



PRACTICE RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

This activity should be led by a facilitator who is prepared to provide instruction and lead the discussion.

STEP 1: Together, review the communication techniques. Then discuss:

1. Which technique would you be most comfortable using, and why?
2. Are there other techniques that could work?
3. What are the benefits of responding to microaggressions as they happen?
4. What happens when we do not respond to microaggressions?

These examples and techniques are adapted from “Interrupting Microaggressions” by Greta Kenney.

TECHNIQUE	SAMPLE PHRASES
<p>ASK STRATEGIC QUESTIONS Ask questions that won't have “yes” or “no” answers and will lead to better understanding. This empowers the other person by allowing them to consider difficult questions. In this way, strategic questions can lead to transformation. They are useful in solving problems, resolving conflict, and leading efforts to make changes.</p>	<p>“What would allow you to believe what they are telling you?”</p> <p>“What could you do differently if ...?”</p> <p>“What happens when you consider the impact on ...?”</p>
<p>INQUIRE Ask the speaker to elaborate or explain. This will give you more information about the beliefs that spurred the comment and may help the speaker realize that what they said could be hurtful.</p>	<p>“Can you explain what you mean?”</p> <p>“It seems like you have a strong opinion about this. Do you want to say why?”</p> <p>“What is it about this that concerns you the most?”</p>
<p>PARAPHRASE OR REFLECT Repeat in your own words the essence of what the person said. This demonstrates understanding and can make the person less likely to become defensive.</p>	<p>“It sounds like you think ...”</p> <p>“What I think I heard you say is that you believe ...”</p>

TECHNIQUE	SAMPLE PHRASES
<p>REDIRECT Shift the focus to a different person or topic. This can be helpful especially when someone is asked to speak for their entire race, cultural group, or other identity. But remember that this technique should be used to move the conversation in a more productive direction, not to ignore a microaggression.</p>	<p>“Let’s shift the conversation ...”</p> <p>“Let’s ask others what they have to say about this question.”</p>
<p>REFRAME Offer a different way to view the situation. Suggest that the person consider other perspectives or interpretations, or ask them to think about the impact of their words.</p>	<p>“What would happen if we required gender parity on our club board?”</p> <p>“Could there be another way to think about this?”</p> <p>“How do you think that might be interpreted?”</p>
<p>REVISIT Even if a microaggression has passed without a response, you can still address it later. Research indicates that failing to address a microaggression can have as much of a negative impact as the microaggression did.</p>	<p>“I want to go back to something that was mentioned in our meeting.”</p> <p>“Let’s rewind the conversation a few minutes.”</p>
<p>SPEAK FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE Talk about the microaggression in terms of your experience. This is often a clear way to address an issue by focusing on yourself rather than the other person. It conveys the impact of a comment, doesn’t blame or accuse the other person, and can reduce the chance that they’ll become defensive.</p>	<p>“I felt _____ [describe the feeling] after _____ [the microaggression], and it _____ [explain the impact on you].”</p>
<p>USE PREFERENCE STATEMENTS Clearly communicate what you are asking for so others won’t have to guess or make assumptions.</p>	<p>“What I’d like is ...”</p> <p>“It would be helpful to me if ...”</p>

STEP 2: Read the scenarios on page 3, then discuss:

5. What are your reactions to learning that these comments are microaggressions?
6. What other microaggressions have you observed that we can add to this list?
7. What steps can you take if you aren’t sure if or why something is considered a microaggression?

STEP 3: In pairs, practice addressing a microaggression using the scenarios and techniques provided. Make sure both people have time to practice responding.

Comment	Why it's a microaggression	Possible response
"Where are you really from?"	When someone asks this, it implies that they assume the other person is a foreigner and suggests that they don't belong.	"I'm curious, what makes you ask that?"
"I don't see race."	Even if someone believes they can ignore a person's race or ethnicity, society often does not. This kind of comment denies the racism that some people experience as well as the privilege of the majority.	"What do you see? Do you think society as a whole sees the same things you see?"
"Everyone in our society can succeed if they work hard enough."	Such comments imply that people who don't succeed are lazy while ignoring the reality that unconscious and structural bias can prevent or interfere with the success of people of certain social classes, races, immigration statuses, genders, ethnicities, etc.	"True, there are successful people from all backgrounds, but many people work very hard and, because they face certain disadvantages, are far less <i>likely</i> to achieve what they're working toward, even with hard work. It's that unfairness that needs to be addressed."
To a woman: "Why are you so bossy?"	Often, women, especially those in leadership roles, are criticized for behavior that men aren't criticized for, because we aren't accustomed to their full participation in leadership and decision making.	"I'm curious about your response. Would you have felt the same way about the same behavior by a man?"
To any member of a marginalized group: "I would never have guessed that you were a doctor."	This comment reflects expectations for a person's accomplishments based on race or gender. It implies that most people in that group aren't as intelligent, as educated, as interested in caring for others, etc.	"Why wouldn't you have thought so? Would you say the same thing to a white man?"
"Gender plays no part in who we ask to join our club."	This denies the persistence of sexism, as well as our own roles in perpetuating it, even if only unconsciously.	"How can we examine our own biases to ensure that we have a fair process?"