



My Whole Self



MHFA England

Supporting the wellbeing and mental health of People of Colour and Black people in the workplace

This advice has been prepared following the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent focus on racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement. At MHFA England we – along with many others – have committed to doing the work to become a truly anti-racist organisation.

Ultimately our work on racial justice must impact positively on the opportunities and wellbeing of colleagues who are Black and People of Colour. We know however that a focus on race, race equity and White privilege can be exhausting for Black people and People of Colour. As organisations, leaders, managers and White colleagues we can and must provide better support and be better allies.

We would like to pay thanks to our colleagues at MHFA England who are Black and People of Colour for both sharing their own experiences and talking about what they need from us. In doing so they raised the importance of providing this support and guidance and have been instrumental in its creation. We would also like to thank colleagues at the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and Business in the Community (BITC) for recognising the importance of the guidance and offering their expertise and insight to its development.

The advice is divided into three sections:

- **Supporting the wellbeing of People of Colour and Black colleagues**
- **Understanding racism and its impact**
- **Becoming an anti-racist workplace**



Supporting the wellbeing of People of Colour and Black colleagues

The most important thing that managers, leaders, and peers can do is check in with our colleagues.

Whatever our role is, we can all:

- Educate ourselves about racism and White privilege, and how it impacts People of Colour and Black staff emotionally, mentally, and physically, their experience of work and performance
- Understand that even well-intentioned and good work focusing on anti-racism can be exhausting, and acknowledge this with People of Colour and Black colleagues
- Listen to the experiences of People of Colour and Black colleagues: pay attention, listen non-judgementally and without inserting your thoughts. Learn, research and reflect before you act
- When there are events which impact on Black people or People of Colour, recognise it can have a negative effect on their wellbeing and on their performance. Have the discussion, create safe spaces to talk
- Actively work to create safe workplaces for People of Colour and Black people so they can proudly take their whole self to work, because research shows that this is not always the case
- Support the creation of brave spaces to talk where People of Colour and Black people don't have to worry about their psychological safety, and where if they do share, they know something will be done to improve the workplace culture and environment

Leaders and managers:

- Lead with empathy, listen non-judgementally. If you have People of Colour or Black people in your teams, check in on them and ask how they are doing. Ask them if there is any support you can provide
 - If Black or People of Colour employees are being asked to get involved with activity which has the potential to retraumatise or stir up emotion, make sure they feel empowered to ask for support, which might include time off. Be proactive and check in to see what they need, including time off work to look after their wellbeing
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Colleagues and friends:

- Connect with empathy. Ask people how they are doing
- Listen non-judgmentally, without inserting your thoughts and perspectives
- Learn about allyship. Let your colleagues and friends know you care and want to amplify the message of Black Lives Matter

Make sure People of Colour and Black people know where they can go to get support and help if they need it:

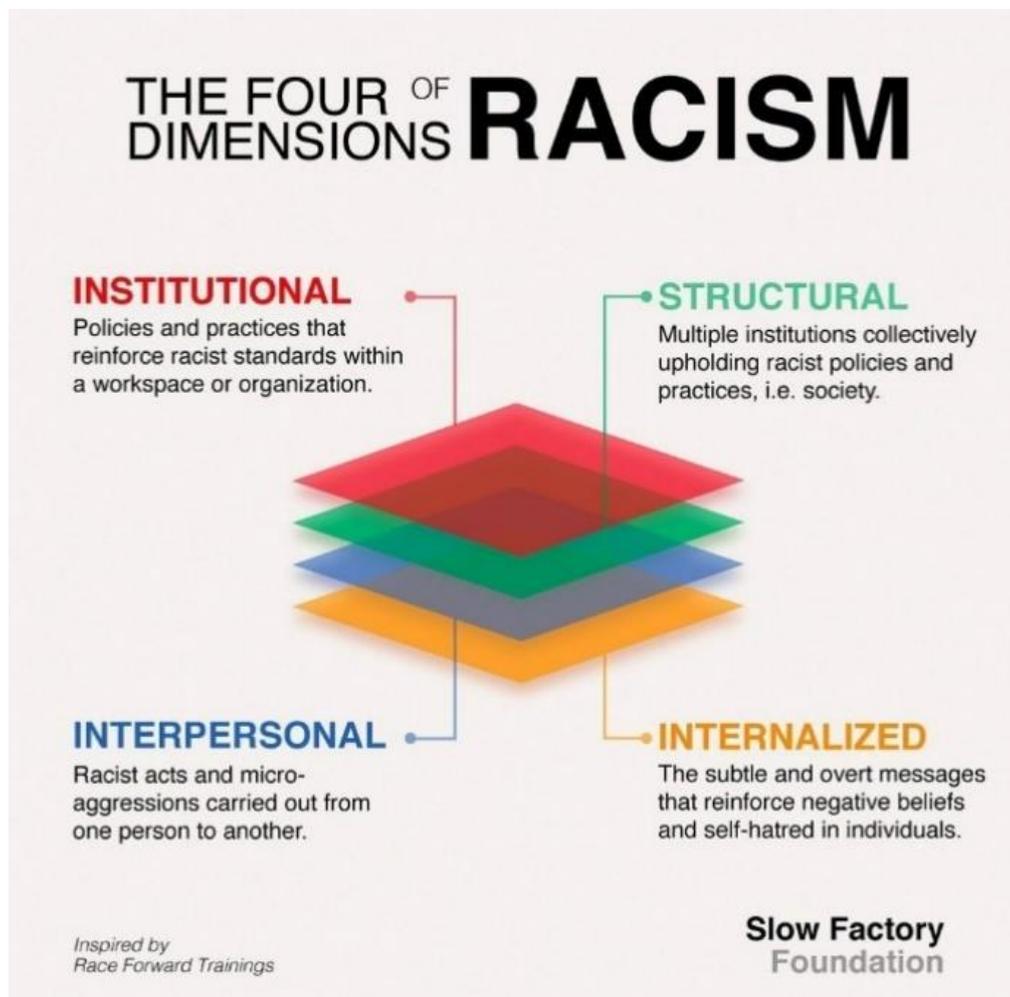
- Line managers
- HR/People team
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Diversity and Inclusion network or other relevant groups
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Specialist organisations, such as:
 - Black Minds Matter blackmindsmatteruk.com
 - Nafsiyat, the intercultural therapy centre nafsiyat.org.uk

Understanding racism and its impact

It is important that White colleagues educate themselves on privilege, race, racism and racial justice. This section provides some background information for ensuring White people understand privilege, race, racism in the workplace, and racial justice.

The four dimensions of racism

The Slow Factory Foundation has set out the four dimensions of racism. By understanding the layers and depth of racism and understanding how they may be at play in our organisation, we are better able to identify it and find approaches to tackle it.





The extent and pervasiveness of racism

The extent and pervasiveness of racism can often be underestimated. The two links below provide some helpful information about racial inequality and representation in management:

- 11 charts demonstrating the extent of racial inequality in the UK:
[independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/racism-uk-inequality-black-lives-matter-wealth-economic-health-a9567461.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/racism-uk-inequality-black-lives-matter-wealth-economic-health-a9567461.html)
- Information about the underrepresentation of People of Colour and Black people in management positions in the UK:
[independent.co.uk/news/business/news/black-asian-minority-ethnic-groups-bme-uk-management-diversity-study-a7846671.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/black-asian-minority-ethnic-groups-bme-uk-management-diversity-study-a7846671.html)

Understanding White privilege and White fragility

White privilege does not mean that if you are White you have not experienced hardship. It simply means that you have not experienced racism, and that racism has not been a barrier to opportunity.

White fragility is when White people experience discomfort when faced with information about racial inequality and racism. We all have to get better at sitting with discomfort and not allowing it to block action and change.

We can use White privilege for good by:

- Being an active anti-racist and using privilege to bring about change, without falling into the trap of White saviourism – i.e. action that is self-serving rather than a genuine commitment to racial justice
 - Learning and teaching other White people the barriers to success and exploring how to dismantle them
 - Listening to and amplifying the voices of Black people/People of Colour
 - Confronting racial injustices even when it's uncomfortable
 - Understanding the power of language and actions to include or exclude and the potential to cause pain. Statements such as 'I don't see colour' or 'I can't believe this is still happening in 2020' are unhelpful
 - Commenting on the riots
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Becoming an anti-racist workplace

As uncomfortable as many people find it, the conversations that are happening are bringing about a more widespread recognition that systemic racism is commonplace in the majority of organisations.

The premise of MHFA England's My Whole Self campaign is that all of us, whatever our identities and life experiences, can bring our whole selves to work.

We know that **is not the experience** of many People of Colour and Black people in the UK. Many people feel they have to hide parts of their identity to fit in at the office.

When organisations empower employees to be themselves at work, it's better for everyone's mental wellbeing and better for business. The highest performing workplaces are supportive and inclusive, with healthier working cultures built on respect and collaboration.

At an organisational level we must make a public commitment to being anti-racist and follow through with concrete actions for change. This may include the following depending on your starting point:

- A review of policies and protocols through an anti-racist lens
- Understand the diversity of your workforce at all levels and take action to address lack of representation where necessary
- Make sure project teams and decision tables include people from diverse backgrounds, and that credit is given to the people who have been involved in the work
- Provide high quality learning and development opportunities on race, racism, being anti-racist and an ally, White privilege, language, microaggressions, and racial gaslighting. This article from Harvard Business Review is an excellent summary of how to be a better ally:

hbr.org/2020/07/how-to-be-a-better-ally-to-your-black-colleagues



We must all do all we can with our words and our actions to champion the message that Black Lives Matter, and race equity and racial justice matters.



My Whole Self



MHFA England

At MHFA England we have chosen to use the terms ‘Black people and People of Colour’ together because this better reflects the diverse lived experiences of communities who are affected by racial inequality and racism. We do not use the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic because it does not recognise and celebrate the diversity of identities and experiences.

We have published a statement of intent on race equity with a set of commitments and actions which you can find at

mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/news/statement-of-intent

To read CMI’s guidance on race visit

<https://www.managers.org.uk/community/community-networks/cmi-race/>

To find out more about the My Whole Self campaign visit

mhfaengland.org/my-whole-self

Thank you to the following organisations for their support in developing this guidance



The Prince’s
Responsible
Business Network

