



# **The BRAVE guide to race and inclusive conversations at work**

A practical toolkit for employees and leaders

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## About this toolkit

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing racial bias in the workplace, not only as part of their commitment to equity and inclusion, but also as part of their legal obligation to prevent and respond to discrimination under [human rights legislation](#). However, it is essential to build a strong understanding of race, racial discrimination and anti-racism before launching into projects or initiatives. Without this foundation, well-meaning efforts can unintentionally cause harm. Thoughtful conversations about race and racism can deepen understanding of historical contexts and lived and living experiences, helping to create environments where everyone can thrive.

An important distinction in these conversations is recognizing that being anti-racist is different from being non-racist. A non-racist individual typically maintains a neutral stance and is not actively engaged in issues of race. While this might seem harmless, it overlooks how inaction can contribute to the continuation of systemic racism. In contrast, an anti-racist actively challenges racist attitudes, policies, and structures, working to dismantle systemic oppression and promote equity. This means confronting personal biases, acknowledging racial disparities, and committing to daily, intentional action. The good news is that these are choices we can make moment to moment, and situation to situation.

While this toolkit focuses on conversations about race, the elements provided are used as a concrete example of broader, often complex conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). The BRAVE framework and strategies presented below are designed to support a wide range of difficult conversations, whether related to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or other equity-related topics. We encourage teams to adapt and apply the tools to suit their specific contexts.

Created in 2025, this toolkit has been updated with recent research and resources to bring fresh perspectives and insights that help organizations move from performative to transformative change. To accomplish this, the toolkit is organized into six sections:

### **BRAVE framework**

- Build intention
- Respect the sensitivity of the topic
- Acknowledge how the past impacts the present
- Validate lived experiences
- Emphasize how to build race-conscious organizations

Each section offers key considerations, reflection questions, and helpful resources. We encourage all teams to treat this document as a starting point and to use the table of contents to find sections most aligned with your organization's context and goals.

*Please note that these conversations are rarely linear. Teams may find themselves revisiting sections as new insights arise, or circumstances evolve. While this process can take time, leaning into its dynamic nature will lead to deeper engagement and lasting change.*

## Important terminology

One very important aspect of conversations around race is terminology and having a mutual understanding of terms before embarking into conversations. Especially because there are many commonly used terms during conversations about race along with multiple definitions and ways of approaching each term. Therefore, a shared definition is necessary to reach mutual understanding. We have defined these terms based on research and conversations within our team, but your teammates may have different perspectives. We encourage your organization to explore different understandings of the following terms to spark healthy discussions.

**Race:** Idea (or social construct), created to separate people based on the assumption that one group of people is superior to another group. It is a complex term with constantly shifting meanings that was built from ideas that skull shapes and brain sizes determined intelligence and is not grounded in biology. Current understandings of race are shaped by societal and historical influences largely based on differentiating people by ascribed characteristics, or characteristics you are born with, such as skin colour, hair texture, and facial features.<sup>i</sup>

**Racialization:** Process where ideas of race are used to organize or differentiate spaces that are not actually racial in nature. This process categorizes everyone based on the particular racialized categories present in a given time and location. The common element of all racialization processes is the belief in a racial hierarchy, where certain groups are seen as superior to other groups of people.

**Racism:** Set of beliefs that organizes our lives and life chances based on the idea of race. Basically, racism assumes that there are foundational and fundamental differences between groups of people with different characteristics. Based on these assumed differences, decisions are made to continue and enhance those differences in such a way that people in power benefit and simultaneously justify their positions of power.

**Difference between BRAVE framework and Brave Spaces:** The BRAVE framework is a structured tool that offers step-by-step guidance for facilitating conversations about racism and equity in the workplace. Brave Spaces, on the other hand, are environments built on principles such as respect, accountability, and vulnerability, where participants are encouraged to engage in open and sometimes uncomfortable dialogue.

## *To take your understanding deeper...*

Many conversations about race lack systemic clarity. They tend to focus on individual beliefs or attitudes, rather than acknowledging the broader systems of institutionalized power at play. Racism is not only a personal ideology but also a structure upheld by policies, practices, and laws that are normalized and embedded in everyday life. These systems do not function on their own. Decisions are made and maintained by individuals, institutions, and governments that benefit from and reinforce racial inequities. Racism is therefore not simply about holding biased assumptions. It is the process of turning those assumptions into actions through systems that determine who has access to resources, safety, and power. Addressing racism requires recognizing both the beliefs and the structures that sustain inequality and understanding who is responsible for creating and upholding them.

Understanding these key terms is foundational, but it's only the beginning. To move from awareness to meaningful change, it's essential to structure these conversations in a way that promotes safety, respect, and actionable outcomes. The BRAVE framework provides a structured approach to framing discussions about racism and racial discrimination. This toolkit adapts and expands upon the BRAVE framework to guide organizations in transforming conversations into concrete actions.

## BRAVE framework

The structure of this toolkit follows the BRAVE framework. It was developed by Dr. Enrica N. Rugg and Dr. Derek Avery as an approach to frame conversations about racism and racial discrimination.<sup>ii</sup> BRAVE is an acronym for Build, Respect, Acknowledge, Validate, and Emphasize, which we have then adapted to fit the needs of this document.<sup>iii</sup>

### Build

“Build the intention, focus, and safety needed to have honest conversations about race.”<sup>iv</sup> This sets up participants’ expectations. This means:

- Define the purpose of the conversation and the audience
- Determine the scope of the conversation
- Provide ground rules for participants

### Respect

“Respect the sensitivity of the topic while challenging people to go beyond the superficial”.<sup>v</sup> This sets a strong foundation for participants to engage in a productive way. This means:

- Define what the term “respect” means to you and what that looks like to your team
- Establish strategies for everyone to participate and be heard
- Create a strategy for pausing the conversation should it become unproductive

### Acknowledge

“Acknowledge the uncomfortable realities of the past and the present”.<sup>vi</sup> This provides context to your conversations. This means:

- Talk about the systemic barriers and what that looks like in your organization.
- Make connections to the past and how it manifests in the present.

### Validate

“Validate and accept the experiences of your racialized colleagues”.<sup>vii</sup> This shows participants how racism is present in their everyday lives. This means:

- Recognize the lived experiences of your teammates
- Understand that the stories shared might not reflect your own experiences, and trust that they are real and meaningful

### Emphasize

“Emphasize how your organization will translate the findings of these conversations into actions”.<sup>viii</sup> This ensures that these conversations lead to change. This means:

- Integrate the comments and feedback from your colleagues into policies and strategies
- Consult with organizations to stay updated on best practices

## Reflection questions

- One question about vocabulary: how do you understand each of the terms race, racialization, and racism?
- When conversations around racial topics happen in your workplace, what stands out to you? Are there parts of these discussions that make you feel more comfortable? Are there parts of these discussions that make you feel unsure?
- Have you heard of the BRAVE framework before? Which parts of it seem clear to you, and which parts might need more explanation or support to understand better?

## Helpful resources

- [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#) / [Guide pour avoir des conversations courageuses sur le racisme et la discrimination](#), Government of Canada
- [Anti-Racism & Organizational Change: A Guide for Employers](#) / [Lutte contre le racisme et changement organisationnel : Un guide pour les employeurs](#), Canadian Human Rights Commission
- [How to talk about race at work](#), CIPD
- [A Guide to courageous conversations on Racism and Discrimination](#), Government of Canada
- [Conversation Guide: Talking about Race, Racism, Care, and Caregiving](#), Caring Across Generations
- [Talking About Race](#), The National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [Racisme émergeant en milieu de travail: Preuves qualitatives et quantitatives d'une discrimination systémique](#), Commission ontarienne des droits de la personne
- [Les mots pour parler de race et d'ethnicité : une terminologie en évolution](#), La Bibliothèque du Parlement
- [Quelle place pour le discours critique de la race dans le travail social antiraciste et décolonial ?](#) Caroline Keisha Foray



## Build intention

The intended outcomes of your conversations should be clear to all participants as this provides a shared goal.<sup>ix</sup> Explain the reason behind your organization's actions and identify your values and the guidelines for the conversation using DEIA practices. This will support the conversation to remain inclusive, focused and meaningful.

## Define the purpose and scope

Conversations about impacts of racism are more likely to be effective if they have a clearly defined purpose. Start by identifying *why* this conversation is happening and *who* it is intended for. Goals will vary, but it should focus on how to address racial equity within your organization.<sup>x</sup> Defining the scope helps prevent confusion and ensures that the discussion stays focused. Ask the following guiding questions about racial equity in your organization to support this process:

- Have you collected feedback from employees, partners or the public on their perceptions of your company's strengths or weaknesses related to racial equity and inclusion?
- What are your company's strengths and weaknesses relating to racial equity?
- Where is the room to grow?
- What needs immediate attention?<sup>xi</sup>

## Understand your audience

Consider who the audience for these conversations will be. Different groups within your organization may require different approaches based on their experiences, roles, and perspectives. Understanding your audience will help you tailor the conversation to meet each group's needs and ensure it is engaging and relevant. For example, groups that have little demographical or community diversity may need basic training and education before conversations begin. Invite your colleagues to share their thoughts to get a better understanding of their lived experiences.<sup>xii</sup>

## Ground rules for anti-racist discussions

Asking racialized colleagues to participate in conversations about race without proper safeguards can place them at risk and create an unfair burden. It's essential to make clear that while their lived experiences are valued, participation in these conversations is entirely voluntary. Racialized employees should never feel obligated to educate others or share personal experiences. When they do choose to engage, they must be explicitly assured that doing so will not pose a risk to their career or personal wellbeing.<sup>xiii</sup> Safety goes beyond words, so ensure that you have the strategies and procedures in place to address any situation if they are to become unproductive. Creating ground rules rooted in DEIA that can be a great way to set clear boundaries during these conversations.<sup>xiv</sup> The list should be dynamic to allow additions or edits, and they should be visible, so participants are always aware of the most updated version. The following list is from Metropolitan New York Synod's "Ground Rules for Anti-Racism Discussions".<sup>xv</sup>

- Listen actively – respect others when they are talking.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
- Participate to the fullest of your ability – community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- The goal is not to agree – it is to gain a deeper understanding.
- Although no one experience or example will prove accurate 100% of the time, we will try to hear the truth in what is said instead of looking for exceptions to the case.
- Assume everyone has good intentions but also acknowledge the impact of saying something that hurts someone else, even if it is unintended.

## Maintain confidentiality

All stories shared in this space stay in this space unless explicit permission is given by the person sharing the story that it can be shared in another setting.

Building intention is essential for fostering meaningful and effective anti-racist conversations. Clearly defining the purpose, scope, and audience ensures that discussions remain focused and constructive. Establishing ground rules and safeguarding participants' well-being creates an environment where all voices can be heard and respected. With these foundational elements in place, your organization can move beyond dialogue toward meaningful action. Explore the following reflection questions and resources to deepen your approach.

## Reflection questions

- Who will decide the purpose of these conversations? Who does this serve? Who does this overlook?
- How will your goals be communicated to your team? How will you ensure that this message is understood?
- What strategies do you have to ensure safety for all participants?

## Helpful resources

- [Communication - Transferable skills](#) / [Communication - Compétences transférables](#), Government of Ontario
- [Anti-Racism Action Program](#) / [Programme d'action et de lutte contre le racism](#), Government of Canada
- [Talking About Race](#), NMAAHC
- [How to Have a Respectful Conversation About Racial Justice](#), AARP
- [What Are Ground Rules for Teams? \(With Importance and Types\)](#), Indeed
- [Promouvoir la dignité et le respect sur le lieu de travail](#), UN HR Portal
- [Conseils essentiels pour la communication au travail](#), Indeed

## Respect the sensitivity of the topic

Conversations about race can bring up deep emotions, personal experiences, and differing perspectives. It is crucial to approach these discussions with care, empathy, and a commitment to psychological safety. This means actively listening to others without judgment, making space for discomfort, and avoiding dismissive or surface-level responses. One way to support meaningful engagement is to clearly define what “respect” looks like in your team context, such as speaking from personal experience, avoiding interruptions, and being open to feedback. When expectations for respectful dialogue are established and upheld, everyone is more likely to feel heard, valued, and able to participate fully.

Create environments where participants can express vulnerability while also being challenged to learn and grow, requires intentionality.<sup>xvi</sup> It's important to acknowledge how power dynamics, such as organizational hierarchy, social privilege, and past experiences of being dismissed, can affect participation. People from equity-deserving groups may feel pressure to stay silent or may not feel safe to speak openly. To address this, teams can adopt strategies to actively seek input from quieter voices, such as offering multiple ways to contribute (e.g., written reflections, anonymous surveys, or small-group discussions), rotating facilitation roles, or checking in individually.

To foster open dialogue involves not only creating spaces where people feel safe to express their feelings but also encouraging them to lean into discomfort for deeper engagement with the material. Explore Brave Spaces and call-in/call-out culture to understand what your team needs to do to make a space conducive to learning.

## Brave Spaces

The idea of Brave Spaces builds on the foundation of safe spaces, a concept widely used in gender-based violence (GBV) initiatives and queer and trans communities to create environments free from judgment, harassment, and discrimination.<sup>xvii</sup> While safe spaces are essential for fostering a supportive environment, it's important to recognize that no space is entirely free from risk, and the concept of safer spaces acknowledges the ongoing need to address and improve upon existing safety measures to ensure that all individuals feel truly included and protected.

Additionally, for any space to be genuinely safe, it must also be anti-racist. This is because safety cannot be fully realized in an environment where racism is present or unaddressed. Despite good intentions, individuals may sometimes hesitate to challenge others out of fear of disrupting the perceived safety of the space. This fear may result in self-censorship and a lack of honest and open dialogue. As a result, our team encourages yours to move beyond safe spaces to create Brave Spaces, an environment that promotes safety and encourages individuals to engage in difficult and necessary conversations, promoting a more inclusive and honest dialogue.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Six pillars of Brave Spaces

In order to create a Brave Space, we must prioritize the six pillars. They help establish an environment that promotes healthy learning environments, while also emphasizing the need for collective responsibility and accountability.<sup>xxix</sup>

1. **Vulnerability:** Be vulnerable to deeply engage with your thoughts and feelings as well as with others.<sup>xx</sup> You should role model what vulnerability with boundaries looks like for participants. In practice, this can look like:
  - Asking questions about things you do not understand.
  - Sharing lived experiences with the group.
2. **Perspective taking:** Listen to the experiences and perspectives of others to gain a better understanding of how they see the world and why they see it that way.<sup>xxi</sup> In practice, this can look like:
  - Listening to understand, not to respond.
3. **Lean into fear:** Push past uncomfortable feelings in service of deeper engagement with the material. Growth often begins at the edge of our comfort zones, and unlearning long-held ideas can feel unsettling, but that discomfort is a sign of learning, not danger.<sup>xxii</sup> In practice, this can look like:
  - Engaging with content that makes you nervous.
  - Reframing your mindset about fear to see it more as an opportunity to grow and learn.
  - Embracing safe discomfort. Recognizing that while learning may feel uncomfortable, it will not harm you. Instead, it opens the door to deeper awareness, empathy, and change.
4. **Critical thinking:** Ask difficult questions and challenge your beliefs to understand complex issues related to race.<sup>xxiii</sup> In practice, this can look like:
  - Understanding how your thoughts and perspectives can be limited.
  - Not taking critique personally but as an opportunity to grow.
5. **Examine intentions:** Be aware of your intentions to set boundaries and be accountable for your words and actions.<sup>xxiv</sup> In practice, this can look like reflecting on the following questions:
  - Am I about to share something that will only serve or centre myself or will it add to the conversation?
  - What is the hoped for result of either my words or my actions?

6. **Mindfulness:** Practice mindfulness to help you stay present.<sup>xxv</sup> In practice, this can look like:

- Slowing down, taking a breath and organizing your thoughts before reacting.
- Building silent reflection into the process.

## Accountability: Calling in and calling out

During discussions, disagreements are likely to arise, which can serve as a catalyst for transformative change. “Calling in” and “calling out” are common methods people use to address conflict, each with its own role. By understanding the differences between the two, you can learn when to use either strategy to promote the most constructive change.<sup>xxvi</sup>

**Calling in** involves addressing a person's harmful behavior in a private, respectful manner, typically when you believe they may be unaware of the impact of their actions and are open to learning. This approach aims to facilitate growth without provoking defensiveness.<sup>xxvii</sup> It is often used when you have a prior relationship with the person or at least feel safe to do so.

*Example of calling in:*

After a colleague makes a racially insensitive comment during a meeting, you privately invite them for a conversation to discuss the impact of their words and provide education on why it was harmful.

**Calling out**, on the other hand, entails publicly addressing harmful behavior or remarks, often when you feel it's necessary to make a strong statement against such actions in a particular space. This approach signals that such behavior is unacceptable.<sup>xxviii</sup>

*Example of calling out:*

During a team discussion, a member repeatedly interrupts and dismisses the contributions of others. In response, another team member respectfully but firmly addresses the behavior, emphasizing the importance of equitable participation in the discussion.

Being called in or out is not an easy experience. It can evoke feelings of hurt or confusion, especially when you did not intend to cause harm. However, this does not necessarily reflect negatively on your character; rather, it highlights an area for growth and improvement, which is something we all encounter. Developing the ability to navigate these situations is a valuable skill, particularly if you aim to cultivate a Brave Space.<sup>xxix</sup>

Respecting the sensitivity of racial discussions ensures that conversations remain empathetic and productive. By balancing vulnerability and challenge, you can create environments where participants feel safe to express themselves and engage deeply with the topic. This approach helps sustain meaningful and respectful dialogues.

### Reflection questions

- How can you create Brave Spaces within your organization to foster open and honest dialogue?
- Is your organization a space to call in/call out people? What adjustments need to be made?
- Who will have the most power in these conversations? How does this shape what is being said?

### Helpful resources

- [Maintaining a Safe and Brave Space / Maintenir un espace sûr et courageux](#), World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
- [Safer Space Guidelines / Lignes directrices pour un espace plus sécuritaire](#), Mental Health Commission
- [7 Tips For Creating Safe Spaces For Speaking Out](#), Voice at the Table
- [Make Your Meetings a Safe Space for Honest Conversation](#), Harvard Business Review
- [Brené Brown and Barrett Guillen on Building Brave Spaces](#), Brené Brown
- [What Do You Mean Brave Spaces? I Want Safety!](#) Deanna Rolffs
- [Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces and Why We Gon' Be Alright](#), Felicia Holman and Ellie Mejía
- [Call out & call in racism](#), Creative Equity Toolkit
- [Du «safe space» au «brave space»](#), Le Courrier
- [Conversations engageantes et courageuses](#), LinkedIn
- [Conversations courageuses en période difficile](#), SCFP
- [Bienvenue dans mon brave space!](#) La ligne diagonale

## Acknowledge how the past impacts the present

The concept of race and the ideology of racism have deep and complex roots that continue to shape our current realities. By examining historical events and their underlying systems, we begin to understand how racism persists, not just as isolated incidents, but as part of broader, ongoing structures of inequality. This historical lens helps uncover how past injustices have led to present-day systemic barriers that continue to affect individuals and organizations.

These conversations can feel uncomfortable or even overwhelming, but they are essential for fostering meaningful and lasting change. That's why it's important to first [build intention](#) and [respect the sensitivity of the topic](#)—two foundational steps explored earlier in this toolkit. Together, they lay the groundwork for thoughtful, intentional dialogue about the impact of history on the present. By approaching these conversations with empathy, curiosity, and a shared commitment to equity, your team can begin to name the legacies of the past and work together to transform the future.

## The historical roots of race and racism

Race is not a valid biological concept; it is a socially constructed idea. For centuries, this construct has been used to justify inequality by assigning value to certain groups and denying others access to rights, resources, and privileges.<sup>xxx</sup>

During the 17th century, European Enlightenment philosophers and naturalists started to shift away from religious understandings of the world to more scientific understandings.<sup>xxxi</sup> Enlightenment-era thinkers sought to categorize people based on physical differences, leading to the false belief that White people were inherently superior. These ideas shaped colonialism, slavery, and segregation, laying the foundation for modern systemic racism.

By the 1770s, this was further solidified when J.F. Blumenbach coined the term Caucasian because he believed that the original race originated in the Caucus Region.<sup>xxxi</sup> This provided a framework for understanding the divide between White and Black. Over time, this evolved into the belief that White people were inherently smarter, more capable, and more human than non-White people. Some naturalists even believed that Africans formed a different species entirely.<sup>xxxi</sup> These historical beliefs continue to affect hiring decisions, workplace expectations, and representation in leadership.

The information above does not begin to cover all racist events or even the nuances behind them. However, by beginning to understand the root of where race and racism began, it can help us understand how it continues to show up today.

## How systemic barriers persist

Racism is not just an individual issue; it is embedded in policies, practices, and institutions that create and maintain unequal opportunities. Think about modern workplaces as an example, racism can potentially manifest in various ways, such as:

- **Hiring and promotion practices:** candidates from equity-deserving groups face discrimination or unfair treatments.<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- **Workplace culture and norms:** Professionalism standards often reflect White cultural practices, making it harder for racialized employees to feel fully included and have a disproportionately low representation in leadership positions.<sup>xxxv</sup>
- **Pay gaps and career advancement:** Studies show persistent disparities in wages and opportunities for racialized employees, even with equal qualifications.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

## Making the connection to today

Understanding the historical context of racial theories helps explain why Whiteness has become a dominant standard in society, though it is also influenced by factors like institutional racism, cultural representation, economic disparities, and other systemic inequalities. Whiteness describes how the norms, culture, and beliefs of White people are often used as the default standard against which all other groups are measured. This dynamic marginalizes other racialized groups and contributes to systems that advantage White people—an effect known as White privilege. White privilege allows individuals to move through society without having their race questioned or seen as different, giving them unearned benefits in both subtle and overt ways.

White privilege is more than a set of attitudes and individual opinions. It is an overarching, comprehensive framework of policies, practices, institutions, and cultural norms. Therefore, it also extends to the workplace including HR policies, recruiting and hiring practices, leadership representation, career advancement opportunities, and equal pay.<sup>xxxvii</sup> As uncomfortable as some people find it, transparent conversations about race and racism are necessary as they impact us all in different ways. The first step in addressing the problem is acknowledging it.

*\*Please note that White privilege is not the assumption that everything a White person has accomplished is unearned. Instead, White privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one's effort.<sup>xxxviii</sup> This acknowledgement of White privilege may result in feelings of guilt, sadness, confusion, defensiveness, or even fear. However, discomfort is a necessary step in unlearning biases and dismantling systemic barriers.*

Acknowledging the historical context of race and racism is essential for understanding its current manifestations. By exploring past injustices and their lingering effects, you provide crucial context for present-day discussions. Organizations that engage in honest discussions about race and privilege can take meaningful action to create more equitable workplaces.



## Reflection questions

- How did learning about the history of race change the way your team understands the issues?
- How will your team continue to learn about how the past impacts the present beyond this toolkit? What time and resources are being dedicated to this goal? Is that enough?
- How comfortable is your team in discussing privilege? How can you ensure that these conversations are productive?

## Helpful resources

- [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) / [Les privilèges des Blancs: Au-delà des apparences](#), Public Service Alliance of Canada
- [The Social Construct of Race That Unnecessarily Divides Us](#), Governing
- [White Privilege](#), ACLRC
- [Understanding White Privilege](#), Very Well Mind
- [Whiteness studies: ces travaux qui exposent le privilège des Blancs](#), Quebec Science
- [Racisme : qu'est-ce que le «privilège blanc» ?](#), Libération
- [Qu'est-ce que le 'privilège blanc' ?](#), BBC

## Validate living and lived experiences

Your understanding of race needs to be rooted in reality to learn how it shows up in your life. Listen and validate the experiences of your non-White colleagues to learn how they are impacted and learn what you can do to make spaces more inclusive.

### Active listening

Active listening is necessary to hear and understand the stories that your colleagues share. It requires mastering many skills, including reading body language and tone of voice, maintaining your attention, and being aware of and controlling your emotional response.<sup>xxxviii xxxix</sup>

- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Get curious about what the speaker is saying<sup>xl</sup>
- Mirror their words to show that you've heard them
- Paraphrase to show your understanding.

### Activity: Listening charades

1. Pair up: Divide participants into pairs. One person will be the "actor," and the other will be the "listener."
2. Act and listen: The actor will choose a simple scenario or story from a pre-prepared list (e.g., "finding out about a surprise party" or "dealing with a delayed project"). The actor shares this scenario with enthusiasm and expressive gestures, while the listener observes closely without interrupting.
3. Mirror and paraphrase challenge: After the actor finishes their story, the listener must mirror the scenario using their own gestures and body language to convey what they understood. Next, they paraphrase the story in a fun way, like summarizing it as if they were explaining it to a child or a celebrity.
4. Feedback and fun twist: The actor then provides feedback on how accurately their scenario was mirrored and paraphrased. Add a twist by having the group vote on the most creative or humorous paraphrase.
5. Debrief: Conclude with a group discussion on how mirroring and paraphrasing enhanced their understanding and what made the activity enjoyable. Discuss how these skills can be applied in everyday conversations.

## Racial microaggressions

As your colleagues share their experiences, they may talk about instances of racial microaggressions. These are subtle actions, comments, or environmental cues that communicate bias or exclusion toward equity-deserving groups.<sup>xli</sup> Though often unintentional, microaggressions can have significant cumulative impacts on an individual's well-being and sense of belonging. If you have been called in or called out for committing a microaggression, it's important to understand that this is not an attack on your character. It is impossible to know every problematic act, but it is possible to learn and grow from these situations. Centre marginalized voices in these situations to unlearn harmful terms or actions.<sup>xlii</sup>

### Witnessing microaggressions<sup>xliii</sup>

There is no one way to respond to microaggressions. Here are a few questions to consider if you encounter one:

- **What's the right moment to say something?** Consider what environment would be the most effective for this conversation. Who should be involved in this conversation?
- **Who made the comment?** Your relationship with the person who committed the microaggression may impact how you address the situation. How close are you?
- **What's your personal understanding of the microaggression?** Your familiarity with the subject may vary depending on the act. Are you prepared to have this conversation?

### If you realize you have committed a microaggression<sup>xliv</sup>

It can be difficult to know how to respond when someone says you have done something harmful. Here are some tips to help you move forward:

- Take a moment to pause. Being called in or called out can put us on the defensive but remember that this is not a personal attack.
- Ask for clarification. If you are unsure what you did to offend your colleague, ask for clarification.
- Listen to your colleague's perspective, even when you disagree.
- Acknowledge and apologize. Once you process that harm has been done, it is important for you to acknowledge the offense and sincerely apologize for your statement.
- Create space for follow-up. Most of these tough conversations take more than one conversation to work through. Allow yourself and your colleagues the opportunity to follow up in the future.

*\*We are aware of the differing opinions on the term "microaggression". There is nothing "micro" about these acts and the harm it causes. However, there has not been an agreed upon term to replace microaggressions which is why the term is used in this document. However, we encourage your teams to use whatever term you like that best fits the needs of your workplace. Regardless of what word you use, ensure that you emphasize how painful these acts can be and hold your team accountable to correct this behaviour.<sup>xlv</sup>*

Validating the experiences of racialized colleagues is key to fostering an inclusive environment. Recognizing these lived experiences helps participants understand the everyday realities of racism. This validation builds trust and encourages open, honest conversations about race.

### Reflection questions

- When your colleagues shared their stories about experiencing microaggressions or other forms of discrimination, how did that make you feel?
- What does centering marginalized voices look like in your organization?
- How can you hold yourself responsible for addressing microaggressions in the workplace?

### Helpful resources

- [Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions at Work / Reconnaître et répondre aux microagressions au travail](#), CCDI
- [Racial microaggression](#), The Micropedia
- [Guidance for Leaders: Engaging in Race Discussions](#), Government of Colorado
- [DEEP LISTENING: Laying the Foundation for an Anti-Racist Workforce Development Strategy](#), Catalyst's Circle
- [Écoute active : définition, techniques et exemples pratiques](#), Asana
- [L'écoute active : 6 trucs pour développer cette compétence clé](#), Agendrix
- [Microagressions : comprendre, reconnaître et agir comme gestionnaire](#), Gestion HEC Montréal

## Emphasize how to build anti-racist organizations

Although conversations about race, racism, and racialization are important, they can only contribute to positive change if they lead to action. Emphasize how your team is taking the learnings of the previous steps to then address racial equity within your organization.

## Canadian workplace examples of race-focused initiatives

The following are real-life, innovative examples of race-focused initiatives from our [employer partners](#). Feel free to draw inspiration or connect with other employers to learn how to implement these ideas into your workplace.

### [Intergroup Dialogue \(IGD\) Workshop for Research Leaders – DEI Office of University of Regina](#)

The University of Regina, through its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Office and the Office of the Vice-President (Research), is offering a five-day Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) workshop specifically tailored for research leaders across campus. Supported by the Canada Research Chairs EDI Stipend, this initiative aims to deepen participants' understanding of race, class, and gender through experiential learning, theory, and peer discussion.

Led by renowned facilitators Dr. Kristie Ford (Mount Holyoke College) and Dr. Charles Behling (University of Michigan), the IGD program helps participants engage across differences, enhance inclusive practices, and foster more equitable research environments.

By prioritizing this dialogue-based, leadership-level engagement, the University of Regina demonstrates a commitment to embedding anti-racism and equity work within its research culture, from the top down. This initiative encourages accountability and sets the tone for systemic change across academic research communities.

### [Partnership with the BC Lions Football Club in support of the Team Up To End Racism program – Pacific Blue Cross](#)

Pacific Blue Cross announced their partnerships with the BC Lions Football Club in support of the Team Up To End Racism program. This program focuses on confronting racism and embracing diversity and inclusion in British Columbia. Through this partnership, the BC Lions and Pacific Blue Cross will implement a program built around four elements; educating and informing youth, as well as the general public, about embracing a diverse society that fosters inclusiveness, understanding and mutual respect. By supporting this program, Pacific Blue Cross aims to amplify the campaign's reach and contribute meaningfully to the dialogue surrounding racism – especially in health care.

### [Anti-Racism Task Force – Royal Roads University](#)

Royal Roads University's Anti-Racism Task Force was created to conduct consultation and research with the university community and to develop an anti-racism action plan for the

university. The task force comprises fifteen students, staff, alumni, faculty and associate faculty throughout the university and holds six online focus groups. Some of the questions this task force looks to answer are the following:

- What changes would you like to see?
- What actions should be implemented?
- Do you have ideas for anti-racism initiatives?

An anti-racism task force is a great way to listen and integrate the opinions of their community to create actionable measures to combat racism within their institution.

## "Power of the Collective" Hair Diversity Education Program - L'Oréal Canada

Although some training on diverse hair types is offered in some hairdressing schools, interviews with Canadian stylists revealed that some feel underqualified to cut, style and color all types. As a result, the “Power of the Collective” program is to educate every stylist on the diversity of hair types in order to foster an inclusive and trusted salon environment for all Canadian stylists and clients.

The first-year, six-module training consists of four sections focused on hair cutting, all taught by international professionals with expertise on the respective hair type. The second year of training will be focused on styling, and the third year will focus on color. Once the full program is complete, hairstylists will be certified as allies having gone through the complete foundational training. They will receive a stylist station decal to show their support for all clients that walk into their salon to ensure their clients know they are committed to upskilling themselves on all hair types.

Many people of colour have been impacted by the exclusionary practices of the hairstyling industry.<sup>xlvi</sup> This program is one step forward to making the industry a place where all hair types are not only seen, but celebrated.

Racial Justice Conference 2024 – City of Calgary

The City of Calgary's Anti-Racism Program hosted its first Racial Justice Conference from March 18-19, 2024, at the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre. Through speaker presentations and workshops, this conference provided attendees opportunities to develop and apply anti-racism knowledge, skills and practices. This two-day event aimed to inform others about historical events but also fostered transformational learning to move towards creating a more inclusive society. The City of Calgary sought the expertise of many different professionals, but some of the guest speakers included:

- Deborah Green (Gopher) - ᐃᑭᑦ ᐱᑦᐱᑦ ᐱᑦᐱᑦ
- Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Dr. Bukola Salami

- Dr. Michael Lickers
- Indigenous Elders & Knowledge Keepers and Global Wisdom Keepers: Elder Marina Crane, Elder Art Cunningham, Elder Casey Eagle Speaker, and Elder Cindy Provost

By creating an event where professionals from all backgrounds were welcomed, Calgary moves closer to creating a racially just city.

Emphasizing action ensures that conversations about race lead to tangible changes. By integrating feedback and translating discussions into concrete policies and strategies, organizations can move from dialogue to meaningful transformation. This commitment to action reinforces the importance of ongoing efforts towards racial equity.

### Reflection questions

- Currently, what initiatives does your organization have to promote racial equity? What is your team doing well? What adjustments need to be made?
- How will the stories of your racialized teammates impact initiatives to promote racial equity in your organization?
- How can you build partnerships with local communities you wish to support?

### Helpful resources

- [Anti-Racism & Organizational Change: A Guide for Employers / Lutte contre le racisme et changement organisationnel : Un guide pour les employeurs](#), Canadian Human Rights Commission
- [Anti-Racism Action Plan / Plan d'action de lutte contre le racisme](#), Canadian Human Rights Commission
- [How to Promote Racial Equity in the Workplace](#), Harvard Business Review
- [Roadmap for Change, Strategic Equity and Anti-racism](#), The University of British Columbia
- [How to Build an Anti-Racist Company](#), Harvard Business Review
- [Comment être un-e allié-e dans la lutte anti-raciste?](#), Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick
- [Comment devenir une personne alliée face au racisme et aux discriminations](#), Instance de concertation en immigration – Sherbrooke

## Conclusion

Addressing issues of race in the workplace is an ongoing process without a definitive endpoint. However, by engaging with this toolkit, your organization has made significant progress toward becoming an anti-racist organization. While we may not be responsible for the creation of systemic racism, we are all responsible for addressing and dismantling it. Continue to extend your learning beyond this toolkit to educate yourself and others, and to create more inclusive workspaces.

Our mandate at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion is to assist Canadian employers in fostering more inclusive workplaces. We hope that the ideas, strategies, and tools we have provided in this toolkit are valuable and useful in helping you navigate conversations about race within your organization.

The BRAVE framework can also be adapted to support conversations on other sensitive or complex topics beyond race, such as gender identity, disability, mental health, or religious inclusion. To do so, we recommend replacing the historical context and examples of microaggressions provided here with those relevant to the topic at hand. For example, adapting the “Respect” and “Validate” sections may involve acknowledging the historical roots of ableism or the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ colleagues. You can visit our [Educational Resource Guides](#) page to learn more about different forms of exclusion and identity-based oppression and tailor your conversations accordingly. This flexibility helps foster inclusion and psychological safety in a wide range of workplace discussions.

## What's next?

It is important to know that new trends are always emerging. To stay updated on best practices, continue to educate yourself by reading articles and attending events.

For additional help, check out our other toolkit, “[Sustaining the Black Lives Matter movement in the workplace](#)”, [view our other toolkits](#) and [educational resource guides](#) to learn more ways to transform your organization's DEIA initiatives.

Here is a recommended reading list:

- Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor (Layla Saad)
- So You Want to Talk About Race (Ijeoma Oluo)
- Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts (Brené Brown)
- It's Time to Talk About Race at Work (Kelly McDonald)
- The Wretched of the Earth (Frantz Fanon)
- Poetics of Relation (Édouard Glissant)
- Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands (Hazel V Carby)



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- <sup>i</sup> [Glossary of Terms](#), Canadian Race Relations Foundation, n.d.
- <sup>ii</sup> [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#), Government of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>iii</sup> [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#), Government of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>iv</sup> [A 5-part framework for talking about racism at work](#), MIT Sloan School of Management, 2020.
- <sup>v</sup> [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#), Government of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>vi</sup> [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#), Government of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>vii</sup> [A 5-part framework for talking about racism at work](#), MIT Sloan School of Management, 2020.
- <sup>viii</sup> [Guide to courageous conversations on racism and discrimination](#), Government of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>ix</sup> [A 5-part framework for talking about racism at work](#), MIT Sloan School of Management, 2020.
- <sup>x</sup> [How Leaders Can Discuss Race in the Workplace](#), LinkedIn, 2020.
- <sup>xi</sup> [How to Set Diversity Goals: 8 Examples of DEI Goals for Work](#), The Diversity Movement, 2023.
- <sup>xii</sup> [How to Set Diversity Goals: 8 Examples of DEI Goals for Work](#), The Diversity Movement, 2023.
- <sup>xiii</sup> [A Tool Kit for Productive Conversations on Race](#), Mass General Brigham, 2020.
- <sup>xiv</sup> [Ground Rules for Anti-Racism Discussions](#), Metropolitan New York Synod, n.d.
- <sup>xv</sup> [Ground Rules for Anti-Racism Discussions](#), Metropolitan New York Synod, n.d.
- <sup>xvi</sup> [Safer Space Guidelines](#), Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2019.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Brady, Martha (2005). Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets For Young Women In The Developing World: A New Role For Sports. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 2005, vol.33, no.1&2, pp. 44-45.
- <sup>xviii</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), Victoria D. Stubbs, n.d.
- <sup>xix</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), Victoria D. Stubbs, n.d.
- <sup>xx</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxi</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxii</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxv</sup> [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space \(PDF\)](#), MaryLand School of Social Work, n.d.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> [Calling In and Calling Out Guide](#), Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (OEDIB), Harvard University, n.d.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> ["Calling In" Versus "Calling Out"](#), The Ripple Effect Education, n.d.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> ["Calling In" Versus "Calling Out"](#), The Ripple Effect Education, n.d.
- <sup>xxix</sup> [Calling In and Calling Out Guide](#), Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (OEDIB) Harvard University, n.d.
- <sup>xxx</sup> [Historical Foundations of Race](#), National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> [Historical Foundations of Race](#), National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> [Facing America's History of Racism Requires Facing the Origins of 'Race' as a Concept](#), Time, 2020.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> [Facing America's History of Racism Requires Facing the Origins of 'Race' as a Concept](#), Time, 2020.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> [Half of racialized people have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years](#), Statistics Canada, 2024.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> [Report 5—Inclusion in the Workplace for Racialized Employees](#), Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2023.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> [Racial Wage Gap](#), The Conference Board of Canada, n.d.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> [How to Recognize and Dismantle Racism and White Privilege in the Workplace](#), LinkedIn, 2021.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> [What Is Active Listening?](#), Harvard Business Review, 2024.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> [How listening as an ally can create positive workplace relationships](#), SmartBrief, 2023.
- <sup>xl</sup> [How listening as an ally can create positive workplace relationships](#), SmartBrief, 2023.

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- xli [Microaggressions are a big deal: How to talk them out and when to walk away](#), NPR, 2020.
- xlii [Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions at Work](#), Harvard Business Review, 2022.
- xliii [Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions at Work](#), Harvard Business Review, 2022.
- xliv [Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions at Work](#), Harvard Business Review, 2022.
- xlvi [Microaggressions: Is the Term Inclusive or Outdated?](#), LinkedIn, 2022.
- xlv [The Hairstyling Industry Has a Racism Problem, and It Starts With Beauty School](#), Vogue, 2020.