

how to get called out for anti-Black racism.



getting called out might not feel good, but it's not supposed to. let's walk through how you can respond and grow.

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tei the
empathy
institute.

introduction.

so, you've been called out for making a mistake; what now?

Now, we know that being called out is easy or fun, but our society's demonization of Black anger has perpetuated harmful and racist systems of oppression for generations.

White folks, in particular, have a lot of work to do when it comes to validating and properly responding to Black anger. The visceral reactions to anti-Black racism that Black folks may have are based on countless lived experiences don't exist in a vacuum, nor are they generated solely by racial oppression. Rather, they are interwoven with violent experiences of transphobia, classism, ableism, biphobia, queerphobia, sizism, sexual violence, and beyond.

To talk about anti-Black racism means we have to think about the totality of the Black experience in Canada and North America. With this context in mind, let's talk about how to respond in a compassionate, power-conscious way.

step 1:
**listen without
interrupting.**



Even if you think someone misheard you; even if you think you're being misinterpreted; even if you think someone is taking something out of context; always make space for the sharing of these experiences.

Allow whomever is speaking to finish and actively listen to what they have to say. If this is a situation where someone has genuinely misheard you, you can always clarify after they have finished.

step 2: **resist defensiveness.**



“I’m the furthest thing from a racist person” is not a productive thing to contribute to a conversation like this. Very few people think of themselves as racist; most people think of themselves as quite the opposite. Not being racist on purpose does not mean you will not speak and/or act in ways that perpetuate, either overtly or covertly, the system of racism that Black folks experience. Non-Black people live with anti-Black racism.

Though it can be hard to hear and not fight to defend your character, true anti-racism asks us to center Black voices and not make conversations about racism about the perpetrator of oppression, especially when that person is white and has never experienced racism. It’s uncomfortable, but there is learning to be found in discomfort.

step 3: ***properly* apologize.**



This means ensuring you apologize right away, without having to be asked to, without making a huge deal out of it, and making sure you focus on your actions rather than on how you think someone wrongly feels about them. It is possible to apologize when you remain foggy about what has happened.

Even if the dust hasn't yet settled and you remain unsure about exactly how you've caused harm, you can apologize sincerely for having done something to hurt another person.

What might this sound like? "I am very sorry I did/said that. I'm going to think about this and reflect on your words. Thank you for sharing them with me. I'll do better next time."

step 4: reflect on your privilege.



If you are a white person, make time to think critically about how white privilege might have insulated you from anticipating the reaction to your words or actions; think deeply about how it might feel to have been on the other end of that interaction, and work to develop power-conscious empathy based on the experience that was shared with you. This learning is a tremendous privilege.

If you didn't mean to be racist, what weren't you considering? How does your whiteness affect your ability to consider these things? Remember: privilege doesn't mean your life is easy; it means you will not experience systemic oppression in ways that other folks might based on who you are.

If you've been called out and you are not a white person, this can be an opportunity to think of the ways in which anti-Black racism has infiltrated so many aspects of our society that you are still working to navigate. Think about your position in relation to the Black folks around you, and identify the work ahead of you.

step 5: seek out more learning.



This could also be called “Do Not Demand That Black Folks Educate You About The Oppression They Experience.”

The internet can be a chaotic, bizarre, and often toxic place, but there are countless resources to help you learn and better understand the experiences of Black people. If someone does want to take the time to educate you, that’s great! Listen and soak that up! But we must better understand the incredible burden felt by Black folks of constantly having to educate friends, family, and colleagues about the oppression they face.

The onus to learn about oppression should not fall to the oppressed. Seek out novels, art, poetry, memoirs, essays, and articles by Black folks whose voices exist in incredibly powerful and accessible ways. Go find these resources. Pay for them. Be intentional. Be accountable.

step 6: apply lessons learned.



Growing and improving is not about never making mistakes, but rather is about making mistakes once and doing the work required to not make them in perpetuity.

Reflect on the experience you had, any realizations you've had about your own life + positionality, any resources you were able to access, and figure out where you might have gone astray. Identify and rectify any ignorance or problematic habits that facilitated this event.

You're allowed to be proud of yourself for working through this! For growing. For doing the work of dismantling racism in the scariest place - internally. It's hard work, but it's necessary and always worthwhile.

step 6: keep going + growing.



Being called out sucks, but it's an experience you can and will survive. The hardest part of being called out should not be the implications we feel it has on the perception of our character, but rather the impact our actions have had on another human being.

If this is not how things align for you, continue to challenge and shift these priorities. Continue to read Black authors, amplify Black voices, and actively support anti-Black racism in your relationships, organizations, and communities.

Time to get back to work. Mistakes don't mean we get a free pass to sit out; they mean we get to do the work of anti-racism with more wisdom than to pull from.