

A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional slights that can impact others. This guide helps you recognize and respond to them, fostering a more inclusive and respectful environment.



**COLLEGE of SOCIAL AND
APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES**
GUELPH INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Guelph Institute of Development Studies
Anti-Racism and Inclusion Advisory
Council (ARIAC)

ABOUT ARIAC

The Guelph Institute of Development Studies Anti-Racism and Inclusion Advisory Council (ARIAC) was established in Fall 2023 following the release of A Path Forward: Anti-Racism Working Group Report.

The report documents the impact of racism on Black, Indigenous, and racialized individuals at GIDS and the University of Guelph. It highlights the need for meaningful change aimed at making GIDS more inclusive, equitable, and anti-racist. The report also introduces the formation of the GIDS Anti-Racism and Inclusion Advisory Council to oversee implementation and ensure accountability.

The Council works closely with the GIDS Director to implement the report's 9 Calls to Action. If you are interested in joining the Advisory Council, please contact the GIDS Director, Dr. Andrea Paras (aparas@uoguelph.ca).



WHAT YOU'LL FIND ON THIS GUIDE

1

Introduction to Microaggressions

2

Understanding Microaggressions

3

Responding to Microaggressions

4

Creating Inclusive Environments

INTRODUCTION TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional comments or actions that convey discriminatory messages towards marginalized groups.

Though they may seem minor, these slights accumulate over time, causing emotional and psychological harm.



MICROINVALIDATIONS

Statements or behaviors that dismiss or invalidate someone's experiences or perspective.

MICROINSULTS

Unconscious, rude remarks that subtly demean a person's identity.

MICROASSAULTS

Explicit and intentional attacks or slights.

Microaggressions are present in everyday interactions, and often go unnoticed by those committing them.

FURTHER READING

Caporuscio, J. (2020, July 22). Microaggressions in the workplace: Examples, responding, and impact. [Www.medicalnewstoday.com. https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/microaggressions-in-the-workplace](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/microaggressions-in-the-workplace)

Alvoid, T. (2019). Eliminating Microaggressions: The Next Level of Inclusion | Tiffany Alvoid | TEDxOakland [YouTube Video]. In YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPqVit6TJjw>

UNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions can target any marginalized group, including people of color, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, religious minorities, and others.

An Asian Canadian, born and raised in Canada, is told, "You speak such good English," suggesting they are perpetual foreigners in their own country.

A young person uses the word "gay" negatively, associating it with something undesirable.

Microaggressions reflect views on inclusion, superiority, and what is considered normal or desirable. Many people do these without intending harm, though that is the impact.

A White person clutches their purse when a Black or Latino person approaches, implying that the person is a potential criminal.

An assertive female manager is labeled a "bitch," while her male counterpart is called a "forceful leader," reinforcing the idea that women should be passive.

FURTHER READING

Sue, D. W. (2010). "Microaggression: More Than Just Race."

https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/m/microaggressions_by_derald_wing_sue_ph.d..pdf

RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Responding to these incidents can be challenging, as individuals may choose to educate, say nothing to avoid confrontation, use humor as a coping mechanism and more. It's important to recognize personal biases and address microaggressions rather than remaining silent, as silence can be interpreted as agreement.



If you experience a microaggression

Assess the situation, decide whether to respond, and choose the approach that works best for you. You could choose to say something immediately, or speak to the person after in private.

If you witness a microaggression

Speak up to validate the experience and not let it go unnoticed. For example, you can say something like: "I would prefer if you didn't say that."

If you commit a microaggression

Microaggressions tend to not be intentional. If you commit one, acknowledge it, apologize and make an effort to learn from the experience for the future.

Regardless of the situation, whether you're witnessing, experiencing, or committing a microaggression, responding thoughtfully is key to fostering a respectful and inclusive environment.

FURTHER READING

Pacific Lutheran University. (2016). LISTEN: How Do You Respond to Microaggressions? [YouTube Video]. In YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3LFB4mJ0DI>

Caporuscio, J. (2020, July 22). What to know about microaggressions in the workplace. Medical News Today. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/microaggressions-in-the-workplace#how-to-respond>

CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Creating an inclusive environment requires an understanding of microaggressions. The real harm of microaggressions lies in not knowing how to respond or feeling unable to do so. When individuals feel disempowered or fear negative consequences for speaking up, the issue often goes unaddressed, allowing it to persist.



However, with the right strategies and support, people can be empowered to confront these issues and create change. It's crucial for those affected to find allies who can help validate their experiences and offer support.

To build a truly inclusive environment, it's essential to educate oneself about implicit bias and stereotypes. By increasing awareness and understanding, individuals are better equipped to challenge these harmful behaviors and contribute to a more respectful and supportive atmosphere for everyone.

FURTHER READING

Connley, C. (2018, April 25). 4 workplace microaggressions that can kill your confidence—and what to do about them. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/25/workplace-microaggressions-can-kill-your-confidence-heres-what-to-do.html>

Keele University. (2019). An everyday dimension of racism: Why we need to understand microaggressions [YouTube Video]. In YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCBJZQrqXG0>