

The Short Microaggressions Explainer

The Racial Justice Task Force

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What are microaggressions?

Microaggressions are 'subtle' forms of discrimination - they are sayings or actions that seem 'normal' or well-intentioned but actually convey insult. They are often unintentional, indirect, casual, or playful. As such, they are difficult to identify or challenge.

This explainer hopes to help you understand and identify microaggressions, and to guide you in being more inclusive and responding when called out or witnessing a microaggression! Have any questions? Feel free to send a message to Srishagon (@srishagon on Telegram).

What can I do to be more inclusive?

Be more conscious by viewing it from the eyes of the other person. Ask yourself:

1. Is this okay to say/do to someone of x identity?
2. Is this okay to say/do to someone you just met?
3. Is this okay to say/do in this context?

If you are in a privileged position and want to be a better ally, you *will* make mistakes as you learn – and you will always be learning. Being Green does not always mean being inclusive.

Being an ally requires active effort, recognising your privilege, accepting that you may need to rethink your views, and acknowledging your role in perpetuating exclusion.

What can I do if I get called out for committing a microaggression?

1. Stop and take a breath. Your initial reaction may be to react defensively, but it's not about you, it's about them.
2. Listen actively before you react. Redirect your focus onto them and why they are hurt.
3. Think. How could what you said or did cause hurt or be discriminatory? View this from their eyes. Good intentions can have negative impacts: intent does not supersede impact.
4. Repair. This could include:
 - a. Validating what they're saying and feeling.
 - b. Apologising by acknowledging the impact and genuinely asking for forgiveness.
 - c. Committing to doing better.
5. Reflect and educate yourself on how you could be more inclusive in the future.

What can I do when someone else commits a microaggression?

1. Assess the situation.
 - a. If you are receiving it: Validate your feelings and ensure your safety and comfort before confronting. You have no responsibility to confront or educate.
 - b. If you witness it: Especially if you are privileged, assess how the recipient feels and decide from there. Ignoring the situation risks normalising such behaviour.
2. Give them the opportunity to check themselves, for example by simply asking, "What do you mean by that?" so they can reflect and possibly realise why it was wrong.
3. Redirect the focus from intent to impact. Good intentions can have negative impacts.
4. Educate with compassion, if you feel comfortable doing so.

Examples of microaggressions from past FYEG events

On racialised identity or ethnicity:

- 'Where are you *actually* from?' – implies someone non-White cannot be from Europe.
- Telling two racialised persons they look like siblings – implies racialised persons are interchangeable, shows ignorance on the diversity of racialised identities.

On gender: Misgendering someone after they have corrected you before – disrespectful.

On sexuality: 'Oh, you don't look gay.' – implies sexuality is linked to appearance/behaviour.

On disability, mental health:

- Referring to non-disabled people as 'normal' – implies people with disabilities are abnormal.
- Using mental illnesses as personality, e.g. 'I'm very OCD about it.' – Belittles mental health.