

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

Ways to Educate Yourself about Anti-Racism and Race

The recent social injustices that led to protests and riots after the death of George Floyd in the United States have created a significant cultural impact, heightening awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement internationally, and reaching people of many different cultures and backgrounds.

As a result, many people are asking what they can do to either lend support or simply understand the intense emotions surrounding these difficult issues.

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." —Archbishop Desmond Tutu

One of the main things advocates have called for is the need for society as a whole to "unlearn" systemic racism and biases that—intentionally or not—hold black people back. Learning about anti-racism and race issues can occur in a variety of ways. Here are some of them:

Ways to educate yourself regarding anti-racism and race

Listen

It's common to think, "I'm a good person and not a racist—this has nothing to do with me," or to feel overwhelmed and uncertain of what actions to take. However, the first step to seeking to understand recent events about anti-racism is to accept that Black Lives Matter advocates are calling for change for a reason, and mental flexibility is necessary to hear, process, and affirm the message.

If you don't know how to get started, just listen to those who are protesting, speaking, writing, and creating art about these issues. Actively listen to your friends from different cultural backgrounds when they speak of their experiences; be empathetic and don't shut down if it makes you feel uncomfortable. Follow thinkers and advocates on social media and engage with the media they produce.

One of the ways to progress your understanding of the issues is being able to engage in difficult dialogue respectfully—whether you end up agreeing or not.

Avoid centring yourself

You may experience strong emotions as you reflect on how issues of racial injustice relate to your own experiences. While empathy is an important skill that can help you gain an understanding of those facing racial discrimination and disadvantage, it's important not to compare their experiences to times when you felt unfairly treated, because your experience will be fundamentally different. Don't try to "one up" people who have experienced racial injustice.

If you're in a conversation with a person who's sharing their experiences or feelings about the issues or the movement, avoid talking about how it relates to your life. Also try not to share feelings of guilt or realizations about times when you behaved in a racist way as this can create pressure on your friend to have to "forgive" you.

Finally, avoid asking your black friends for individualized help in understanding the movement, its terms, or the history of white supremacy because this can create an unnecessary burden on people.

Instead, start with a Google search or by browsing the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media; there are many guides, books, blog posts, documentaries, and podcasts available.

Get educated

Here's a list of resources that you can start with in educating yourself about anti-racism. There's a lot out there, so if you start to feel overwhelmed, just pick one and start.

Books

- *How to be Antiracist* by Ibram X Kendi
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo
- *White Tears, Brown Scars* by Ruby Hamad
- *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge

Films

- *13th*
- *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory*
- *I Am Not Your Negro*
- *The Death and Life of Marsha P Johnson*
- *When They See Us*

Podcasts

- 1619 (from the *New York Times*)
- About Race with Reni Eddo-Lodge
- Code Switch (from NPR)
- Seeing White (from Scene on Radio)
- Still Processing (from the *New York Times*)
- The Diversity Gap
- Uncivil (from Gimlet Media)

Take action

"Anti-racism is about doing and not just knowing." —Leslie Mac, activist and community organizer

It might be daunting, but once you've started to learn more about the history of racism, it's now time to educate others, donate to causes, support businesses owned by people of colour, and amplify the message of anti-racism. Sign petitions, share news stories, write to government officials about the injustices in your community. Talk to your company about their diversity and inclusion policies and see if there's room for improvement.

Keep trying

"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears." —Nelson Mandela

You might get it wrong. You might be told that you said or did something racist, or that you centred yourself in someone else's narrative. If that happens, learn to say, "My objective is to understand, and I apologize." Remember that this is a continuous process of learning, and maintain your commitment to practising anti-racism.

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