

TAKE ACTION WHEN WITNESSING RACISM. IT MATTERS!



Racism Affects our Health

Racism can harmfully affect the health and well-being of individuals and communities. It can lead to:

- Anxiety, depression and low self-esteem
- Unhealthy behaviours like alcohol consumption, irregular sleeping patterns
- Self harm or physical injury resulting from race-based violence

Racial prejudice and discrimination can also lead to reduced access to employment, housing and education, and social exclusion.



Importance of Bystander Anti-Racism

When you witness racism, speak up! Bystander intervention can:

- Help prevent racist acts from being committed
- Limit the potential for escalation
- Reduce the physical, social, psychological and emotional harms that result
- Promote norms and ideals that can weaken the social acceptance of racism in the future.



How Can I Become an Active Bystander?

Bystander action can include:

- Confronting the perpetrator
- Recruiting other active bystanders
- Seeking assistance from appropriate authorities (e.g., from a police officer, or school teacher)
- Reporting the incident

Roots of Racism in Canadian History

Doctrine of Discovery, 1452

"...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Sarcens and pagans whatsoever placed,....,and the principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable good whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the,..., principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit"

—Pope Nicholas V (Papal Bull 1452)

Discovery was used as legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations, including First Nations in what is now Canada. During the European "Age of Discovery", Christian explorers "claimed" lands for their monarchs who felt they could exploit the land, regardless of the original inhabitants.

This was invalidly based on the presumed racial superiority of European Christian peoples and was used to dehumanize, exploit and subjugate Indigenous Peoples and dispossess us of our most basic rights. This was the very foundation of genocide. Such ideology lead to practices that continue through modern-day laws and policies.



PERSONAL STORIES

These stories are first-hand accounts of racism in Edmonton. Names have been changed to protect identities.



Joan,
Filipino woman

A couple of summers ago I worked in an office setting as a casual worker. Being a filler for the summer while others were on vacation, I didn't get to know people right away. I had an encounter with a co-worker that just absolutely blew my mind (in a negative way). The conversation went a little like this:

Him: Can I ask what nationality you are?

Me: Um... I'm Filipino.

Him: Ahhhh, I knew it. I knew you had to be Filipino. You're a hard worker. Although I thought that maybe you were half or something because a lot of the Filipinos I know don't work in office settings like this. Our janitors are Filipino, did you notice?

Me: *Cringe* *Speechless*
Makes awkward face

Him: I bet you know a lot of people who work at Tim Hortons.

Me: *Knowing what's about to be said....* Why?

Him: Duh, because that's where all of your people work!

What could a bystander have done?



Identify Harm

A good first step in these situations is to recognize that harm has been done. Be aware when someone is making generalizations about another person's race, and pay attention to social cues and clues that show the targeted individual's discomfort.



Address the Speaker

A simple comment or question asking: "sorry, why do you think that's true?" can throw someone off guard and lead them to reflect on the acceptability of their comments.

In this situation, you could be even more specific: "I'm sorry, I don't agree with your opinion about Filipinos. Do you feel like your ideas about them are always true?" When forced to give an answer, the speaker may begin to understand the inappropriateness of their views.



Address the Targeted Individual

Find a way to bring the targeted individual back into the conversation by directly asking them about their views and their experiences. For example, you can interject in the situation and simply ask: "Joan, how do you feel about that comment, what are your experiences"?

What's the problem here?

Microaggression: Tongue-in-cheek comments or jokes about someone's race or ethnicity can seem innocent but are often dismissive of an individual's experiences and personal histories. Prejudiced jokes and assumptions about someone's race can be understood as microaggressions. Whether intentional or unintentional, they demean the lived-experiences and perspectives of the targeted individual.

Microaggressions can invalidate group identity by communicating that targeted persons are different, inferior, and/or must fall under certain stereotypes because of their background.



Nate,
Indigenous man

Walking through a small downtown park, I placed my backpack and Walking Stick on a bench to sit and role a cigarette. Immediately upon finishing, security came up and asked me to leave. I replied that he'd no reason to ask me to leave. At this point he attempted various intimidation tactics. At one point, he was about to grab me but I told him if he laid a hand on me I would defend myself.

The guard's supervisor arrived and called the police while the guard moved towards my backpack but I grabbed it. Then he walked behind me and, to my horror, snatched my custom carved Walking Stick with a Sacred Eagle Feather attached at the top. I got a hand on it but the guard insisted on wrestling me for it and although I wanted to lash out in that moment, I knew I'd lose to the system once again so let go. I was left pleading for people in the park to record what was happening.

A lifetime of shackling racial comments and beatings flashed to mind as the guard turned my Walking Stick upside down, slightly grinding the hand carved tip and Eagle Feather into the ground.

Eventually, the police arrived and I explained everything that happened. One officer said I had every right to be there but when I suggested I wished to file a complaint, he said I should have left the scene, called the police, and then have filed.

What could a bystander have done?



Record the Incident

I was satisfied with the way bystanders reacted to this situation. A woman in the Park began to record the incident on her phone which possibly led the guard to lay down the Walking Stick.



Address the Speaker/ Sit with Targeted Individual

Another Indigenous person stopped and told the guard to leave me alone. This good samaritan even sat next to me. The guard tried to warn him "not to get too close. I don't want you to get hurt. He's got a stick and could get violent"... lol.

He and I talked a second and then he began drawing attention from other bystanders. Calling out how this guard was being racist towards me and such. It was beautiful, lol.

I thought about filing a law suit and wish I still could but my anxiety and past experiences hold me back from doing so. Nothing ever worked for my people in this area.

What's the problem here?

Systemic Racism
in which either:

1) Privilege breeds ideologies of superiority along with a sense of duty to protect the foundational institutions that provide the sustenance for said ideologies.

2) Newcomers along with others working for the system are kept unaware of the history, purpose and practices of Colonization. They don't have the opportunity to learn about the dynamics of institutional policies that promote a mindset of fear, division and dominance.

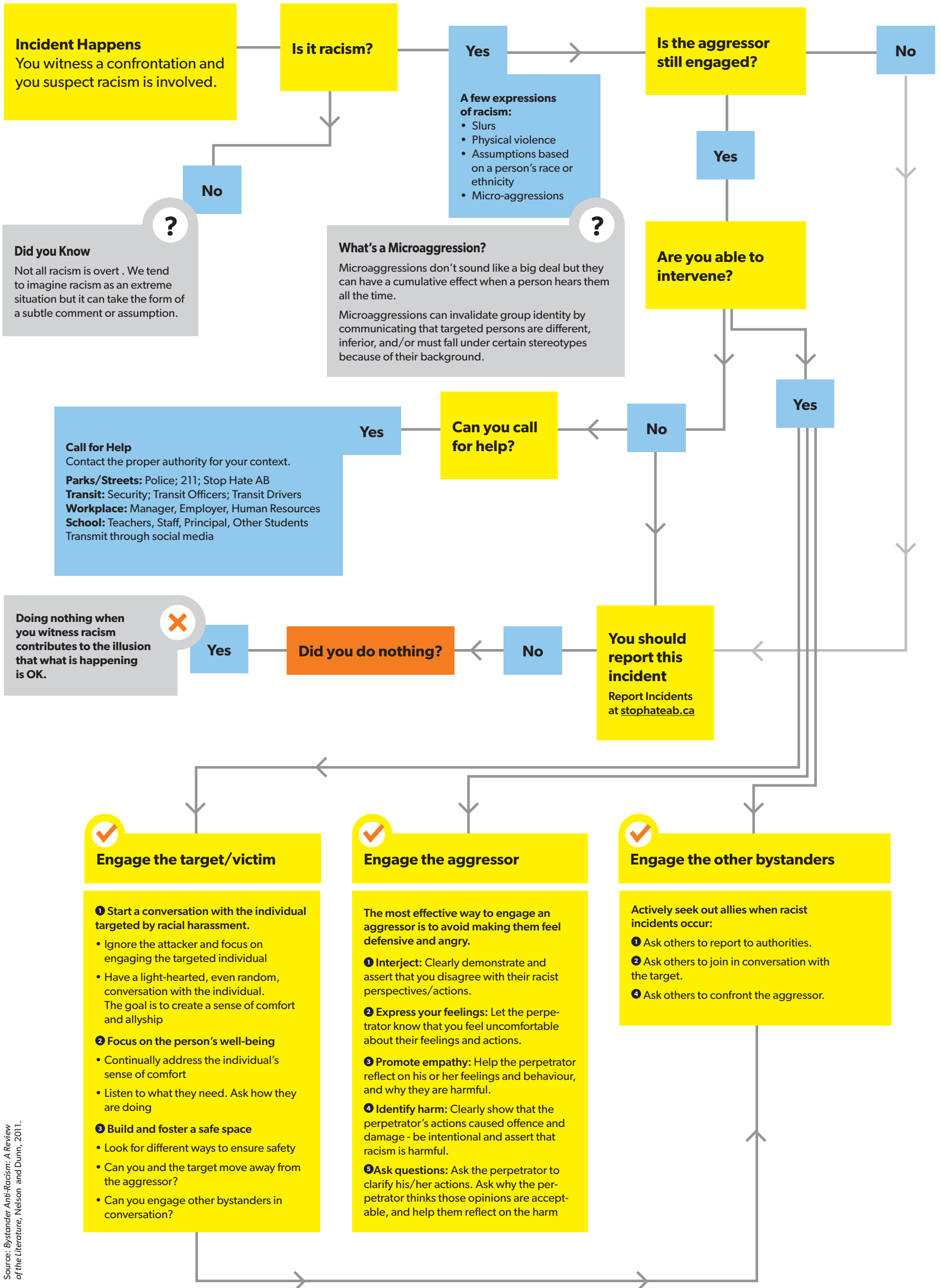
LEARNING TO BECOME AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

A Flow Chart

Bystander Safety

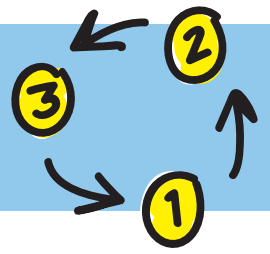
It is up to the person making the intervention to decide whether it is safe or not to intervene. Every situation is unique and must be evaluated in context. When possible and safe, it is always preferable to speak up. Letting everyone involved with the situation know that racism in any form is not acceptable makes a difference.

When intervening is deemed unsafe, try calling for help or ensuring that you report the incident.



CONFRONTING PREJUDICE

A Step-by-Step Guide



Taking Action and Speaking Up: It Changes Minds

Whether subtle or more directly challenging, confrontation makes perpetrators aware of their own biases, and it effectively reduces their prejudiced responses.¹



Identify Racism

A few expressions of racism:

- Slurs
- Physical violence
- Assumptions based on a person's race or ethnicity
- Micro-aggressions



Even people who consciously and sincerely endorse egalitarian ideals are often unaware that they may hold biases that can be automatically activated and thus can unintentionally influence their own judgments of others.¹



Decide if the Situation Warrants Action

Discrimination is physically and psychologically harmful. It often takes people by surprise and (if safe) may require an immediate response to effectively extinguish in it.



Decide how to Intervene

The most effective bystander action communicates a message of disapproval or discomfort without damaging interpersonal relations. Effective bystander action is a delicate balance between communicating discomfort and maintaining interpersonal relations, and the most appropriate action will depend on features of a particular situation.



Stay Prepared

Confronting someone and calling them out on racist behaviour or prejudice is difficult and takes practice. Every situation is unique and it is up to you to determine your response to a racist comment or action.



Responding with anti-racism offers the hope of shifting social norms toward intolerance of everyday racisms, and leveraging additional prosocial action from the untapped potential that seems to exist.²

Source: 1 – The Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) Model: Applying CPR in Organizations, Ashburn-Nardo, Morris and Stephanie A. Goodwin, 2008. 2 – Bystander Anti-Racism: A Review of the Literature, Nelson and Dunn, 2011.