

Anti-Racism Toolkit

White Privilege

White privilege refers to the advantages white people experience over other racial and ethnic groups in society. In Australia, these advantages are shaped by historical and ongoing systems that position whiteness as the norm.

“White privilege is both a legacy and a cause of racism” [i]

These benefits are often invisible and unintentional. People from racially privileged groups may be unaware of the advantages they receive, or the disadvantages faced by marginalised groups. White privilege enables them to navigate everyday life more easily than those from racialised groups.

White privilege does not mean that all white people do not experience disadvantages and challenges. They may still face disadvantage due to class, gender, disability, or other factors. White privilege explains that their race is not a source of that disadvantage.



Why it Matters

White privilege is both a result of past racism and a factor that continues to sustain inequality today. It contributes to unequal access to opportunities, resources, and fair treatment. In Australia, this connects to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other communities of colour.

Systemic white privilege results in:

- Access to higher education and educational success.
- Access to well-paying and secure employment.
- Greater choice of safe neighbourhoods.
- Positive representation in the media, literature, and curriculum.
- Fairer treatment and protection by the justice system.
- Greater access to basic civil liberties.
- Increased political influence and representation.
- Better access to healthcare, financial services, and other essential resources.



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Everyday Experiences of White Privilege

Peggy McIntosh's 1989 Essay: *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*^[ii] provides some examples of white privilege: [ii]

- Being able to go shopping alone, without being followed or harassed.
- Not being asked to speak for all the people of your racial group.
- Turning on the television and seeing people of your race widely and positively represented.
- Moving through life without being racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped.
- Walking into a store and finding that the main displays of shampoo and band aids cater to your hair type and skin tone.

The Importance of Acknowledging White Privilege

Understanding and acknowledging the unearned advantages that whiteness provides is important. This may be a difficult process, and may evoke feelings of guilt, defensiveness, anger, denial, or discomfort [iii]. It is important to overcome these feelings, because denial makes white privilege more invisible, and harder to address. Acknowledgement is the first step toward creating more equitable systems and opportunities for all.

Importantly, discussions about white privilege are not intended to attack white people. Rather, they encourage awareness of how racial privilege operates within society and empower individuals to challenge racism in its various forms.

Actions you can take:

- **Prioritise** the voices of people of colour in conversations about racism.
- **Channel discomfort** into motivation for learning and action.
- **Read, listen, and learn** from the experiences of racially marginalised communities.
- **Use this knowledge** to inform your actions and decisions.
- **Advocate for change** about issues of justice and inequality.
- **Support collective action**, including attending protests where appropriate.

[i] Cory Collins, "What is White Privilege, Really?" , Salisbury Education, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/stories/what-is-white-privilege-really/>.

[ii] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: unpacking the Knapsack" , University of Maryland, 1989, [https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege McIntosh- _ 1989.pdf](https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege%20McIntosh-1989.pdf).

[iii] J Willis, "'Tangled up in white: The perpetuation of whiteness in Australian national identity and Northern Territory Intervention", Macquarie Matri 2, 2012, <https://studentjournal.mq.edu.au/Willis.pdf>.

