

Anti-Racism Toolkit

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday negative behaviours or comments that reflect prejudice toward marginalised groups. In the context of race and ethnicity, they may be intentional or unintentional, but they reinforce discriminatory attitudes and reinforce inequality.[i]

They are commonly grouped into three categories: [ii]

1. Microassaults

Deliberate acts of racism that differ from overt racism because the perpetrator is often unaware, or does not believe, that their behaviour is offensive.

Examples include:

- Racist name-calling
- Racist jokes
- Avoiding or excluding people of colour



2. Microinsults

Behaviours or remarks that convey disrespect or reinforce stereotypes, often without conscious intent.

Examples include:

- Questioning whether someone's success is due to diversity policies
- Assuming incompetence based on race
- Expressing suspicion toward people of colour in public settings
- Commenting that someone "doesn't look Aboriginal"



3. Microinvalidation

Comments or actions that dismiss the lived experiences of racial discrimination.

Examples include:

- Statements such as "I don't see colour" or "all lives matter".
- Denying the existence or ongoing impact of racism



[i] Kelsey Borresen, "13 Microaggressions Black And First Nations People Deal With All The Time", Huffpost, June 18, 2020, <https://www.huffpost.com/archive/au/entry/microaggressions-black-people-deal-with-all-the-time-au-5eec0b31c5b6385574099778>.
[ii] Proctor, Sherrie L., Jennifer Kyle, Keren Fefer, and Q. Cindy Lau, "Examining Racial Microaggressions, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Bilingual Status with School Psychology Students: The Role of Intersectionality", *Contemporary School Psychology*, 2017, 22(3), 355-368, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40688-017-0156-8>.

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Recognising Microaggressions

Microaggressions are often covert and subtle, making them harder to identify, challenge, or have acknowledged by others. This can lead to the experiences of those affected being dismissed or minimised. Daily microaggressions highlight the persistent of racism and **challenge the idea that Australia is a 'post-racial' society.**^[iii] Awareness of microaggressions is important so these behaviours can be recognised as forms of racism and the underlying prejudiced beliefs can be addressed.

Health Impacts

Racial microaggressions create significant barriers for people from racially marginalised groups. Their regularity takes a cumulative psychological and physiological toll on those who experience them. Impacts include: ^[iv]

- Low self-esteem and feelings of self-doubt
- Symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Anger
- Sleep disturbances
- Physical health issues such as high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease



Responding to Microaggressions

Addressing microaggressions requires both individual and institutional responses. Call It Out is a First Nations racism register to report experiences or witnesses of discrimination online. Embedding anti-racism and social justice approaches within education, healthcare, and workplace systems can help prevent microaggressions and improve accountability.

Conversations about microaggressions may prompt defensiveness, particularly when individuals are unaware of the impact of their behaviour. Constructive engagement, grounded in reflection and education, can support behavioural change while minimising harm.

To avoid further harm to First Nations communities, non-Indigenous people should listen, reflect, and actively educate themselves on the impact of their behaviour. ^[v]



^[iii] Fiona McAllan, "Getting 'post racial' in the 'Australian' state: what remains overlooked in the premise 'getting beyond racism'?", *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, 2011, 7(1), 1-21.

^[iv] Lindsay Pérez Huber & Daniel G. Solorzano, "Racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race research", *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2015, 18(3), 297-320. doi:10.1080/13613324.2014.994173.

^[v] Kelsey Borresen, "13 Microaggressions Black And First Nations People Deal With All The Time"