



## Racial Literacy

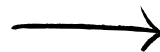
### What is racial literacy?

Racial literacy is an important skill that individuals can develop to understand race and the impacts of racism. With better racial literacy, we can question the belief that racism has been eliminated in this country, and understand why statements like 'I don't see colour' are harmful to racially marginalised groups. **Creating change starts with acknowledging there is a problem.**

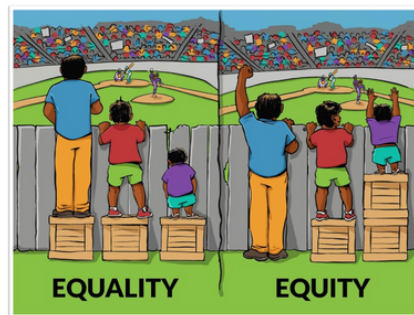
### So, what is the problem?

Racism is a global pandemic and has killed more people than Covid-19[i]. It affects children, workplaces, mental health, physical health and overall wellbeing. Many Australians are unaware of the complexity of racism, and it is important that the layered impacts are widely understood. Racial literacy is the first step to understanding the different ways racism presents, and how it can devastate individuals, families, and communities.

**When thinking about social justice and racial equality it is important to understand that to achieve racial equality, equity must come first.**



**Equality Vs Equity**  
Equality and equity may sound similar, but they represent very different outcomes when put into practice.[ii]



**Equality**

**Equity**

Sees that everybody receives the same treatment and gets the same amount of resources regardless of what they already have or don't have. The problem with equality in the context of race is that some groups are starting at a disadvantage due to ongoing oppression and discrimination.

Accounts for the gap created through structural racism and seeks to close it. This means a greater focus on racially marginalised groups and meeting their needs. Until all groups are at a level playing field equality alone will not achieve social justice.



## Racial Literacy

### How racial literacy impacts the workplace

Australia is a multicultural country, but like most colonised countries its foundations are built on racist systems. Since colonisation, Australian mainstream media, education and society more broadly has constructed a narrative of First Nations Peoples through inaccurate representations and accounts of history. These inaccuracies have played out in harmful government policies, media rhetoric, and the dominance of white perspectives. They affect all aspects of society, create inequity, and cause ongoing trauma for First Nations Peoples.[iii]

**Gari Yala ('speak the truth' in the Wiradjuri language)** is a research project conducted by the Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia. Through a survey of 1033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People their findings reveal a troubling pattern of racism in the workplace.[iv]

- 38% reported being treated unfairly because of their Indigenous background
- 44% reported hearing racial slurs
- 59% reported experiencing appearance racism - receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person

AND

- Only 1 in 3 had the workplace support required when they experienced racism
- Only 1 in 5 worked in organisations with both a racism complaint procedure and anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Indigenous discrimination and harassment.

### How racial literacy impacts children

Racism is visible to children from a young age; First Nations children are often exposed to the negative impacts of poor racial literacy from their peers and service providers. Spaces that other children feel safe in, such as school, become unsafe for First Nations children when they are subject to racism[v].

**To create a safer society** for First Nations children, training in racial literacy needs to be built into all levels of schooling, universities, healthcare, community protection and other institutions. If racial literacy is introduced from a young age, children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds will be more aware of the impacts of societal racism and how to address it.



## Racial Literacy

**Truth telling** is a crucial component to racial literacy. Non-Indigenous people must understand how Australia's colonial legacy continues through systems and attitudes that adversely affect First Nations Peoples.

### Truth telling is...

**Learning** about First Nations connection to Country and culture through engaging with First Nations film and literature.

**Listening** to First Nations histories and experiences of colonial violence.

**Sitting** with the discomfort that may arise when learning about the position of privilege as a non-Indigenous person.[vi]

Reconciliation NSW's series of factsheets seek to provide public education, helping to make visible what is often unseen by racially privileged people. Racism and related terminology is a complex issue so we encourage you to visit our terminology factsheet and resources page for more information.

**Read our next factsheet on Allyship**

- i] Vissia Ita Yulianto, “We’ve been facing a pandemic of racism. How can we stop it?”, *The Conversation*, June 16, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/weve-been-facing-a-pandemic-of-racism-how-can-we-stop-it-140284>.
- [ii] Paula Dressel, “Racial Equality or Racial Equity? The Difference it Makes”, *What is Racial Equity (Blog)*, September 25, 2018, <https://viablefuturescenter.org/racemattersinstitute/2014/04/02/racial-equality-or-racial-equity-the-difference-it-makes/>.
- [iii] Bronwyn Fredericks, Debbie Bargallie and Bronwyn Carlson, ““Nothing about us, without us”: performative allyship and telling silences”, *Croaky Health*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.croakey.org/nothing-about-us-without-us-performative-allyship-and-telling-silences/>.
- [iv] Diversity Council Australia/Jumbunna Institute (Brown, C., D’Almada-Remedios, R., Gilbert, J. O’Leary, J. and Young, N.) *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia/Jumbunna Institute, 2020.
- [v] Lilly Brown, Odette Kelada and Dianne Jones, ““While I knew I was raced, I didn’t think much of it’: the need for racial literacy in decolonising classrooms”, *Postcolonial Studies* 24, no.1 (2020): 82-103.
- [vi] Fredericks, Bargallie and Carlson, ““Nothing about us, without us”: performative allyship and telling silences”