# Effective Interventions Worksheet ~

**Ways to Respond to Racist Microaggressions:**

A Beginning List of Possibilities, Especially for White Change Agents

**Complied by Kathy Obear, Center for Transformation and Change**[**www.drkathyobear.com**](http://www.drkathyobear.com) **- October 2021**

Directions: For each situation, please review the list of possible responses, and identify:

* Which, if any, could you imagine doing effectively? Have done at times?
* What additional responses could be effective as well?

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| Dynamic/ situation | Possible Responses | Other Effective Responses |
| 1. You are leading a discussion and someone makes an offensive “joke” you experience as racist. | \* You may not realize the negative impact of that comment, what you thought was a joke.  \* I don’t find that funny. In fact, I find it offensive and racist.  \* That has no place here.  \* After the meeting, I’d like to talk through this interaction. |  |
| 2. When one of the few, or only, People of Color offers an idea, a white colleague says, “I don't think that will work; we tried it before” and then proceeds to advocate for their own suggestion. | \* Actually, I want to go back to \_\_\_’s idea and consider it.  \* I noticed you dismissed their comment without our even considering it.  \* Times have changed since then. And maybe we didn't plan and implement it well in the past.  \* I think it is an important idea to explore.  \* I’ve seen something similar be effective at other organizations. |  |
| 3. You notice this is the 3rd or 4th time white people have dismissed the ideas of colleagues of color without discussion, though most every comment from a white person gets discussed. | \* I could be wrong, but I have noticed this dynamic now 3 or 4 times: A white person dismisses the comments of a colleague of color, while we seem to consider most every idea posed by a white person. Anyone else notice this as well?  \* I’m concerned about what is going on. Why does this keep happening?  \* I have been wrong to not confront this dynamic in the past. I will not let it occur again. And neither should any of us. |  |
| 4. A white team member rolls their eyes and shakes their head as People of Color are talking passionately about the racist dynamics that occur in the organization. | \* I noticed you rolled your eyes and shook your head while our colleagues of color shared about the racist dynamics they experience.  \*Regardless of your intent, I found your nonverbals disrespectful and dismissive.  \* I’m curious what is behind your nonverbals? |  |
| 5. Several participants are engaged in a passionate, heated disagreement. As a Person of Color is beginning to share their perspective, the white colleague starts to speak, and now both are talking at the same time. | \* I’m having trouble hearing you both. Can we slow down and talk one at time? And maybe clarify what we hear before sharing anything else?  \* I believe \_\_\_, you started talking first. I’d like to hear your comments and then hear others.  \* (To the white person) Did you notice you spoke on top of \_\_\_? I’m curious why you kept talking as well as why you thought you could… |  |
| 6. A white person interrupts a colleague of color. | \* I don’t believe they were finished with their comment.  \* Actually, they were still talking, and I want to hear what they were saying.  \* (To the Person of Color) Was there more you were going to say? |  |
| 7. This is the 3rd time a white person has interrupted the same colleague of color. | \*You may not realize it, but that is about the 3rd time you have interrupted \_\_\_\_.  \* I’m noticing how often \_\_\_ gets interrupted by white colleagues. Like just now.  \* I’m curious why you thought it was acceptable to interrupt?  \* I need us to stop interrupting \_\_\_ and all other People of Color. |  |
| 8. After being asked to acknowledge and explore the racist impact of their behavior, a white person says, “That was not my intent! You misunderstood me!” | \* I’m open to hearing your intent, but I’d first appreciate your acknowledging the impact of your comment and actions....  \* What was your intent.... I hear your intent was \_\_\_\_, and I need you to realize your impact was different than what you say you intended.  \* In the future, I’d appreciate if you would stay open to any feedback about your impact without trying to defend yourself by centering your intent. |  |
| 9. After being asked to realize the racist impact of their behavior, a white person says, “That has nothing to do with race!” | \* When you say that, I feel you’re discounting the lived experiences of People of Color.  \* You could be right that this one specific time had little to do with race directly. But it feels so similar to very common, pervasive racist dynamics I’ve observed, heard about. It’s hard to not assume this is just like all those other times....  \* What would it mean to you if, indeed, this was a racist dynamic? |  |
| 10. After being asked to realize the racist impact of their behavior, a white person says, “That happens to me, too!” | \* I know this occasionally happens to white people, but usually not related to our racial identity.  \* This dynamic/situation does happen to other groups. The difference might be HOW OFTEN it happens to them, and WHY it happens to them. For instance: most white people have received bad customer service. It rarely happens to them because someone has racist prejudice towards them. And it probably doesn’t happen to them very frequently compared to People of Color.  \* And, when white people raise issues and concerns, they are taken more seriously, and the police and security officers are rarely weaponized against them. |  |
| 11. After being asked to realize the racist impact of their behavior, a white person says, “You’re too sensitive. You’re over-reacting. It’s not that big a deal.” | \* Your comment just dismissed and discounted my experience and those of many People of Color.  \* We need to interrupt each and every type of racist microaggression. They all have a negative impact; and, the cumulative impact is devastating to individuals and the organization. |  |
| 12. When some People of Color are naming racist dynamics, a white person says, “I don’t see it that way. We’ve come a long way. We’re post-racial now.” | \* You might not have ever recognized this racist dynamic before or seen it happen. There was a time I didn’t see it this way, either.  \* After having similar dynamics happen SO MANY times, though, I now realize the harmful racist impact on colleagues of color.  \* I wish it were true, that racism no longer occurred. But I am realizing more and more how racism historically and today is embedded in our policies, practices, services, and norms as well as infused into every institution.  \* We may have more employees and maybe leaders of color, but demographic diversity doesn’t translate to eradicating systemic racism. |  |
| 13. When a Person of Color describes a racist comment or behavior of a white colleague (who is not in the room), another white person says, “They’re a good person. They’re not racist! They have never said anything racist in all the years they’ve been here. And they adopted a kid of color!” | \* Many “good people” still do very inappropriate and harmful things at times. I know I have.  \* I’m talking about racist actions, comments and impact. Any of us white people can have a racist impact, while also generally being a “good person.”  \* It could be you’ve never realized the racist impact of their comments and actions in the past.  \* I’m not questioning if they’re good or bad, I’m talking about the racist impact of their actions even if not consciously intended.  \* Just because someone’s best friend is Black or they are in relationship with a Person of Color has no bearing on whether some of their actions and comments have a racist impact.  \* It could be they feel more emboldened to say and do racist microaggressions in these times. |  |
| 14. A white person says, “This Chinese virus is a hoax!” | \* Do you realize how offensive and racist your comment is?  \* We may disagree on the viability of covid 19, but calling it the Chinese virus is racist.  \* I need you to stop making racist comments. |  |
| 15. A white person says, “These illegal aliens should go back to where they came from!” | \* Are you talking about white immigrants without documentation or only immigrants of color?  \* Do you realize how offensive your comment is?  \* That comment has no place here.  \* I need you to stop making racist comments. |  |
| 16. A white employee says to a Pakistani American student/client, “You speak English so well. Where are you from?” | \* Did you notice you assumed they weren’t born here?  \* You've never said that to me. \* I’m curious why you felt you could say that just now?  \* Do you know how often People of Color are assumed to be “foreigners” in their own country? Assumed to not be citizens of the U.S.? Maybe told they don’t deserve to be here? |  |
| 17. A white employee says, “I disagree with the focus on anti-racism.” | \* I’m curious why you feel that way?  \* What is the probable impact on others when you say that?  \* You may not agree, but as an employee you are required to interrupt all racist behaviors as well as revise all policies, practices, and services to eliminate any racist impact. Can you do this consistently? |  |
| 18. You suspect your comment/action had a negative impact (and it did). | \* It seems what I said had a negative impact on you, maybe others. I’m open to listening if it did.  \* I want to apologize for what I said/did.... I was wrong...and I’m open to hearing how I’ve impacted you....  \*Thank you for letting me know this. I intend to change my behavior in the future...  \*Is there anything else I can do to make amends and possibly repair your trust? |  |
| 19. Someone “holds a mirror up” to show you the impact of your behavior; gives you feedback about the racist impact of your comment/behavior. | \* Breathe; choose to listen deeply, learn & own your part.  \* I apologize for my impact…  \* Are you open to saying more about the impact of my behavior?  \* So, when I …. (share back what you understood to be your impact).  \* I regret my what I said/did; and how my actions impacted you so negatively.  \* I was wrong to…  \* I commit to learning more and changing my behavior in the future.  \* If there is ever more you want to share with me, I commit to listening and changing my behaviors. |  |
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