

Facing the Elephant in the Room:

A Guide to Communicating Productively About Race



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Avoid SAYING the following when communicating about race

1. “**Colored people.**” Instead say “People of Color.”
2. “**Pick yourself up by the bootstraps.**” Not all obstacles can be overcome with hard work.
3. “**You / Your people.**” This implies all people from the group are the same.
4. “**Oriental.**” Oriental is a great way to describe an object like a rug, not a person. Instead identify a specific Asian ethnicity.
5. “**Non-White.**” This implies that White is the norm. Additionally, everyone should have words to describe who we are, not just who we are not.
6. “**Illegal immigrant.**” No human is illegal. Use the term “undocumented” instead.
7. “**Minority.**” The word could connotation a value judgement of “less than.” Additionally, People of Color will soon be the majority of the population, not the minority. Instead, say “minoritized.”
8. “**What are you?**” This could be offensive and especially so for bi-racial people.
9. “**Non-racialized people/person.**” Everyone has a race/ethnicity- even White people.
10. “**You are a credit to your race.**” You might think this is a compliment, but it is not!
11. “**Model minority.**” Not all Asians are hard-working, intelligent, obedient, and well-off. This term has also been used to fuel Anti-Blackness and acts as a racial wedge between Asian and Black Americans.
11. Avoid using **absolute language** (always, every, never, etc.) when referring to a racial/ethnic group because it reinforces faulty stereotypes and demonstrates bias.
12. Avoid using **derogatory or rude language**, racial slurs, swearing, or sarcasm.

Avoid DOING the following when communicating about race

1. Pointing out how many Black or Brown friends you have. Having friends of color doesn't excuse you from the potential of being racist!
2. Accusing someone of "pulling the race card." It's easy to accuse someone of that when you don't have a race card to pull yourself.
3. Avoid using racially coded language. Ex. thug, terrorist, ghetto, inner city, tiger mom, etc.
4. Pointing out how *anyone* (regardless of their race) can get discriminated against. This might be true, but some forms of discrimination are inconsequential.
5. Avoid stereotyping and remember that racial/ethnic groups are heterogeneous and dynamic, not homogeneous.
6. Avoid attacking, name calling, or blaming.
7. If you ask a person of color where they are from and they respond by saying "America" don't continue to question or pry.
8. Avoid silencing or ignoring conversations regarding race, and be willing to have these hard and even sometimes uncomfortable conversations in order to work towards creating transformational change.
9. Avoid expecting one individual to speak on behalf of an entire racial group.
10. Avoid dominating/interrupting the conversation and allow others to have a chance to express their thoughts and ideas.
11. Avoid individualizing White People while collectivizing People of Color.
12. Avoid viewing racism as solely individual acts, but view it as a system that has been deeply embedded into our society.
13. Avoid correlating racism with immorality or something that only "bad" people do. Racism is not always intentional, it is largely subconscious and many "good" people can and do unintentionally partake in racism.

Tips for communicating productively about race

1. Affirm personhood ex. Asian, Jewish, or Black PEOPLE not Asians, Blacks, or Jews.
2. Resist the colorblind ideology: Don't fool yourself- you see race!
3. Speak from your own personal experiences rather than generalizing/ use "I feel" instead of "we, "they", or "you."
4. Understand that you DON'T know other people's experience better than they do.
5. Realize it is okay to be emotional and okay to make mistakes
6. Acknowledge your fears/concerns up front
7. Understand that learning how to talk about race effectively is something that you can learn to do and with practice, you can increase your competence around the topic of race.
8. RESPECT one another
9. Strive to understand rather than agree
11. Learn the history of racial and ethnic groups and the history behind racialized words before you use them.
12. Be mindful of your verbal and nonverbal behaviors: Rolling eyes, crossing arms, shaking head, and sighs may only add fuel to the fire.
13. Realize that different is not deficient, it is just different. Embrace that difference.
14. Realize that culture influences the ways in which we communicate- don't expect everyone to share your communication or conflict styles and/or think the way you communicate is the right way.
15. Don't expect everyone to have the same understanding about race and racism as you do.
16. Allow others to make mistakes, there is a learning curve when it comes to talking about race.
17. Work on developing your racial literacy. You can visit my Instagram and/or website for my *racial literacy syllabus* that can guide you in increasing your racial literacy!



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Questions or Comments?

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