

ACTIVE AND EFFECTIVE BYSTANDER STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS AT WORK

Participant Agenda

I. **Introductions**

Participants introduce themselves; facilitators will review program for the day

II. **What are microaggressions?**

Participants will analyze scenarios to identify microaggressions and the assumptions behind them and explore the role of power dynamics.

Microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages – verbal and nonverbal – sent to people with marginalized identities by people who are often well-intentioned but who may be unaware of the messages and assumptions they are communicating.

adapted from Derald Wing Sue, Columbia University

III. **Impacts of microaggressions: Trauma in the workplace**

Facilitators give a brief explanation of trauma, which is what happens when we experience stressors that exceed our coping facility. This includes historical and systemic traumas including racism, ableism, sexism, poverty, transphobia, etc.

Microaggressions can be traumatic for the targeted person, especially when taken cumulatively. Or they may trigger memories of, and reactions to, related trauma, including historical and systemic traumas.

Participants will name physical and emotional symptoms of trauma and discuss how an understanding of trauma might impact their decision about whether or not to intervene when witnessing a microaggression.

IV. **Becoming an active bystander and ally**

Participants will define the terms bystander and active bystander or ally and explore how to assess a microaggression situation and strategies to consider when intervening. Participants will return to the scenarios they analyzed in Part II and prepare a short skit to demonstrate one way to intervene.

V. **Moving from ally to accomplice**

Facilitators will define accomplice, and participants will brainstorm structural changes they could encourage their organization or workplace to make to educate coworkers/members about microaggressions and prevent their occurrence in the first place.

Active Bystander Training: Scenario #1

Tania is a Latina trans woman who is not out at work. She is having an issue with her regular childcare provider and has asked her supervisor if she can come in early and leave early several days a week until she gets back on a regular childcare schedule. Her supervisor denied the request even though others in her department have successfully asked for flex time in similar situations. She decided to take the case to her shop steward Jerry to see if she could file a grievance. Jerry and the Chief Steward Bobby, both of whom are white, meet with Tania to talk about what happened. Bobby says that he thinks she has a case, and adds, "I think it's so great that you guys are able to have kids just like a regular couple."

Discuss the following questions:

1. What is happening? What microaggressions do you see, if any?
2. What do you think are the assumptions or subtle messages being communicated, if any?
3. What kinds of power dynamics do you see at play?

Active Bystander Training: Scenario #2

Meg, a person who uses a wheelchair, works at a consulting firm. Clients who have spoken to her over the phone often express surprise when they meet her in person and realize that she uses a wheelchair. Sometimes they ask if she was in an accident. Meg good-naturedly explains to them that the nature of her condition means that she usually uses a chair, and leaves it at that. At a recent staff meeting, Meg was asked to give a status update on the project she had been assigned to; she reported that the project was running on time to meet the deadline. Her supervisor gushed, “You’re just such an inspiration to all of us, Meg – I don’t know how you manage to do it.”

Discuss the following questions:

1. What is happening? What microaggressions do you see, if any?
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3. What kinds of power dynamics do you see at play?

Active Bystander Training: Scenario #3

Jamil, one of a small number of Black employees in his company, walks into a meeting of his colleagues, all of whom are white. They chat with each other while waiting for the meeting to start, and Melissa says, “Did you guys see that black guy hanging out in the lobby? He was just standing there reading the sign by the elevator, but I’ve never seen him around before. He was really creeping me out.” John agrees, and says, “Do you think we should call security?” Jamil snaps, “Can we just get the meeting started, please?”

Discuss the following questions:

1. What is happening? What microaggressions do you see, if any?
2. What do you think are the assumptions or subtle messages being communicated, if any?
3. What kinds of power dynamics do you see at play?

What is trauma?

Trauma happens when we experience stressors that exceed our coping capacity. Trauma can be the result of one instance (a car accident), repeated or recurring experiences (abuse), and even broader historical and social systems. **Historical Trauma** refers to a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation or circumstance (for example, slavery or genocide). **Social or systemic trauma** is experienced by a group of people who have been the targets of systems of oppression (for example, poverty, environmental injustice, or racism).

Impacts of Trauma		
EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	MENTAL/BEHAVIORAL
Numbness, detachment, apathy, withdrawal Anxiety, fear Guilt and shame Anger Sadness Feeling overwhelmed or unreal Irritability Depression	Nausea/stomach problems Faintness, shaking, heart racing (fight or flight) Fatigue Startle response Sleep problems Pain	Hard time concentrating and making decisions Flashbacks Memory problems Suicidal thoughts Triggers Substance abuse

Adapted from "A TREATMENT IMPROVEMENT PROTOCOL: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. 2014.

WHAT ARE TRIGGERS? You might hear someone refer to a "trigger warning" or "content warning" or talk about being "triggered." Individuals impacted by trauma may experience flashbacks or other physical, emotional or mental symptoms listed above when something unexpectedly reminds them of, or triggers, their trauma. This could be a reference in conversation, a movie scene, even a smell or song. You can't always know what may trigger someone, but you can be aware of what triggers are and how they work: give content warnings for potentially traumatic subjects in trainings or meetings, and allow someone time to recover if they feel triggered.

ACTIVE BYSTANDER STRATEGIES

An active bystander is someone who not only witnesses a situation, but takes steps to speak up or step in to keep a situation from escalating or to disrupt a problematic situation.

BYSTANDER ACTIONS:

ASSESS THE SITUATION

Some things to consider:

- Find a way to pause from assuming or reacting right away.
- Is the “targeted individual” in danger?
- What are the consequences if no one intervenes?
- What are the options for intervention?

DETERMINE YOUR GOALS: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

In the moment:

- Support the “targeted individual”
- Interrupt the behavior?
- Engage other bystanders?
- Other?

Later:

- What other kind of support might the “targeted individual” need?
- What are longer term ways to address the issue?

STRATEGIES:

If focus is the transgressor	Support for the targeted individual	Other bystanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge/Disagree Respectfully • Question • Express your own emotions • Pivot/interrupt/distract • Follow up after the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid assuming target’s reactions • Publically Support the targeted individual during the situation • Counteract the slights • Check in with the targeted individual privately after the event • Follow up after the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support others who speak up • Establish/Reminder group about norms/codes of conduct that promote respect • Encourage allies to speak up in the future •

Bystanders, Allies, and Accomplices

BYSTANDER

A bystander is an observer to a situation - they do not step in or interact to change the outcomes in any way.

ALLY

An ally, or an active bystander, is a person who educates themselves about different forms of oppression and is willing to intervene or disrupt problematic situations (whether the targeted person or population is present in the room or not).

ACCOMPLICE

Accomplices act as an ally during individual instances of oppression, but they also work to dismantle structures of oppression in their social and professional spheres. They speak truth to power in order to challenge inequity.

Adapted from www.whiteaccomplices.org.

“The actions of an Accomplice are meant to directly challenge institutionalized racism, colonization, and White supremacy by blocking or impeding racist people, policies, and structures.

Realizing that our freedoms and liberations are bound together, retreat or withdrawal in the face of oppressive structures is not an option. Accomplices’ actions are informed by, directed and often coordinated with leaders who are Black, Brown First Nations/Indigenous Peoples, and/or People of Color.

Accomplices actively listen with respect, and understand that oppressed people are not monolithic in their tactics and beliefs.

Accomplices aren’t motivated by personal guilt or shame. They are not emotionally fragile.

Accomplices build trust through consent and being accountable - this means not acting in isolation where there is no accountability.”

Source: www.whiteaccomplice.org