

16

BRIDGE-BUILDING *Tips* FOR WHITE PEOPLE

BE *the* BRIDGE

MOVING TOWARDS
RACIAL RECONCILIATION

- 1 Don't expect POC to be your only source of education about race.** Black, Indigenous, and people of color get exhausted explaining the same ideas over and over again, every time a white person "joins the conversation." Read a book instead. Watch a documentary. Google terms and ideas. If you must hit up your friend of color for insight, at least buy them dinner, and really listen to what they have to say.
- 2 Don't take up too much (metaphorical) space in the conversation.** Yes, this is hard for verbal processors. We know you have important things to say, but White people's ideas and stories are prioritized everywhere else. Take this opportunity to sit quietly and elevate the voices of POC.
- 3 Don't compare your experience of oppression or suffering with a POC's experience with oppression or suffering.** Although you might see similarities between your circumstances, resist the urge to interpret a Black, Indigenous, or person of color's experience through your limited lens. Your suffering is real, and it might help you feel more connected to or empathetic toward your friend of color, but your experiences are not the same. Continue to listen and seek to understand.
- 4 Don't "Whitesplain."** Do not explain racism to a POC. Do not explain how the microaggression they just experienced was actually just someone being nice. Do not explain how a particular injustice is more about class than race. It is an easy trap to fall into, but you can avoid it by maintaining a posture of active listening.
- 5 Don't make the conversation about you.** The needs/feelings/questions/priorities of White people are centered most everywhere. If you feel silenced or undervalued, use that experience to inform how you treat POC in other spaces instead of developing a victim complex. The falling of "White tears" does not build bridges and it shifts the focus from the true problem (racism and inequality) to how you feel about having to learn about it.
- 6 Don't equate impact with intent.** Yes, we all know your heart was in the right place and you meant well. But your words or behavior had a negative impact on those around you, and that is what matters. Despite the best of intentions, as you navigate conversations of race you will make mistakes and missteps and hurt someone. Humbly apologize and do better next time rather than dig in your heels or try to justify yourself.

7 Don't explain away a POC's experience of oppression. They are the expert on their own experience. Don't play devil's advocate or provide an alternative explanation for what happened. Take their word for it. Maybe ask a follow-up question like, "How did that make you feel?"

8 If what you are about to say starts with "Not all..." (...men, ...White people, ...evangelicals, ...police officers, etc.), don't say it.

Conversations about race and racism are about systems, institutions, and ideologies more than individuals. Though this is contrary to White cultural norms, it is not helpful or necessary to force the conversation to fit our culture. There will always be "good" examples which fall outside generalizations, but do not derail the conversation by bringing up the exceptions when discussing the rule.

9 Don't demand proof of a POC's lived experience or try to counter their narrative with the experience of another person of color. The experiences and opinions of POC are as diverse as its people. We can believe their stories. But keep in mind: just because one person of color doesn't feel oppressed, that doesn't mean systemic, institutional racism is not real.

10 Don't believe the classic trope that behavior modification on the part of POC would eliminate racism. In other words, don't blame the victim. POC changing how they dress, what music they listen to, how they speak, or any other number of excuses, will not eradicate White supremacy. Belief in such is a historical shift from biological racism (POC are inherently inferior) to cultural racism (POC are culturally inferior). Expecting Black, Indigenous, and people of color to act more in line with White cultural norms is not the solution.

11 Do not chastise POC (or dismiss their message) because they express their grief, fear, or anger in ways you deem "inappropriate." Understand that historically, we White people have silenced voices of dissent and lament with our cultural idol of "niceness." Provide space for POC to wail, cuss, or even yell at you. Jesus didn't hold back when he saw hypocrisy and oppression; POC shouldn't have to either.

12 Don't attempt to equate your experiences visiting, serving, or living overseas with the experience of being a POC in America. You may have been a minority in your setting, but it is not an equivalent experience. Being a POC in America includes a different set of dynamics. White supremacy is not unique to America, but rather a worldwide phenomenon.

13 Don't underestimate the impact of your words. You have the power to inflict real, lasting damage in these conversations. Be careful; melanin is not a protective shield. Decide if you want to be a balm or a battering ram.

14 Don't forget: racism is our problem. Our people created and sustained it, and now it's our job to dismantle it. Only by the grace and mercy of God are POC willing to walk this road with us toward racial healing and reconciliation. Honor that reality in how you treat those with whom you want to build bridges.

15 Don't get defensive when you are called out for any of the above. When a person of color tells you that your words/tone/behavior are racist/oppressive/triggering, you stop. Don't try to explain yourself (see #6.) Don't become passive-aggressive or sarcastic. Don't leave in a huff. (It may be helpful, however, to inconspicuously step outside/go to the restroom and take a deep breath.) Remain cognizant of the dynamics of White fragility, and take note of how it usually shows up in you. When you get defensive or leave the conversation, you reinforce to POC that White people are not a safe people with which to have this conversation.

16 Don't give up. This will be a hard, lifelong process. Take care of yourself. Find community. Take time out to disconnect and process. Abide in the Word. Pray. Laugh. Cry. Yell. Sit quietly. Sing. Dance. Remember that our hope is in Jesus, who is present, and who sees all, and who grieves more deeply than you over racial oppression. Then come back and work hard again tomorrow. POC don't get to step out of their skin and walk away the way we can. Remain, even when it's harder than you imagined it could be, in solidarity.