <p>If the person hasn't really interacted with Black people before, the person may also be unconsciously overcompensating when trying to make a connection by assuming that's how Black people talk.</p>	<p>Ask the person why he/she said it and explain the significance. Then, suggest he/she should not call a Black person "sister" or "brother" unless that person invited him to do so.</p>
<i>White privilege doesn't exist.</i>	<p>Differences in racial privilege show up at a personal level, too. White privilege also means not having to stress over whether your hairstyle will cost you a job or even an interview. It's not having to worry whether your skin color was the reason for your mortgage application denial.</p>	<p>Ask them if they've ever had any of these experiences because of the color of their skin.</p>
<i>I'm not racist. I have a Black friend.</i>	<p>This statement equates racism with prejudice. Prejudice is an attitude based on stereotypes. Racism entails the policies and practices that uphold ideas of White people as superior and Black people as inferior.</p> <p>You may not be racially prejudiced, but knowing Black people doesn't keep you from engaging in discriminatory behavior or failing to challenge racist practices.</p>	<p>Saying I can't be racist is denying the larger social context in which all of us are living. It's not about our individual intentions [or biases]. It's about our collective work.</p> <p>So even if we have the best of intentions, as long as we're supporting racist policies and ideas that undergird those policies, all of us can be racist.</p>