

NINE WAYS TO HELP END RACISM

A Sociological Guide to Being an Anti-Racist Activist

By Nicki Lisa Cole

At the Individual Level (These are mostly for white people, but not exclusively.)

1. Listen to, validate, and ally with people who report personal and systemic racism. Most people of color report that whites do not take claims of racism seriously. It's time to stop defending the idea of a post-racial society, and recognize instead that we live in a racist one. Listen to and trust those who report racism, because anti-racism begins with basic respect for all people.

2. Have hard conversations with yourself about the racism that lives within you. When you find yourself making an assumption about people, places, or things, challenge yourself by asking whether you know the assumption to be true, or if it is something you have simply been taught to believe by a racist society. Consider facts and evidence, especially those found in academic books and articles about race and racism, rather than here-say and "common sense."

3. Be mindful of the commonalities that humans share, and practice empathy. Do not fixate on difference, though it is important to be aware of it and the implications of it, particularly as regards power and privilege. Remember that if any kind of injustice is allowed to thrive in our society, all forms can. We owe it to each other to fight for an equal and just society for all.

At the Community Level

4. If you see something, say something. Step in when you see racism occurring, and disrupt it in a safe way. (Like this, for example). Have hard conversations with others when you hear or see racism, whether explicit or implicit. Challenge racist assumptions by asking about supporting facts and evidence (in general, they do not exist). Have conversations about what led you and/or others to have racist beliefs.

5. Cross the racial divide (and others) by offering friendly greetings to people, regardless of race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, class, or housing status. Think about who you make eye contact with, nod to, or say "Hello" to while you are out in the world. If you notice a pattern of preference and exclusion, shake it up. Respectful, friendly, everyday communication is the essence of community.

6. Learn about the racism that occurs where you live, and do something about it by participating in and supporting anti-racist community events, protests, rallies, and programs. For example, you could: Support voter registration and polling in neighborhoods where people of color live, because they have historically been marginalized from the political process; Donate time and/or money to community organizations that serve youth of color; Mentor white kids on being anti-racist citizens who fight for justice; Support post-prison programs, because the inflated incarceration rates of black and Latino people lead to their long term economic and political disenfranchisement; Support community organizations that serve those bearing the mental, physical, and economic costs of racism; And, communicate with your local and state government officials and institutions about how they can help end racism in the communities they represent.

At the National Level

7. Combat racism through national-level political channels. For example, you could: Write senators and members of congress to demand an end to racist practices in law enforcement, the judiciary, education, and the media; Advocate for national legislation that would criminalize racist police practices and institute ways to monitor police behavior, like the Mike Brown Law; Join the movement for reparations for the descendants of African slaves and other historically oppressed populations within the U.S., because theft of land, labor, and denial of resources is the foundation of American racism, and it is on this foundation that contemporary inequalities thrive.

8. Advocate for Affirmative Action practices in education and employment. Countless studies have found that, qualifications being equal, people of color are rejected for employment and admission to educational institutions far greater rates than white people. Affirmative Action initiatives help mediate this problem of racist exclusion.

9. Vote for candidates who make ending racism a priority; vote for candidates of color. In today's federal government, people of color remain disturbingly underrepresented. For a racially just democracy to exist, we must achieve accurate representation, and the governing of representatives must actually represent the experiences and concerns of our diverse populace.