

ACTION STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

In this section, we would like to offer several activities you can do to address racism and white privilege at both the personal and policy levels.

Activity 1 – We start with an activity called, Biggest Fears and Highest Hopes. Working for racial justice is a process; it does not have an end point. What are your concerns as you engage in this work? We suggest you do this activity with a small group of white people that you work with. Fill in each sentence on your own, and then share your responses in the group.

My biggest fears

I am worried that I can't.....

I am concerned that the people I work with.....

I am apprehensive that the following might happen with clients.....

I am afraid of the following reactions from administrators.....

My biggest hopes

I am looking forward to.....

I am pleased that the people I work with.....

I am pleased that my clients.....

I believe that this institution.....

I know I am a good social worker and that I will improve because.....

Activity 2 –Kivel (2002, p 97-98), who is a long-time white anti-racist educator and activist provides the following general guidelines to help white people understand and challenge racism and white privilege. Go over each statement with another white person, discuss it and see if you can name an example.

- 1. Assume racism is everywhere, every day.** Just as economics influences everything we do, just as gender and gender politics influence everything we do, assume that racism is affecting your daily life. We assume this because it's true, and because a privilege of being white is the freedom to not deal with racism all the time. We have to learn to see the effect that racism has. Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn't present when racist talk occurs.

Notice code words for race, and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments that are being expressed. You already notice the skin color of everyone you meet—now notice what difference it makes.

2. Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power. Racism works by directing violence and blame toward people of color and consolidating power and privilege for white people.

3. Notice how racism is denied, minimized, and justified. Frequently white people minimize the anger of people of color. When a person of color or white ally brings up an instance of racism, other white people may say it is an overreaction or that that person is playing ‘the race card’ rather than taking the concern seriously.

4. Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism. Notice how racism has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.

5. Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.

6. Take a stand against injustice. Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy, lack of self confidence, indecision, or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the only healthy and moral human thing to do. Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on.

7. Be strategic. Decide what is important to challenge and what’s not. Think about strategy in particular situations. Address the source of power.

8. Don’t confuse a battle with the war. Behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.

9. Don’t call names or be personally abusive. Since power is often defined as power over others—the ability to abuse or control people—it is easy to become abusive ourselves. However, we usually end up abusing people who have less power than we do because it is less dangerous. Attacking people doesn’t address the systemic nature of racism and inequality.

10. Support the leadership of people of color. Do this consistently, but not uncritically.

11. Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice. There is a long history of white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.

12. Don't do it alone. You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, and work with already established groups.

13. Talk with your children and other young people about racism. Even young children are aware of race and racism. Share experiences and thoughts with children about your identity and experiences. Listen to their thoughts and experiences about racism and privilege.

Activity 3 - Consider doing this exercise with a small group of white people.

When was the first time you thought about race in your life? What is that story?

Write down your story quickly, trying to remember as many details as possible. Then, share your story with the group. What commonalities do you notice in your stories? What differences?

(Hint: When doing this activity with white people, what we have found is that in almost every story, the first time that a white person thought about race in our lives, it was connected to a person of color. For example, “the first time I thought about race was when I met a black person for the first time...” Or, “The first time I noticed race was when my mother told me that I could not go on a date with the young Latino man who asked me out...” It is very rare to hear a white person say that the first time they thought about race was when they noticed that they were white, and that they were treated in a special way. Now ask each other, when was the first time you thought about being white? And what is that story? Again, note commonalities and differences in your stories.)

After discussing these stories together, we suggest you ask the following questions in your group.

If a person of color has ever gotten angry about racism around you, how has it felt?

If that person directed their anger at you, how did you feel?

Why is the anger of people of color valid? What purposes does it serve? What choices do people of color have besides being angry?

What is white guilt and fear? Why does it happen? How does it make white people feel? What purposes does it serve? What else can white people do besides feeling guilty and afraid for confronting personal and institutional racism?

Activity 4 – We ask you to complete the two action plans below. Again, we urge you to do this activity with a small group of white people.

Personal Action Plan – How do you start to think about dismantling white privilege in your own life?

What needs to change? What do you need to do first? What's your main priority?

1. Information I plan to seek out to further my understanding of white privilege, white supremacy and other forms of institutional and systemic oppression:
2. A topic of conversation related to white privilege and white supremacy I would like to have with my friends and family:
3. The different groups being negatively affected or benefiting from privilege I feel I still need to gain knowledge about:
4. Events or activities I plan to participate in to increase my understanding of white privilege and white supremacy:
5. An action I can take to confront white privilege in my life is:

Once you identify your main priority, how do you go about making change? Identify specific objectives.

Objective 1:

What will you do?

What do you need to do this?

How will you do this?

When will it be done & how will you hold yourself accountable?

Objective 2:

What will you do?

What do you need to do this?

How will you do this?

When will it be done and how will you hold yourself accountable?

Institutional Action Plan – How do you start to think about dismantling white privilege where you work?

What needs to change at your workplace? What needs to change first? What's your main priority? Who will you work with to advance this plan? No one person alone can make institutional change.

1. Information I plan to seek out to further my understanding of how white privilege operates in my workplace:
2. A topic of conversation related to white privilege and white supremacy I would like to have with peers (and/or supervisors) at work:
3. The specific groups being negatively affected by white privilege and racism at my workplace are:
4. An action I can take at work to challenge white privilege and racism at work is:

Once you identify your main priority, how do you go about making change? Identify specific objectives.

Objective 1:

What will you do?

What do you need to do this?

How will you do this?

When will it be done & how will you hold yourself accountable?

Objective 2:

What will you do?

What do you need to do this?

How will you do this?

When will it be done and how will you hold yourself accountable?