

BE BRAVE
ENOUGH
TO HAVE THE
CONVERSATIONS
THAT
MATTER

-Margaret Wheatley, Author

December, 2016

Anti-Racism Kitchen Table Conversation Guide
Beyond London's Forum on Racism

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Format & concept adopted from Canadian Union of Public Employees' Universal
Child Care Kitchen Table Conversations

Anti-Racism Kitchen Table Conversation Guide

Beyond London’s Forum on Racism

On September 17th, 2016 London held a forum on racism. This guide will assist in bringing the issues from the forum to your kitchen table, boardroom, and social circle. Having difficult conversations is just one way of addressing the issue of racism beyond forums and events.

1. Starting a conversation:		
	Do’s	Don’ts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do use current issues, media stories to begin a conversation on racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t begin a difficult conversation amidst a pre-existing argument – people are more open to meaningful discussion when they are not in the defensive mode
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do use positive body language – your physical location, posture, facial expression, etc can set the tone for the conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t mirror aggressive behavior like shouting, standing over your counterpart, pointing, etc – remind yourself of the intent to start this conversation, which includes continuing it.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do paraphrase your counterparts points, responses, and feelings – sometimes there is great clarity in hearing things out loud, repeated clearly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t assume your counterparts position or opinion. Even if past experiences points to a particular stance, allow for the conversation to organically happen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do use historical facts as a tool to help frame your conversation. Do your homework and remember that some of what you will state as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t assume all history is written equally. Check your facts, source, and always ask <i>“through which lens is this written in?”</i> 	

	<p>facts may be new information to your counterpart</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be patient. Coming to terms with one's privilege (or lack of) is not easy to digest. If an emotional reaction surfaces, ask <i>"how are you feeling about this?"</i> Follow with asking <i>"why do you feel this way?"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Don't belittle, blame, or undermine your counterparts. Be compelled to listen to differing opinions, but do not mistake it as a place to give 'respect' to opinions that are racist.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do follow up on the conversation by checking in with your counterpart and continuing the dialogue at a later date/time. Leaving some time to reflect is ideal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Don't expect that one conversation (or twenty) will <i>change your counterpart's mind</i>. Your energy is best applied to facilitate/influence your counterpart to challenge their norm.
<p>2</p>	<p>Starting the conversation- Questions to consider</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is racism, and what isn't racism? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What does racism look like? b. What does racism sound like? c. What does racism feel like? d. What impacts does racism have? e. Where does racism come from? 2. Should racism be interrupted? Why and how? What are some barriers to interrupting racism? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why should racism be interrupted? b. How should racism be interrupted? c. Have you ever seen racist behaviour, but been afraid to interrupt it? 	

	<p>3. What are some actions that we can take as a community to stop individual and systemic racism?</p> <p>a. What are some kinds of individual racism?</p> <p>b. What are some kinds of systemic racism?</p>											
<p>3.</p>	<p>What do I do if...?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="266 468 841 516">Pitfall</th> <th data-bbox="841 468 1419 516">Remedy</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="266 516 841 915"> <p>Individuals with power (white people, men, other individuals with undeserved advantages) monopolize the conversation, focusing on their own responses to what they are learning about racism, lack of experience of oppression</p> </td> <td data-bbox="841 516 1419 915"> <p>Acknowledge their perspective, then redirect to unheard or underheard perspectives from oppressed communities</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="266 915 841 1140"> <p>White individuals speaking the words of racialized individuals within the group as if they were their own, without attribution.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="841 915 1419 1140"> <p>Identify that the racialized individual just said that</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="266 1140 841 1409"> <p>White individuals minimizing or diminishing the lived experiences of racialized individuals</p> </td> <td data-bbox="841 1140 1419 1409"> <p>Affirm the lived experiences of racialized individuals. Believe individuals with lived experience when they say they have experienced trauma</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="266 1409 841 1902"> <p>Signs of white fragility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Defensive behaviour (“I’m not racist; I have friends who are [racialized group]; I don’t see colour”) ● Using sugar-coated language to talk about racism, oppression, and anti-oppression work </td> <td data-bbox="841 1409 1419 1902"> <p>Challenging the “good / bad” binary of racism (“Only bad people are racists,” “Good people aren’t racist”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introducing the idea that “safety” and “comfort” aren’t the same thing, and encouraging white individuals to be uncomfortable </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Pitfall	Remedy	<p>Individuals with power (white people, men, other individuals with undeserved advantages) monopolize the conversation, focusing on their own responses to what they are learning about racism, lack of experience of oppression</p>	<p>Acknowledge their perspective, then redirect to unheard or underheard perspectives from oppressed communities</p>	<p>White individuals speaking the words of racialized individuals within the group as if they were their own, without attribution.</p>	<p>Identify that the racialized individual just said that</p>	<p>White individuals minimizing or diminishing the lived experiences of racialized individuals</p>	<p>Affirm the lived experiences of racialized individuals. Believe individuals with lived experience when they say they have experienced trauma</p>	<p>Signs of white fragility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Defensive behaviour (“I’m not racist; I have friends who are [racialized group]; I don’t see colour”) ● Using sugar-coated language to talk about racism, oppression, and anti-oppression work 	<p>Challenging the “good / bad” binary of racism (“Only bad people are racists,” “Good people aren’t racist”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introducing the idea that “safety” and “comfort” aren’t the same thing, and encouraging white individuals to be uncomfortable
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accusations of “reverse racism” or racial discrimination against white people ● Emotional responses to the trauma of racialized individuals, “taking up space” in racism discussion with their personal discomfort ● Shutting down, going silent, or physically leaving the space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask “What are the rules for how people of colour should give us feedback about our racism? Where did we get those rules? Whom do those rules serve?”¹
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¹ <http://www.alternet.org/culture/why-white-people-freak-out-when-theyre-called-out-about-race>

Speaking with family, friends, and colleagues about racism is difficult work. These conversations are seldom easy, so self-care and seeking support before and after is crucial as a facilitator – even when it’s happening at your kitchen table, in your work lunchroom, or at a social function.

Anti-oppression work, particularly anti-racism work is a long-term commitment, especially as an ally. Every little bit of informed, genuine, and consistent work counts!