



Starting Meaningful Conversations About Racial Inequity

4 tips for engaging in racial inequity conversations

Are you prepared to have a conversation about race? Conversations surrounding racial inequity are happening all around us—at a national level, in our communities and neighborhoods, in our workplaces, and at our dinner tables.

The focus on systemic racism has been heightened and sharpened through these discussions. While now is the time to be part of these conversations, or to even lead them, many feel unqualified or unprepared to do so. These feelings are normal. If a conversation feels uncomfortable, it's a signal you're pushing not only yourself, but the status quo as well.

Here are four tips to help you feel more confident and prepared for a meaningful discussion that promotes understanding and empathy, whether you're having a conversation with your family, friends, or colleagues:

1. Put participants at the center of your planning and know your biases

A conversation about racial inequity doesn't necessarily require an agenda. It can be organized around a central issue or theme, or it can be free-flowing from topic to topic as participants share their perspectives. However, the driving force of each conversation is consistent—the participants. Their unique perspectives will influence the dialogue. That's why it's important to know your

Key takeaways



A conversation about racial inequity doesn't necessarily need an agenda, but for most of us, it requires preparation.



If the conversation feels uncomfortable, it's a signal that you are pushing yourself and the status quo.



By embracing your vulnerability, you'll give other participants permission to do the same.

ground when entering the conversation and respect that everyone else may have a different foundation based on their upbringings, mindsets, and experiences. Ask yourself, “What unconscious biases am I bringing forward that will affect my engagement with the group?”

2. Take emotional inventory; embrace vulnerability

Before engaging, take inventory of how your feelings might impact your engagement. Are you stressed or short on time? Is a deadline on your mind? We are all human, and any of these situations can affect our behaviors and make us less attentive to others’ perspectives.

In addition, embrace vulnerability. By embracing your own vulnerability, you’ll give participants permission to do the same. While some participants may actively speak in the conversation, others might choose to just listen and take in information—and that’s OK, too. Creating a safe place for all, whether that’s sharing or listening, will create an environment for learning and growing.

3. With permission, amplify BIPOC voices

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) live the experience of systemic racism every day. Do your best to make sure their voices are represented in the discussion. With their permission, encourage involvement from these participants and amplify their input.

At the outset of your conversation, establish a shared understanding of what terms like racial equity, social justice, or systemic racism mean to the group. The perspectives of BIPOC participants should drive consensus on these terms. Then engage in dialogue that includes numerous opportunities for follow-up questions. Ask open-ended questions, such as “Can you tell me about your experience?” or “What do you think about this issue?” Invite feedback by saying, “It would be great to hear about your perspective,” or asking, “What might this mean for the future?” Be open and inviting so everyone feels comfortable participating.

And when your discussion concludes, be sure to thank BIPOC participants for sharing their perspectives, as it can take a lot of courage to discuss deeply personal matters of race.



4. Do your homework

It’s important each person—especially those leading discussions—takes full accountability for their learning and education on race topics and issues. From general articles and [books](#) to [movies](#), documentaries, or videos, there are countless free resources to prepare.

You may hear new or unfamiliar language during your discussions about racial inequity. Familiarize yourself with terminology from sources such as the [Racial Equity Tools website glossary](#). For example, “[unconscious bias](#)” is a very important prejudice to understand, as it affects how we see and respond to others around us. You may even want to [test yourself for this hidden bias](#).

The conversation may include a discussion of the tenets of the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement, the [Color of Change](#) organization, and other platforms dedicated to promoting racial justice. Before your talk, learn more about these important advocacy groups.

Lean in and have the conversation

Leveraging these tips will lay the foundation for you to confidently participate, or even lead, a conversation at your workplace or at home with family. Host a video chat or a small, socially distanced outdoor picnic with friends or co-workers. Invite friends to watch a movie or read a book about race, and then host a call to discuss your thoughts. Employers can even host diversity, equity, and inclusion events for their full team.

We are all living in a time of historical change in the equity conversation. We can be active participants and educated supporters. Stay open, learn from each other, and amplify voices to further accelerate the equity conversation in your business and your community.

Further resources:

[21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#)

[Debunking The Most Common Myths White People Tell About Race](#) or [Deconstructing White Privilege](#) with Dr. Robing DiAngelo (videos)

[How You Can Be An Ally in the Fight for Racial Justice](#) from ideas.ted.com with DeRay Mckesson (article)

The 1691 Project (articles and podcast) by the New York Times

White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide by Carol Anderson

The Miner's Canary by Lani Guinier

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein

How to Be An Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi

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