

So You Think You're an Anti-Racist? **Shifts of Consciousness for Well-Intentioned White Folks**

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for **EdChange**
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- 1. The Base Shift: Human relations programming → Social justice activism**
Food fairs, multicultural nights, and diversity festivals are fun events that may bring people together temporarily. But do they contribute to eliminating racism? The most anti-racist shift for white people is to understand that confronting racism is going to be uncomfortable, difficult, emotional, and painful. So why do we put so many resources into human relations programming? Who might we be trying to protect?
- 2. Racism as a People of Color problem → Racism as a White People problem**
Racism is my pathology, not that of People of Color. Of course, it's much more comfortable for me, as a White person, to portray it is a People of Color problem so that I can sit back and wait for People of Color to solve it. How convenient, right? White people are privileged by racism, even if we aren't consciously contributing to it. Since we reap the benefits, we also hold the responsibility to challenge the system that benefits us.
- 3. Color-blindness → Self-examination**
I don't believe color-blindness is possible. I see difference. If I can't be honest about that, I don't have much potential to be an effective anti-racist, do I? And if color-blindness is possible, I don't believe it is desirable. Why would I want to deny what may be a powerful, impactful part of somebody's identity. Instead of working on my color-blindness, I might decide to direct that energy into immense self-examination so that I can be honest about my prejudices and how they impact the people around me and the work I'm trying to do.
- 4. Racism as individual acts → Racism as an institutional oppression**
I'm not burning any crosses. I don't own slaves. (And neither did my great-grandparents!) So this racism thing isn't my issue, right? Well, not exactly. As long as I can understand racism as individual acts of wacko White people, I can pretend that I have no part in it. But wait. I benefit from racism. It gives me access to certain opportunities denied other people on the basis of race. If I understand racism in that way—as an institutional structure that provides access and opportunity to some at the expense of others—then I do have some responsibility to end it. Blast it! I knew this anti-racist stuff was going to be complicated!
- 5. Racial harmony → Racial equity**
Why can't we all just get along? Why can't we just have peace on earth? Why are "those people" so angry? I've been working on these questions all week. Here's what I've come up with. There can be no peace without justice. (Consider it—if you were discriminated against every day of your life based on something over which you have no control, would you be feeling harmonious with your oppressor?) There can be no justice without equity. So if we want peace and harmony, all we have to do is provide equity. Who's ready?
- 6. Focus on intent → Focus on impact**
Of course you don't *mean* to be racist. Neither do I. But as a White person, I'm still working on understanding racism and my own whiteness. I, too, am a product of racism. I must take responsibility for the impact I have, regardless of my intentions. Racism hurts, whether I mean it or not.

Collaborative Problem-Solving for Equity and Justice: A 6-Step Model

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The purpose of this model is to facilitate an organized process for examining, understanding, and responding to complex issues related to diversity and equity in schools. For best results, it is crucial to assemble a diverse team of stakeholders to work through this process.

1. **Problem Identification**

Identify or name the situation and relevant related issues. What is the conflict? What is the source of the conflict?

2. **Perspectives**

Create a list of every person, group, and institution impacted by the incident. How is each of these people and institutions affected by the situation? Be sure to include possible victims, victimizers, members of the community, and anyone else who is touched by the incident directly or indirectly. It may be necessary to make some assumptions for this step, intensifying the importance of incorporating as many voices and perspectives as possible into the process of compiling the information.

3. **Challenges and Opportunities**

With the varied perspectives in mind, what are the individual and institutional challenges and constraints within which the situation must be addressed? What are the challenges based on the individuals directly involved, and what institutional constraints must inform an approach for addressing the situation? What are the educational and growth opportunities presented by the incident, both for the people directly involved and the institution?

4. **Strategies**

Brainstorm approaches for addressing the situation, attempting to maximize the extent to which the negative outcomes of the situation are addressed while simultaneously maximizing the extent to which you take advantage of educational and growth opportunities. Keep in mind the varied perspectives and the fact that any solution will affect everyone differently. This is not the step at which to challenge and critique each other's ideas. Record every idea, no matter how unreasonable it may sound to individuals in the group.

5. **Solutions**

Focus your strategies into a formal plan of action. Keep in mind the varied perspectives as well as the challenges and opportunities. Be sure to come up with at least two or three specific responses, whether they focus on the individual conflict or the underlying issues at an institutional level.

6. **Expected Outcomes**

Name the outcomes you foresee as a result of the solutions you identified. Revisit the perspectives step to ensure a standard of equity and fairness.