

A **Tool Kit** for Productive
Conversations on **Race**

June 2020





Race and racism are at the forefront of our current collective conscious.

We the People of the United States of America continue to struggle with acknowledging and making amends for the historical legacy of Slavery and systemic racism. For many of us, the recent murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and, most recently, George Floyd, have revived the importance of addressing racial violence effectively as individuals and collectively as a health care system.

Since its inception, Mass General Brigham's Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) has been focused on addressing systemic racism through education, dialogue, community building and action. These materials are not an exhaustive anti-racism educational curriculum, but serve as a toolkit to begin engaging in conversations.



For additional education, visit the [Office of DE&I webpage](#) for a more comprehensive set of resources and course offerings to address systemic racism.



A **Tool Kit** for Productive Conversations on **Race**

Designed to support Mass General Brigham's anti-racism campaign, the Tool Kit is divided into three sections:

1) SEE. Designed to prepare people for racial dialogue.

2) HEAR. Provides you with skills and tactics for facilitating or participating in a conversation around race and racism with colleagues.

3) ACT. Focused on taking our thoughts and discussions forward to creating meaningful change and promoting anti-racism in our personal and professional lives.

Each section provides initial guidance and best practices for addressing racism.

Self-Reflection and Education

Before engaging in a conversation about race and racism, it is important to spend some time reflecting on your own ethnic/cultural background and understanding the historical context of others who are entering a discussion with you. Racial dialogue becomes unproductive when we are not able to fully hear another person's perspective because it does not align with our own view of the world. To be able to fully listen to another person's experience around race, we must understand our own racial identity.

Cultural Humility

Developed by Dr. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García, cultural humility is a "lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique" in our interactions with a person that is of a different racial or cultural background than our own. To practice cultural humility, you need to begin with self-reflection and ask yourself some very critical questions.

Once you start to fully understand your own beliefs and values, you can be more equipped to talk with colleagues and ask questions that better understand their individual racial or ethnic identity.



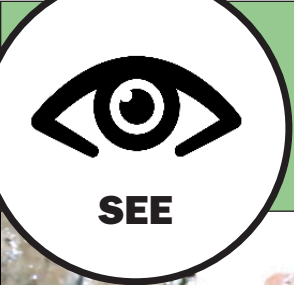
Cultural Humility: People, Principles and Practices
(7 mins)

Question Yourself



THINK

- What are my cultural beliefs about race?
- What are my family's beliefs and values about race?
- What is my personal culture and identity (ethnicity, age, experience, education, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion)?
- Am I aware of my personal biases and assumptions about people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds different than my own? What are assumptions may I have about their culture and values?
- Do I consider my beliefs and values to be representative of the population at large? In the past when you have talked about race and racism, how did that make you feel (comfortable, uncomfortable, angry, happy, sad)?
- What makes talking about race hard for you?
- What are the benefits about talking about racism for you personally?



Understand the **racial history** of America. **Learn** about **#BlackLivesMatter**.



THEN

+


NOW



 **#BlackLivesMatter: A Look Into The Movement's History**
(4 mins)

The Importance of History

In order to have a productive conversation about race, we must be operating on a similar understanding about the United States' ugly history of racism and how it is embedded into all of the social institutions in America. In "Slavery to Mass Incarceration," racial justice leader Bryan Stevenson discusses the impact slavery plays in our society today. After watching Stevenson's video, the historical legacy of slavery is clearly connected to the disproportionate incarceration of black men and the police brutality they face in America today.

 **Slavery to Mass Incarceration**
(6 mins)

Racism is structural inequality.

For more comprehensive background information about structural racism, please review these [additional resources](#). In any discussion about race or racism, it is important to acknowledge that racism is not just individual acts of bigotry perpetrated against people because of their skin color. Racism is structural inequality.


Understanding and Defining Racism

As defined by Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, Structural Racism is "the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – over time that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of others."

It is important to use similar definitions and concepts so that you can see, listen and learn from others' experiences and perspectives.

Language is important. We cannot communicate if we do not understand each other's words.

In addition to structural racism, the Aspen Institute's glossary contains additional terms that will be helpful to know before engaging in racial dialogue with others.

 **Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling of Structural Racism**



Having Difficult Conversations

Once we have reflected on our own cultural background, understand the historical legacy of slavery and have common language and terminology around racism, we need to acknowledge that difficult emotions and feelings will arise for people when talking about race. These conversations are not easy, as our racial and ethnic identity are the core to who we are as people and how we experience the world.

Leading anti-racism activist Dr. Robin DiAngelo spoke at MGB in February. She discussed common behaviors and thoughts that arise for white people when talking about race. These may derail conversations and keep people of color from speaking openly. [Full list here.](#)

Before engaging in a conversation about race, reflect on whether you have experienced or participated in any of these behaviors in previous discussions. How might these behaviors have affected the conversation around race? What can you do to be better prepared to recognize these behaviors and ensure that you do not hinder a productive dialogue with your colleagues?

The emotional, physical, and spiritual toll of engaging in anti-racism work is real. Conversations can be stressful, and can result in physical indications like increased heart rate, sweaty palms, upset stomach or warmth/redness in your skin. Identify how your body manifests stress. Check

in with yourself and remember to practice deep breathing; if you become overly stressed you might become angry or upset, and might not be able to listen to what others are saying with empathy, leading to disengagement from the group.

“A riot is the language of the unheard. What is it that America has failed to hear?”

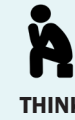
— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Engagement

Whether engaging in individual or group conversations, we should acknowledge that these discussions won't be perfect and may be uncomfortable at times. However, they are important and needed as we all process current events and systemic racism.

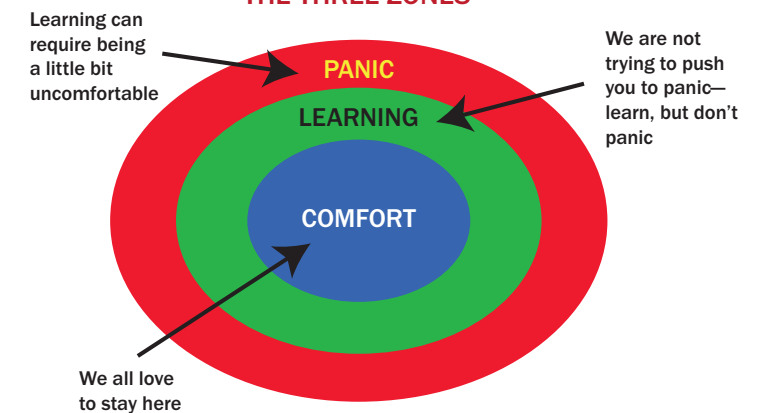
As with any toolkit, the information provided is suggested best practices and can be helpful for creating space for dialogue, but most importantly listening. Truly hearing someone means bring empathy, courage, humility and honesty to a conversation around racism.

Common Conversation Derailers Do you....?



- Believe you have “earned” what you have, rather than acknowledge the extensive unearned advantages white people receive; claim that if people of color just worked harder...
- Not notice the daily indignities that people of color experience; deny and rationalize them away with perfectly logical explanations
- Internalize negative stereotypes and believe that whites are smarter and superior to people of color
- Want people of color to conform and assimilate to white cultural norms and practices
- Blame people of color for the barriers and challenges they experience; believe that if they “worked harder” they could “pull themselves up by their bootstraps”
- Believe that people of color are not competent and are only hired/promoted to fill quotas
- Interrupt and talk over people of color
- Dismiss and minimize frustrations of people of color and categorize the person raising issues as militant, angry, having an “attitude,” working their agenda, not a team player...
- Focus on their “good intent” as whites, rather than on the negative impact of their behavior on people of color
- Focus on how much progress we have made and the need to “get over it”, rather than on what still needs to change
- Get defensive when people of color express frustration with racism

THE THREE ZONES



Racial dialogues should be challenging.

When there is enough tension and people are open to others' points of view, dialogues foster growth. While people may say something that makes you uncomfortable, or that you disagree with, hear them fully and consider their perspective and point of view. This is the **learning zone**. You may shed a few tears, or hear or say something that makes others uncomfortable. That is okay, as long as you are open and can learn from that perspective or experience.

If at any time you get into the panic zone, drink some water or take a few deep breaths until you can get back into the learning zone. Discussion about race will be taxing, so make sure you have a plan for self-care. Check in with friends and family, exercise, meditate or identify another practice you can engage in to reduce stress.



“Dialogue is about people – listening to them, empathizing with them, and humbling ourselves for a moment that we might understand a different view.”

— Science & Spirit: Connecting Science, Religion and Life



 **“Your Black Colleagues May Look Like They’re Okay – Chances Are They’re Not”**
READ

One on One Conversations

We are all struggling to process what we see, hear and experience in our homes, communities, and cities as we see police brutality, righteous protests, racial violence and death around the country. Racism is front and center in our lives; it is impossible to look away. We must discuss current events and racism at work as it directly relates to our colleagues and the patients we serve. As a manager or colleague, acknowledge the difficulties of this moment and provide space for your colleague to share, especially for colleagues of color, whose communities are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and are continually processing their experiences with police brutality and racism, but still working effectively each day.

Checking In With Colleagues Individually



ENGAGE

LISTEN

This is a difficult time and it is important to acknowledge the reality of current situation. Ask your colleague how they are feeling about it and then LISTEN. Don't interrupt or add your own experience. Just give them the space to speak. If they give a short or one-word answer, like “okay,” don't push, but keep communication open. “Thanks for sharing with me, and if you want to talk more, I am here to listen when needed.”

OFFER SUPPORT

Understand that people are grieving and upset, but may not want to ask for help. It may be helpful to ask, “What can I do as a colleague or manager to help support you?” If they are unsure, be specific. “I can adjust the timeline for what you are working on.” “If you are comfortable, we could bring another member of the team in to help.” If the support is too much for you to personally provide, suggest that your colleague check with MGB's Employee Assistance Program.

MGB's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is equipped to provide support and guidance to employees who are experiencing difficulties.



The key to productive conversations regarding race and racism is facilitated dialogue.

Team and Group Discussions

As an adult learning technique, **facilitated dialogue** allows participants to bring their knowledge and lived experiences around race to the discussion, and creates space for people to reflect on how race and racism shape their personal and professional lives.

Preparation

Before you facilitate dialogue, create an **agenda** and identify a related video, podcast or article that you may want to utilize as a discussion starter. An agenda should include:

1. **Welcome/check-in**
2. **Ground rules**
3. **Discussion**
4. **Check-out**

The agenda and any selected media should be distributed to all participants prior to discussion to allow people to reflect and process it.



1. Welcome/Check-In

Don't just jump right in to a conversation. Have everyone go around and introduce themselves. Have them share their name, role, racial/ethnic background and how they are currently feeling. Sharing racial/ethnic background is extremely important, as it allows people to self-identify whether they are Black, White, Hispanic, Latinx, Asian, Native American, bi-racial, etc. This ensures that other participants do not accidentally make assumptions about a person's background.

2. Ground Rules

When discussing race, be sure that there are guidelines for how people should interact during the conversation. While you cannot ensure safety, you want to make sure people are respectful in their interactions. Below is a list of suggested ground rules. Share them with the group and get agreement to abide by them for the discussion. Feel free to make additions or alterations.

Actively participate

- **Share** your experiences and thoughts to enlighten, not convince
- Be **authentic**
- Really **listen** to learn and understand – let others finish. No matter what is said, **say something**. If you don't know what to say, start by asking, "What did you mean by that?"

Speak for yourself

- **Speak up** when you experience or witness intolerance, mistreatment or racism in action
- **Process** your feelings. Race based tragedies can feel traumatizing, especially for members of marginalized groups. Talking to friends and loved ones can help.
- **Share** examples and stories from your own truth without trying to push your truth on others

Stay open and flexible

- **Create** an inclusive environment for everyone. Seek, respect and honor others' views and experiences
- Assume **positive** intent
- Be **open** and honest and have a real conversation

Respect and maintain confidentiality

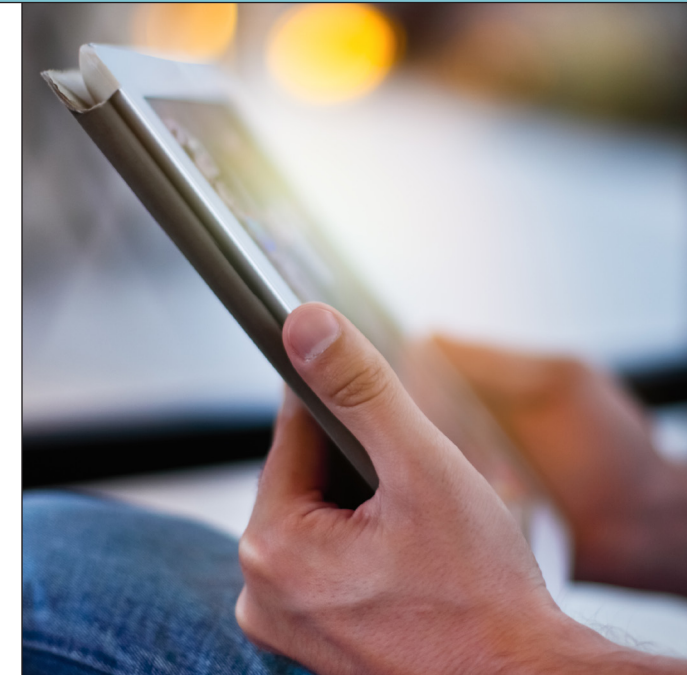
- **Honor** and **respect** one another by agreeing to keep conversations confidential
- Create a **space** where people feel comfortable and **empowered** to voice their ideas, thoughts, and concerns



3. Discussion

A great way to start a discussion around race is to choose a relevant quote that will allow people to respond personally. Here is a list of selected quotes that the Office of DE&I have found useful to spark discussion. Read the quote a loud and re-read it again. Then solicit participants' reactions.

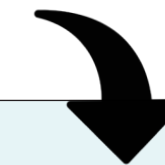
- **James Baldwin:** “Neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind.”
- **Toni Morrison:** “Race is both an empty category and one of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categorization.”
- **Fannie Lew Hamer:** “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.”
- **James Baldwin:** “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
- **Hillel the Elder:** “If not me, who? If not now, when?”
- **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:** “A riot is the language of the unheard. What is it that America has failed to hear?”
- **Dr. Robin DiAngelo:** “The key to moving forward is what we do with our discomfort. We can use it as a door out—blame the messenger and disregard the message. Or we can use it as a door in by asking, ‘Why does this unsettle me? What would it mean for me if this were true?’”



If you choose to utilize **media** to spark discussion, make sure you have selected something relevant to racism. After you select media, develop general questions that can open up conversation. Try this list of questions, or adapt based on your needs.

4. Check-Out

To be respectful, the discussion should have a fixed time. Be mindful that these conversations often move quickly, so leave time at the end for participants to process the discussion. A simple way to check-out is thank everyone for participating in the conversation. Then ask each participant to say one to two words about how they are feeling. This will allow you to gauge their reactions to the conversation and later check-in with people who may need support.



Some Group Discussion Questions



- What was your reaction to the article? How did it make you feel?
- What, if anything, from the article resonated with you or reminded you of personal experiences? Would you be willing to share that experience with the group?
- Did what the author have to say change or shape your perspective? If so, how?
- How might this article relate to our work professionally?
- What does racism look, sound and feel like here?
- Racism is a system. How does structural racism function on our team, department/institution or health care system?
- How does structural racism affect our patient care?
- What is a takeaway for you today from our conversation?



Participating in Discussions on Race

Often, we are unsure how to respectfully share our own views about race with others. We may get into some conversations where we disagree with each other. This is totally normal and a part of conversations about race and racism.

Consider using “Yes, and ...”

For example, if someone said, “racism is something that happened a long time ago,” you might say, “YES, racism was something that affected people in the past, AND it still occurs today, but in different ways.” Using “yes, and” statements allows us to open and extend conversations.

Beware of Right/Wrong or Good/Bad Thinking

With conversations around diversity, we can often fall into a trap of believing our own perspective is right and other people are wrong. Or similarly, someone or something is good, and the opposite is therefore bad. This type of thinking either keeps us in our comfort zone or pushes us quickly to the panic zone. Differences in opinion or viewpoint are important and help us stay in that learning zone.



Either/Or Debate

Either/or Thinking can also stifle conversation, as it creates a dynamic where only one perspective or view is valid. Instead, we want to think about using “both/and” statements, where even if we disagree with someone’s perspective, we give it equal validity.

Clarify Statements

Last, we need to provide everyone with the opportunity and permission to clarify their words. We may say something that does not come out the way we had intended, and we may realize that what a person said is not how they actually feel or what they believe. It is important that we all give each other space to clarify what we mean.

Expressing Your Views

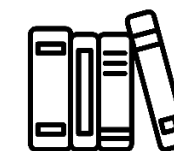


Dr. Robin DiAngelo provides some helpful guidance for how to express views that promote understanding, demonstrate empathy, and encourage conversation when discussing race. Read the [full list](#).

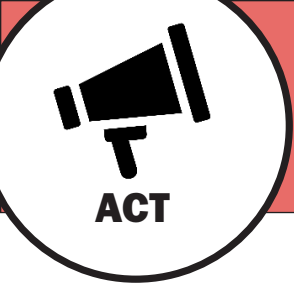
- I’m really nervous/scared/uncomfortable to say this...and/but...
- From my experience/perspective as (identity)...
- I’m afraid I may offend someone, and please let know if I do, but...
- It feels risky to say this and/but...
- I’m not sure if this will make any sense, and/but...
- I just felt something shift in the room. I’m wondering if anyone else did.
- It seems like some people may have had a reaction to that.
- Can you help me understand why? Can you help me understand whether what I’m thinking right now might be problematic?
- This is what I understand you to be saying ... is that accurate?
- Can you help me understand ...?
- This perspective is new to me, but I’m wondering if it is accurate to say that ...?
- I’m still working through/processing this, but right now where I am at is ...

Creating space to hear people of color and their experiences around race and racism is critical for change.

As you move forward in your conversations, please make sure you are hearing with an open mind and a heart full of empathy and understanding. These conversations take courage and our health care system, colleagues, and patients will be better off for discussions we have around race.



For additional education, visit the [Office of DE&I webpage](#) for a more comprehensive set of resources and course offerings to address systemic racism.



Commit to anti-racist actions and continue to **educate yourself** about race

“Neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind.”

— James Baldwin

Taking Action

While conversation about systematic racism is a critical part to our understanding about race/racism, we must also find ways to actively challenge problematic behavior and change the underlying system that has caused death, violence and inequality in our society. Here we provide resources, tools, and practical steps for advancing anti-racism in our personal and professional lives. These resources are not exhaustive and should be viewed as a starting point for learning more about race, racism and anti-racist practices. Personal and professional strategies ensure that we can develop anti-racist knowledge, skills and behavior that impact all aspects of our lives.



Personal

- [75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#)
- [Op-ed by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar](#)
- [YWCA Campaign to Stand Against Racism](#)
- [White People: Fighting For An Anti-Racist Future Together](#)
- [Curriculum for White Americans to Educate Themselves on Race and Racism—from Ferguson to Charleston](#)
- [Scaffolded Anti-Racism Resources](#)
- [Dr. Robin DiAngelo: White Fragility Resource Page](#)
- [I Am Not Your Negro](#)
- [1619 Project](#)

Family

- [10 Books About Racism and Activism for Your Children](#)
- [Dismantling Racism and Transforming Communities](#)
- [Black Parents Explain How To Deal With the Police](#)

Professional

- [5 ways to start being a better ally for your black coworkers](#)
- [Organization: US Businesses Must Take Meaningful Action Against Racism](#)
- [Your Black Colleagues May Look Like They're Okay — Chances Are They're Not](#)

Health Care

- [Race, Racism, and Health: Challenges and Opportunities](#)
- [Systems of oppression in health care long made 'invisible,' Harvard prof says](#)
- [Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine- Dr. Paul Farmer](#)
- [Social Determinants of Health Inequalities](#)
- [Black Men In White Coats: Dr Ray Wurapa](#)
- [How Racism makes us sick](#)



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Mass General Brigham
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