

Ten Tips for starting conversations about race and racism

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1. Start by understanding that **talking about race isn't racist** and not talking about race is harmful – it enables and solidifies racial inequalities.
2. **It's okay to be uncomfortable**, especially if this isn't something that you have thought of a lot. Sit with discomfort and use it to rethink the boundaries of our democratic imaginations. Think about what it means to be uncomfortable, especially in the middle of a pandemic when we keep hearing and dreaming about what we'll all do when we "get back to normal." In a recent article in the *Toronto Star*, the incomparable Dionne Brand notes that the idea of normal was always in contention: "I and many other people hate our normal. Who would one have to be to sit in that normal restfully, to mourn it, or to desire its continuance?" We don't need to go back to that normal; instead we can build back something better. But a better world needs to be created out of that discomfort rather than from our complacency.
3. **Believe BIPOC** when they tell you what they've experienced, be mindful of the emotional labour you ask of BIPOC, and recognize that it's not our job to teach white people about racism.
4. Though there are a lot of catch-phrases about **"checking your privilege"** and **"admitting your biases,"** the basic idea is to understand that everyone has implicit bias and we all come at life from different positions of power. And within broad categories, there's nuance – I, for example, identify as a Black woman, but I'm also straight, cis-gendered, anglophone, middle class, educated, neurotypical, and able-bodied, with light-skinned privilege and dual citizenship.
5. **Beware of false equivalences.** Racism is not symmetrical and there's no reason why we would expect racial formations manifest in the same way for different racial groups. Intersectionality is, of course, important, but don't let a discussion of, for example, misogyny or heteronormativity, veer conversations away from racism. Similarly, because racism is a relation of power and not individual behaviours, there's no such thing as reverse racism.
6. **Try to "call people in" rather than "call people out."** As a manager, you have to address racism and bias when you see it – you must "call out" harmful behaviour that needs to stop. But we also know that everyone is on a different step of this journey and people are going to make mistakes, so if there are opportunities to explore these issues in a more sustained way you can "call people in" and try to learn together. You can't control the content of the discussion, but you can control the processes through which these discussions occur.

7. **Understand that we all participate in structures of domination.** My students come into my classroom and they are so, so worried that they will learn that they're actually racist. They think that coming to terms with racism will reveal that they are bad people. It's not like that, I tell them. Being able to recognize that we all participate in structures of domination and doing what is necessary in order to dismantle these systems – that's what makes you a good person.
8. **Understand the unparalleled role of the state in creating and protecting white supremacy.** Being a civil servant is a noble calling. It is a profession that exists in the service of the public good. But don't forget that for many Black and Indigenous people, our primary interactions with the state happen through the state's violent, coercive, and punitive arms. We have good reason to not trust the state.
9. **This needs to be an ongoing conversation.** Research on implicit bias demonstrates that the bias can be mitigated through long-standing, repeated, substantial engagement with those we hold bias toward. A one-off diversity training won't do it and that one Black friend you have on Facebook can't be responsible for it.
10. I want you to know that I learned everything here. I didn't have a single Black professor in 10 years of post-secondary education nor a Black teacher in the 14 years before that, and I never had the opportunity to take a course on race in university. But, **if I could learn this, you can, too.**

Some resources to help you along the way:

Books:

Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Vintage Canada, 2001)

Desmond Cole, *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power* (Doubleday, 2020)

Jennifer Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice that Shapes What we See, Think, and Do* (Viking, 2019)

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

Eternity Martis, *They Said This Would be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up* (McClelland & Stewart, 2020)

Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Fernwood, 2017)

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016)

Articles:

Melissa Phruksachart, [“The Literature of White Liberalism,”](#) *The Boston Review*, August 21, 2020.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, [“Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and the Limits of Representation,”](#) *The New Yorker*, August 24, 2020.

Debra Thompson, [“The Long Road Home,”](#) *The Globe and Mail*, June 6, 2020.

Podcasts:

Serial, season 3

CodeSwitch (NPR)

Radiolab podcast, “Shots Fired,” parts 1 &

2: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/shots-fired-part-1/> <http://www.radiolab.org/story/shots-fired-part-2/>

Radiolab Presents: More Perfect podcast, “Mr. Graham and the Reasonable Man,” November 29,

2017: <https://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiolabmoreperfect/>

Other Media:

[20 Picture Books to help teach your kids about race](#)

Showing Up for Racial Justice - [Toronto](#)

[Course syllabus](#) for “Black Lives Matter and American Democracy”

A [whole list of anti-racism resources](#)

[The 1619 Project](#), *New York Times Magazine*.

[“Where do we go from here?”](#) A Fundraiser for Black Lives (A conversation with Cornel West, Elizabeth Hinton, Robin D.G. Kelley, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, and Brandon Terry)