

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How to Support People of Colour in the Workplace

Many people are seeing the global conversation that has arisen out of protests against systemic racism in the United States and are asking what they can do to help. The good news is there are lots of ways to become an ally, and a key place that you can help is in the workplace, where people of colour can not only face invisible, systemic barriers but direct acts of discrimination. Here are some of the ways you can start to change your organization to support people of colour:

Speak up. Many people from ethnic minorities experience racism in a variety of forms, from the invisible to the overt. Some ways this manifests in the workplace are:

- bias—being passed up for promotions or being told their work isn't good enough
- microaggressions—small instances of indirect, subtle or even unintended incidents of racism
- racist abuse—slurs, insults, and physical violence

To be a good workplace ally, be aware of the fact that this is a common, everyday experience for your non-white colleagues. If you find other colleagues engaging in any kind of racism, it's important to let them know that it's unacceptable and follow your company's discrimination policy to report it.

Request company-wide bias and anti-racism training from your human resources (HR) department. Everyone has unconscious bias. We have to process millions of pieces of information per day, and we fall back on shortcuts to help us make decisions. However, sometimes the shortcuts are based on poor information or **social modeling**. Learning how bias functions can help make the unconscious conscious—at which point, it can be acknowledged and dealt with.

Even if you receive training, you may still find yourself making mistakes. If that happens, acknowledge your mistake, apologise, and promise to be more aware next time.

Call for diversity. Talk to your manager and HR about implementing diversity policies, mentoring programs, open days, and outreach to create a more open, safe environment that encourages people of colour to both join and progress in your organization.

Create a diversity action council within your organization. Create a mission statement for this group, which is reflective of the needs of your organization, be it to promote ongoing training, education, and/or awareness about issues which impact your team. An active group can serve a vital role in communicating the needs of staff directly to leadership, when employees may feel invisible or unheard.

Encourage objective selection processes. **Multiple studies** have found that CVs with non-Anglo sounding names tend to get rejected at a higher rate than those with white-sounding names—even when it's the same CV. Minimize unconscious bias by introducing anonymised selection processes for hiring and introduce scorecards so that all candidates are rated against the same criteria by multiple people throughout the hiring process rather than relying on the "feeling" of the hiring manager.

Give credit, both casually and formally. Studies have shown that black women's comments are **forgotten more quickly and remembered less accurately** than those in other demographics. This has left many black women reporting that they feel invisible at work. One way you can help counteract this is to give credit and praise for ideas, innovations, and good work. If you notice someone else taking

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credit or erasing the contribution of a person of colour on your team, say “Let’s not forget, that was Annie’s great idea.” You can also help by ensuring that outstanding achievers get nominated for any company or industry awards.

Mentor junior members of your organization. People who are aware of the difficulties people of colour can face in the workplace can help champion their colleagues by offering to mentor or sponsor new hires so they know they have an ally. This will also give them someone who’ll speak up for them when it comes time to consider promotions and pay raises. You could also suggest a formal mentorship program to your HR department.