

# EDUCATING ON RACISM WHILE AVOIDING RACIAL TRAUMA FOR BLACK STUDENTS

## A Guide for White Academics

Talking about racism in the classroom can add to the racial trauma that Black students chronically experience. Here are some concrete ideas to help you build relationships and improve belonging, give students power, and emphasize growth and learning for the benefit of Black students.

### LOOK OUT FOR MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are everyday, subtle behaviors that communicate bias. "You are so articulate," implies, "It is unusual for someone of your race to be so intelligent." Embrace empathy and avoid defensiveness if you are called out; defend Black students when you see microaggressions occur.

### SYLLABUS DESIGN

Include messages of support, diversity and inclusion section, and land acknowledgement (<https://native-land.ca>). Look for no-cost course materials. Show you value effort and improvement.

### GRADING POLICIES

Consider ungrading (Blum, 2020), where students assess their own learning. Encourage peer feedback. Let students revise assignments and retake tests.

### PROMOTE BLACK SCHOLARS

Add more readings from Black scholars. Show pictures, quotes, talks by Black scholars and leaders. Cite them in your papers. At course evaluation time, talk about bias against scholars of color.

### EMPHASIZE STRUCTURAL CAUSES FOR DISPARITIES

Instead of generic statements ("*Black people are...*"), use specific language with reminders of structural causes ("*A lot of Black people have... because...*").

### SET A POSITIVE TONE WITH WARM UP ACTIVITIES

Anti-racism meditations, gratitude exercises, affirming videos or writing assignments, helping others, dance party, getting to know other students, etc.

### RESPOND TO TRAUMATIC NEWS EVENTS

Acknowledge the event. Be honest about your feelings. Allow optional space for reflection and student sharing how and when they choose, with a heads-up before class.

### PREPARE FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

Plan ahead for how to respond when discussion becomes particularly heated or a student inadvertently makes an offensive comment.

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### GUIDE CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Set norms of learning from mistakes.

Help White students avoid denial, inaction, shame and defensiveness. Call out problematic statements and help restate them in a better way. Avoid tone policing.

### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Reach out individually. Always assume good intentions. Pronounce names correctly and use correct pronouns. Support mental health. Replace regular assignments with fun/self-care. Be flexible and supportive.

### INVEST IN YOUR BLACK STUDENTS

Teach the hidden curriculum. Learn about students' interests. Share your personal/professional connections and resources. Serve as a mentor and/or supporter.

### RESPOND TO CLASSROOM CONFLICT OR CRITICISM

Listen/understand. Bring suggestions and ask for their feedback. Allow space for supported discussion in class or students to anonymously share.

### HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

1. In the past, how have you succeeded or failed to support Black liberation in your courses?
2. What new ideas do you have for promoting Black liberation in your courses?
3. How will you determine if you are successful in supporting the humanity of your Black students?
4. How will you hold yourself accountable for supporting Black liberation in your teaching?
5. How will you respond if/when students inadvertently make offensive comments?
6. What is (at least) one Black resource (Instagram page, Twitter page, magazine, etc.) you can consistently promote to ensure visibility among your Black students?

## CREATED FOR ACADEMICS FOR BLACK SURVIVAL AND WELLNESS

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IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION LAB

# MICROAGGRESSIONS

## 101: A GUIDE FOR THE MAJORITY



**Microaggressions are everyday, subtle, intentional — and sometimes unintentional — behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward minorities groups.**

### Examples of Microaggressions

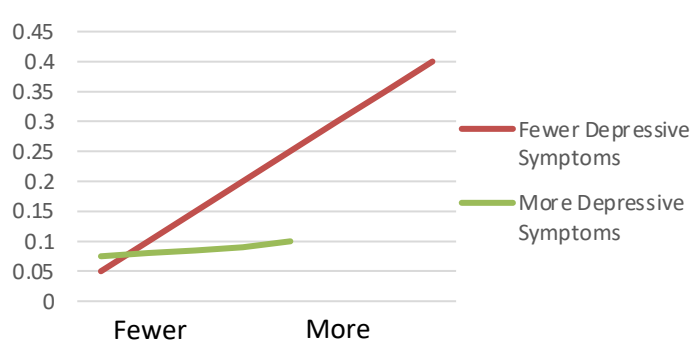
Microaggressions	Message
“You speak good English.”	You are not American, you are a foreigner.
“You are so articulate.”	It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.
“I don’t see color.”	Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.
“I’m not racist, I have Black friends.”	I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.

# 60%

**Americans have witnessed or potentially witnessed a microaggression.**

### How Racial Microaggressions Impacts Mental Health:

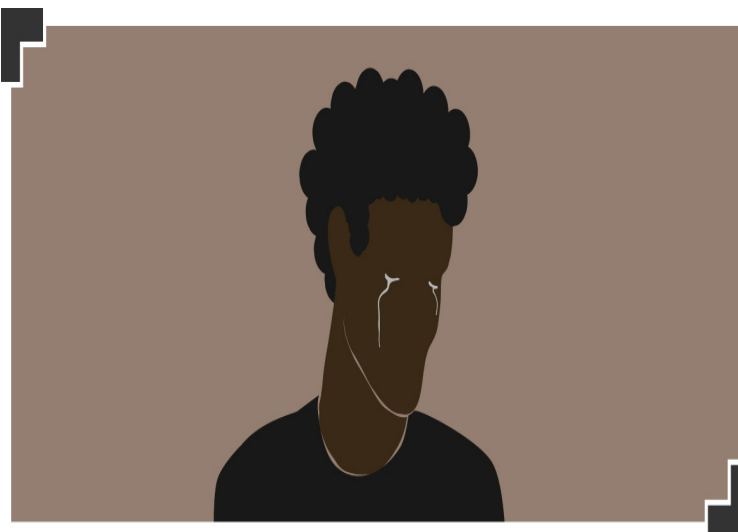
The Relationship between Microaggressions and Mental Health



❖ Black students experienced more depression, self-doubt, frustration, and isolation that impacted their education as a result

❖ Increased stress related to things like microaggressions in the workplace and experiences with discrimination can lead to physical concerns like headaches, high blood pressure, and difficulties with sleep, which of course impact our mood as well.

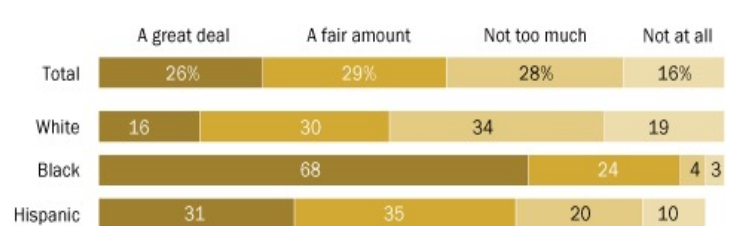
❖ Individuals who report ethnic microaggressions show levels of psychological distress similar to those who experience betrayal and abuse



## How to Check Your Privilege

Before engaging with persons of color, check your privilege by asking yourself these questions (If you answer yes to any of the below questions, you uphold some form of privilege):

Most whites think white people get little or no advantage from their race  
% who say white people benefit \_\_\_ from advantages in society that black people do not have



Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown.  
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 8-21, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

- Can I watch a television show or movie, attend a university, sit in a classroom, and see people of my race widely represented?
- Do the historical curricular materials addressed in education testify to the existence of my race?
- Can I behave freely in a professional setting without having to think about the consequences of those behaviors?
- Have I ever been pinned as the spokesperson for my race?
- If I am pulled over by a cop, can I ensure that my life will not be in danger due to my race?

### How to Prevent Microaggressive Behavior

•**Examine your beliefs:** Do those beliefs and values represent me as a person?

•**Acknowledge other people’s feelings:** It’s our responsibility to acknowledge how others feel by validating the fact that their feelings matter.

•**Embrace empathy:** Ask yourself how you would feel if you were in their situation.

•**Try not to get defensive:** If you’ve been called out for doing or saying something hurtful, resist getting defensive. Instead, embrace curiosity and ask questions that can help you understand a person’s point of view.

### How to be an Ally

It is important to know that sometimes your voices can be heard even more powerfully than those of the people being directly affected by microaggressions.

1. **Don’t speak on behalf of the person who has experienced the microaggression since doing so can itself be a form of microaggression.**
2. **Hold yourself accountable (i.e. expand your social networks, read books on race, practice empathy).**
3. **Suggest “Here is why I am offended, upset, or upset about the remark you made...” when defending a person of color.**

ALLY

“Allyship is taking on the issue of racism and oppression as your own issue, even though you’ll never truly understand the damage that it does.”

– Sen. Elizabeth Warren

