



My Whole Self

My Whole Self: Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of people from racialised communities in the workplace

At Mental Health First Aid England® we, along with many others, have committed to doing the work to become an anti-racist organisation.

Ultimately, this must impact positively on the opportunities and wellbeing of People of Colour, Black people, and people from racialised communities. We know that a focus on race, race equity, and White privilege can be exhausting for people from racialised communities. As organisations, leaders, managers, and White colleagues we can, and must, provide better support and be better allies.

We would like to thank our colleagues at MHFA England® who are from racialised communities for sharing their own experiences and talking about what they need from us. In doing so they raised the importance of providing this 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 guide and offering their expertise and insight to its development.

We have used the term 'racialised communities' to be inclusive of all those who experience racism including People of the Global Majority, Black people, People of Colour, and others who experience forms of racism such as antisemitism and Islamophobia. 'Racialised' does not define a person's community or identity but the phenomenon that is happening to them because of racism.



People cannot and should not be defined solely by their race or any other single identity. Everyone is shaped by the complex interplay of their various experiences and identities. This is called intersectionality.

Recognising intersectionality is crucial for creating a more equitable and inclusive society. It calls for a multifaceted approach to addressing discrimination that considers the unique experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups.

The advice in our guide is divided into three sections:

- [Supporting the wellbeing of people from racialised communities](#)
- [Understanding racism and its impact](#)
- [Becoming an anti-racist workplace](#)

What is psychological safety?

At its core, psychological safety is about trust and respect. It means colleagues listen without judgment. Leaders model vulnerability. Policies demonstrate fairness and dignity for all.

Teams thrive when all voices feel encouraged to speak up with ideas, questions, or concerns without fear of embarrassment or retaliation.

Psychologically safe work cultures are proven to unlock creativity, productivity, and belonging.

While change takes intention, small consistent actions by each of us help create welcoming cultures.

MHFA England want workplaces where people question assumptions, avoid blame and validate others' realities. Our differences make us wiser, stronger and better.



Supporting the wellbeing of people from racialised communities

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 staff from racialised communities emotionally, mentally, physically, and 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 from racialised communities
- Listen to the experiences of people from racialised communities: Pay attention, listen non-judgmentally and without inserting your thoughts. Learn, research, and reflect before you act
- If you have people from racialised communities in your teams, consider how their experiences may differ from yours and how you can best support them as individuals
- Call out racism in the workplace and act on complaints
- Recognise that there will be events which impact people from racialised communities more than others. This may have a negative impact on their wellbeing and on their performance. Have the discussion and encourage people to talk

Leaders and managers:

- Lead with empathy, listen non-judgmentally
- If employees from racialised communities are being asked to get involved with an activity which has the potential to re-traumatise or stir up emotion, be proactive. Check in to see what they need, including giving them the option not to take part or time off work to look after their wellbeing
- Actively work to create safe workplaces for employees from racialised communities, so they can proudly take their whole self to work, because [research](#) shows that this is not always the case



- Providing a dedicated space for prayer throughout the year, encouraging phonetic spelling of names and use of pronouns, and supporting relevant awareness campaigns, such as Race Equality Week and South Asian Heritage Month, are all ways workplaces can help create psychological safety
- Support the creation of brave spaces where people from racialised communities can talk without worrying about fear of judgement or discrimination

Make sure people from racialised communities know where they can go to get support and help if they need it, including:

- Managers
- HR/People team
- MHFAiders®
- Equity, diversity and inclusion networks, employee resource groups (ERG) or other relevant groups
- Employee assistance programme (EAP)
- Specialist organisations, such as:
 - blackmindsmatteruk.com - a collective of Black therapists, who work to remove stigma and redefine mental health experiences for Black individuals
 - nafsiyat.org.uk - the intercultural therapy centre
 - interfaith.org.uk - promotes understanding, cooperation and good relations between organisations and persons of different faiths in the UK
 - baatn.org.uk - The Black, African and Asian therapy Network



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 to help White people understand privilege, race, racism in the workplace, and racial justice.

What is racism?

Racism is the prejudice, discrimination, abuse, or oppression against a person or group based on their racial group, and beliefs about one's own racial superiority or the belief that race reflects inherent differences in attributes and capabilities.

Racism includes but is not exclusive to anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, Sinophobia, and antisemitism. Racism can take many forms and can be led by individuals, groups, and/or institutions.

Racism can be overt and take the form of prejudice towards particular racial groups, such as assuming someone who speaks non-standard English to be less intelligent.

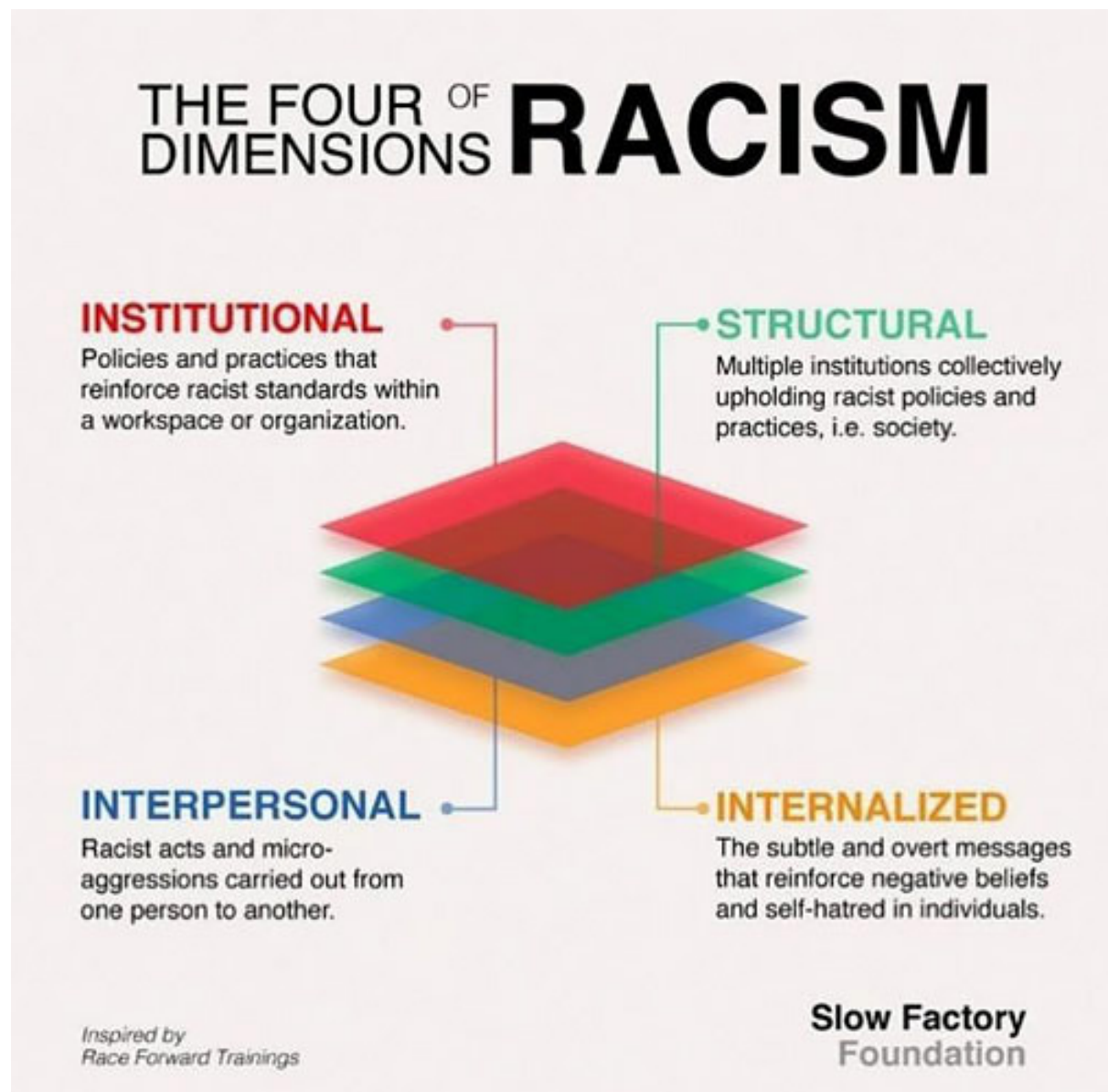
Racism can also be covert and take the form of microaggressions, or at an institutional level take the form of policies or practices that reinforce social inequalities.



My Whole Self

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 links below provide some helpful information about racial inequality and representation in the workplace:

- Quantitative evidence and report of the scale of workplace discrimination facing Black people in the UK
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/still-rigged-racism-uk-labour-market>
- Recommendations for equity in the workplace by Chartered Institute of Personnel
<https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/cipd-viewpoint/race-inclusion-in-the-workplace/>
- Guide for recognising microaggressions at work
<https://hbr.org/2022/05/recognizing-and-responding-to-microaggressions-at-work>
- Insight explaining antisemitism in the workplace
<https://www.farrer.co.uk/news-and-insights/antisemitism-in-the-workplace/>
- Insight explaining Islamophobia in the workplace
<https://www.farrer.co.uk/news-and-insights/blogs/islamophobia-in-the-workplace/>

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, a phrase coined by Robin DiAngelo, is when White people experience discomfort when faced with information about racial inequality and racism. We must all 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 people from racialised communities
- Confronting racial injustices even when it's uncomfortable
- Understanding the power of language and actions to include or exclude and their potential to cause pain. For example, statements such as 'I don't see colour' or 'I can't believe this is still happening in 2023' are unhelpful
- Commenting on race related world events

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 most organisations.

Brought to you by MHFA England, My Whole Self is the campaign for workplace culture change. It calls on employers to create workplaces where everyone is empowered to bring their whole self to work without fear of judgement or consequence, no matter our identities and life experiences.

We know that is not the experience of many people from racialised communities in the UK. Many people feel they must hide parts of their identity to fit in at work.

When organisations empower employees to be themselves at work, it's better for 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 making includes 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 racism including being anti-racist and an ally, White privilege, language, microaggressions, and racial gaslighting
- [Race Equality Matters](#) offers excellent ideas on how workplaces can be effective allies

MHFA England has committed to becoming an anti-racist organisation. You can read more about the work we have done so far and our aims for the future, [here](#).

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

We have published a Statement of Intent on race equity with a set of commitments and actions which you can find [here](#)

To read CMI's guidance on race visit [the website](#)

To find out more about the My Whole Self campaign visit [our website](#)

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



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