



HOW TO BE A RESILIENT & HUMBLE LEARNER: White People

Racism – a system that gives white people unearned benefits and power – thrives on complacency, fear, guilt, shame, denial, blame, resentment, “us and them,” isolation, and silence. When well-meaning white people act out the racism we have (un)willingly learned, we can feel overwhelmed, defensive, self-deprecating, stuck, or hopeless. Yet *when, not if*, we cause harm, we can use tangible tools to be resilient and contribute to dismantling the **GIANT** that is racism rather than giving into the feelings and behaviors that feed it:

Gratitude
Inquiry
Acknowledgement
Next steps
Tenderness

Gratitude

When we are called on our harmful behaviors, we are given gifts. They may not feel the same as receiving a birthday present, but they are gifts of learning and growth. It often takes tremendous emotional labor for folks of color to give us feedback of any kind. So we can say things like, “*Thank you for calling me on _____,*” “*Thank you for saying ‘ouch’...*” “*Thank you for being honest about _____,*” and so on.

Inquiry

Asking questions of self/others and conducting our own research are critical if we are to avoid repeating our behaviors (or at least avoid exhibiting them in the same way): “*What was the impact regardless of my intentions?*” “*What can I learn from what was going on in my body during the interaction?*” “*What do I need to learn in order to better understand why it was harmful?*” “*What role did my socialization play?*” White people should be mindful of not expecting people of color to teach us. When we can accept that we do not – nor will we ever – know everything, we can approach inquiry with genuine curiosity rather than fear.

Acknowledgment

An acknowledgement can be anything from apologizing to naming what happened or what you heard someone say. In fact, a statement like, “*You just taught me something, but that learning was at your expense. I wish I could take away the pain I just caused you, but I know I can’t,*” can be more impactful than, “*I’m sorry I hurt your feelings.*”

Next steps

What will you do with the gift you just received? How can you share your learning so others, too, can learn from your experience? Is there any other corrective action needed to heal or repair the impact of your actions? What structures need to change now that you have learned something new? What support do you need to seek out *from other white people* in order to process your mistake and figure out your next steps?

Tenderness

Be tender with yourself. Show yourself compassion. Forgive yourself. Remember you did not create the system of racism nor did you ask to learn racism. Your actions may have reminded the person you hurt of all the other previous times they were hurt in a similar way. Therefore, their feelings are simultaneously about you and about something much bigger than you.

BECAUSE ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE REQUIRES TREMENDOUS COURAGE

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