

# Introduction to Practicing Antiracism: A Guide for White People and Non-Black People of Color



This guide extends an invitation to engage in and commit to the work of dismantling racism and white supremacy. Our audience for the following tips on antiracist practice is both white people and non-Black people of color who are committed to dismantling racism in solidarity with Black people. We use the terms “people of color” and “BIPOC” as a generalized way of referring to individuals and communities who are targets of racism. But racisms differ, depending on the target; they have different histories and manifest differently today. In general, though, all racisms in the U.S. have developed in relationship to the history of anti-Black racism, and as a support for white supremacy. Racial and racialized groups who are not Black tend to have closer access to white privilege than people who are identified as Black.

The work of undoing systemic and interpersonal racism, and creating spaces at TCNJ that nourish the well-being of Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and employees, is central to the college’s mission (see the [Campus Diversity Statement](#) and [strategic plan](#)). If we are to create significant change, we will need to talk about race in virtually every circumstance in which we meet with colleagues to conduct the college’s business.

Many of us have been enculturated into “color-blindness”--the notion that we avoid racism by claiming not to see race. Accompanying this claim is the belief that simply talking about racism is racist. These are harmful myths; they dismiss the lived experiences of people of color while excusing people with racial privilege from facing their accountability for the everyday impacts of institutional practices and ways of thinking that were created to benefit white people. So, in fact, *not* recognizing the difference race makes in lived experience and *avoiding* conversations about race perpetuate racism.

By *racism*, we mean, briefly, policies and ideas that create and normalize racial inequalities. Policies, laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations and guidelines that result in or perpetuate inequity between racial groups are racist. Ideas that suggest one racial group is superior or inferior to another racial group are racist, and reinforce racist policies by arguing that inequities are normal and natural outcomes of racial differences.

# ...Introduction to Practicing Antiracism



*Antiracist practice* means engaging in everyday practices to oppose and resist racism, *and* to promote policies and practices that enhance the well-being of people of color. These practices include naming instances of racism, describing them, and dismantling the structures that promote them.

So embrace the conversation. But what can you say? What if you say the wrong thing? This short guide will give you some tips and starting points for engaging in antiracist practice.

Keep in mind that *self-reflection is a critical component of antiracist practice*. Notice what comes up for you as you bear witness to BIPOC voices and experiences, how you resist listening to or engaging with conversations about race, and how you experience and express defensiveness. Investigate why that comes up; explore the origins of your beliefs and attitudes and identify potential biases you may have toward BIPOC. For many of us who have racial privilege, the mere mention of racism, let alone being “called out” for something we said, can be shocking and upsetting. These feelings should alert us to the opportunity to take in something about racism that we have been shielded from; racial privilege protects those who have it from perceiving racism and understanding how we are complicit. Stay with the conversation if you can, but if discussing racism makes you visibly upset, remove yourself from the conversation so others do not feel a need to comfort you rather than hearing and supporting a colleague of color.

**Don't wait until you think you're ready, or other people are ready, or the group or institution is ready.**

People of color, with white allies, have been resisting racism and envisioning its end for about four centuries. Study and reflection are valuable supports for antiracist practice, but they are no substitute for taking action to undo policies, practices, and ways of thinking that uphold inequality.

*Prepared by the HSS Antiracism Advocates*

# Practicing Antiracism

## A Guide for White People and Non-Black People of Color



**Listen to and center the voices of people of color.** Give caring attention to those who have embodied experience of how racism works in our shared spaces. Value the points of view of people of color, honor their truths, and uplift their voices.



**Prioritize** the well-being of people of color in both process and the decisions. In white-dominant spaces, the comfort of white people is usually prioritized, with the result that systemic racism stays in place.



**Avoid tone policing.** Tone policing (i.e., demanding civility or professional decorum) silences people of color and centers white comfort while maintaining white ignorance and derailing antiracist practice. Instead of criticizing people of color for expressing themselves with strong emotion, engage with the substance of what they have said.



**Check speech and process.** Notice when people of color are targeted with aggression or invalidation. Attend to and verbalize how white racial power and white racial expectations show up as the default in decision-making processes about policy and practices.



**Speak up.** Intervene when others say problematic or harmful things. The burden should not fall squarely on the shoulders of people of color. (For tips on preparing, click.)



**Own a vision** of well-being at the college, and state it. E.g., instead of “People of color want racism to stop,” state your vision: “I want racism to stop.”



**Emphasize accountability, not shaming.** The goal of antiracist practice is to hold your working community and its members accountable to its commitment to equity and antiracism, not to perform your own outrage or polarize the group.



**Be humble,** even if you already identify as an ally. Aspire to continuous learning and growth. Similarly, your goal should *not* be to earn gratitude or praise. Making a show of your solidarity in order to earn points is called “performative allyship” and may do more harm than good. True solidarity requires consistent, sustained engagement, learning, reflection, and accountability.



**Focus on impact, not intent.** Although your intentions may be benign, the impact of your words and actions may differ from your intention and cause harm. Lower your defenses and recognize the harmful impact your words and actions might have.



**Recover and restore.** Own up to your mistakes and apologize in a way that doesn’t divert attention away from those who were harmed. Accept responsibility, express regret, and turn control back to people of color. You should also express a desire and intent to education yourself to avoid future harm.



**Offer restitution.** Look for ways to make amends for any harm done. Identify actions you can take that support the collective work of antiracism and enhance the safety and well-being of people of color.

# Practicing Antiracism

## Avoiding Harm



**DO NOT...**let fear of saying the wrong thing keep you silent.

**DO NOT...**opt out of the conversation because you haven't been the target of racism and believe you'll never really understand what it's like to be in that position.

**DO NOT...**center your own point of view by hijacking or controlling the conversation.

**DO NOT...**conflate oppression by identifying parallels with your own experience. E.g., "I have suffered, too..."

**DO NOT...**channel switch. E.g., "The real oppression is..."

**DO NOT...**negate the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities ("microinvalidation"). E.g., saying that a person of color should not take offense because the person who caused offense didn't mean it like that.

**DO NOT...**correct the racial analysis of BIPOC--e.g., "Are you sure that's racism?"

**DO NOT...**tokenize, that is, expect or demand that BIPOC colleagues or students speak on behalf of an entire group.

**DO NOT...**deflect attention from the needs of BIPOC.--e.g., "But what about [another marginalized group]?"

Conversations about other oppressions are important, but if the topic is race, stick with race.

**DO NOT...**protect white people's feelings and rally more resources to white people.

**DO NOT...**make sweeping generalizations about racial or ethnic groups, Black people, people of color. E.g., "They don't apply for our jobs."

**DO NOT...**view being called out or corrected as an attack on your character and respond as the outraged victim (there is no such thing as reverse racism).

**DO NOT...**demand that BIPOC colleagues say what they have to say in a tone you find more palatable.

**IF YOU CATCH YOURSELF SAYING THESE THINGS: Stop. Apologize (briefly!).**

**IF YOU HEAR SOMEONE ELSE SPEAKING LIKE THIS: Intervene.**

# Practicing Antiracism

## Prepare Yourself to Speak Up



**Have a starting phrase prepared** before you find yourself needing to speak up. Below are a few suggestions; you can also create your own list of sentence stems or scripts for circumstances that you expect to come up. The following tips are from this [handout on micro interventions](#), which offers a helpful framework for intervention when racism is expressed verbally.

**Signal your discomfort** to make the problem visible to others: “Ouch.” “What you just said is really uncomfortable to me.”

**Express your disagreement:** “I don’t agree with what you just said.” “That’s not the way I see it.”

**Differentiate between intent and impact:** “I know you meant well, but that really hurts.”

**Redirect** comments that “other” or belittle BIPOC to discussion of how systems, policies, practices, and cultures constructed around whiteness marginalize BIPOC, and what your group can do to intervene in and transform those structures. E.g., if someone comments, “We try to hire people of color, but qualified applicants don’t apply,” you can state your discomfort with the comment and turn the discussion to recruitment, interview, and onboarding practices, or to an interrogation of what “qualified” entails in a white-dominant institution.

When you can, **stay with the conversation**. Sometimes you just can’t, because of time or context, or because you need to set boundaries, but the skills involved are valuable in moving a group forward. Loretta Ross recommends “seeking accountability from others with love and respect instead of anger and punishment,” not for the sake of white comfort, but to improve the chances that the intervention will be successful in advancing your group’s accountability.

Start by restating or paraphrasing the comment or behavior and ask the speaker to confirm: “I’d like to be sure I heard you correctly. I heard, ‘...’ Is that what you meant to say?”

Once the speaker has confirmed, ask their reason, value, or purpose for making the comment: “Can you help me understand why you said that?” or “Can you tell me more about what that means to you?”

If the comment or behavior is harmful, acknowledge harm: “What you just said is uncomfortable to me” or “Here’s why that comment is harmful...” [Click here for a link](#) to a video about calling in (vs. calling out).

**Affirm, validate, and support POC:**

“You have my support.”

“That took courage.”



# Practicing Antiracism

## Resources: Do Your Homework



Don't wait to be educated by BIPOC colleagues. The following resources can be useful in preparing to engage in discussions about race. Longer lists of books and other resources are readily available, and do keep learning--but don't stop at reading! And avoid intellectualizing and distancing ("I recommend this book...").

It's also helpful to **find a community** to help hold you accountable. Join a book club or contact an HSS Antiracism Advocate (email [Glenn Steinberg](mailto:Glenn.Steinberg)). A buddy, counselor, or accountability group can be a great help as you process your experience of engaging in antiracist practice.

Patti Digh's [Hard Conversations Book Club](#) is a longstanding online social justice reading group. You can join the monthly discussions, or just follow the reading list.

[Academics for Black Lives](#) offers trainings, workshops, and a three-week summer institute.

Watch for other remote opportunities that you can easily join.

### Infographics, articles, and podcasts

[Contradictions for White People in Doing Racial Justice Work](#) from @malefragility

[Cycle of Liberation](#) by Bobbie Harro

[Interview with Ibram X. Kendi](#) by Ezra Klein

Ibram Kendi's podcast, ["Be Antiracist"](#)

[Surviving Academic Karens While Black](#) by Sean K. Wilson

### Books

[So you Want to Talk about Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo

[How to be An Antiracist](#) by Ibram Kendi

[White Rage](#) by Carol Anderson

[Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor](#) by Layla Saad

[The Racial Healing Handbook](#) by Anneliese Singh

[It's Time to Talk \(and Listen\)](#) by Anastasia Kim

[Black and White Racial Development](#) by Janet Helms

[A Different Mirror](#) by Ronald Takaki

[Four Hundred Souls](#), co-edited by Ibram Kendi and Keisha Blain

[The Toni Morrison Book Club](#) by our colleagues Cassandra Jackson, Juda Bennett, Piper Williams, and Winnie Brown-Glaude

**About "white fragility":** This concept, as popularized by Robin DiAngelo in [her book](#) and in the articles listed below, can be very useful for white people to get an understanding of our affects around race. However, many BIPOC authors, including W.E.B. DuBois and James Baldwin, explored white racial emotions long before DiAngelo coined the term, and [Deborah Plummer](#) and others have critiqued the limitations of the concept.

[White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to People about Racism](#) and [White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement](#) by Robin DiAngelo