

# MICROINTERVENTION TOOLKIT

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AND BEST  
PRACTICES TO DISARM AND NEUTRALIZE  
MICROAGGRESSIONS

**Developed by Derald Wing Sue 2021**

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Microintervention Strategies: What you can do to disarm and dismantle individual  
and systemic racism and bias. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

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## MICROINTERVENTION STRATEGIES

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO DISARM AND  
DISMANTLE INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMIC  
RACISM AND BIAS

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# MAKE THE “INVISIBLE” VISIBLE

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Bring the microaggression to the forefront of the person’s awareness.
- ◆ Indicate to the perpetrator that they have behaved or said something offensive to you or others.
- ◆ Force the perpetrator to consider the impact and meaning of what was said/done or, in the case of the bystander, what was not said/done.

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Allows targets, allies and bystanders to verbally describe what is happening in a nonthreatening manner.
- ◆ When allies and bystanders intervene, reassures targets that they are not “crazy” and that their experiences are valid.
- ◆ When those with power and privilege respond, may have greater impact on perpetrator.

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Develop perspicacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Can’t you see what is happening?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Do you realize what you just did when that Black person walked in?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Let’s analyze why Juanita was offended by your ‘compliment.’”</i></li> </ul>
2. Disempower the innuendo by naming it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“That’s a racist remark.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“That’s a microaggression.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“That’s a stereotype.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“You just acted in an unfair and biased manner.”</i></li> </ul>
3. Undermine the meta-communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Not all Asian Americans are good in math.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“I was born and raised here.”</i></li> </ul>
4. Challenge the stereotype.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Robberies and crimes are committed by people of all races and backgrounds.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“That hasn’t been my experience at all.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Don’t worry, I might be black, but that doesn’t make me dangerous.”</i></li> </ul>

## MAKE THE “INVISIBLE” VISIBLE

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
5. Broaden the ascribed trait.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“I think that applies to everyone.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“I don’t think that’s a gender thing, men do it too.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Most people would do the same thing.”</i></li> </ul>
6. Ask for clarification of a statement or action.	<p><b>GENERAL QUESTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Robert, what exactly do you mean?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Come again. Did I hear you correctly?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Do you realize what you just said?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“I can’t believe you just said that. Tell me what you mean?”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>SPECIFIC QUESTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Do you really believe all Latinos have a poor worth ethic?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“What experiences do you have with African Americans that lead you to that conclusion?”</i></li> </ul>
7. Make the meta-communication explicit by restating/rephrasing the statement or action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“You’re telling me that you’re not going to consider Daryl for the manager position because White co-workers aren’t ready for a Black boss.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“In other words, you believe that women workers are less dependable than men because they will take time off to have children.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“You mean that Black students here at Columbia couldn’t have gotten into the University without some accommodated admissions program.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“What you just said, make me believe you are prejudiced against Muslims.”</i></li> </ul>
8. Reverse and restate the compliment, action, and role as if it was meant for the perpetrator.	<p><b>Response to: “You’re pretty for a dark girl.”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Thank you. You’re pretty for a White girl.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Response to: “You speak excellent English (to Latinx American).”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Thank you. You speak excellent English, too.”</i></li> </ul>
9. Depersonalize and describe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“I notice that not everyone has had a chance to speak.”</i></li> <li>● <i>“We always seem to focus on negatives rather than positives about diversity.”</i></li> </ul>

# DISARM THE MICROAGGRESSION

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Stop or deflect the microaggression.
- ◆ Force the perpetrator to consider what they have just said or done.
- ◆ Communicate your disagreement or disapproval towards the perpetrator actions in the moment.

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Provide targets, allies, and bystanders with a sense of control and self-efficacy to react to perpetrators in the here and now.
- ◆ Preserves targets' well-being and prevents traumatization by or preoccupation with what transpired.
- ◆ Allows perpetrator to think before they speak or behave in future encounters with similar individuals.

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Affirm, validate and support the target.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"That took courage!"</i></li> <li>● <i>"Don't doubt yourself."</i></li> <li>● <i>"You're not crazy."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I'm with you."</i></li> <li>● <i>"You have my support."</i></li> </ul>
2. Express disagreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"I don't agree with what you just said."</i></li> <li>● <i>"That's not how I view it."</i></li> </ul>
3. State values and set limits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"You know that respect and tolerance are important values in my life and, while I understand that you have a right to say what you want, I'm asking you to show a little more respect for me by not making offensive comments."</i></li> </ul>
4. Describe what is happening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"Every time I come over, I find myself becoming uncomfortable because you make statements that I find offensive and hurtful."</i></li> </ul>

## DISARM THE MICROAGGRESSION

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
5. Use an exclamation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"Ouch!"</i></li> <li>● <i>"Aww, C'mon!"</i></li> <li>● <i>"Get serious!"</i></li> <li>● <i>"Yikes."</i></li> </ul>
6. Express nonverbally your reactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Shaking your head</i></li> <li>● <i>Looking down or away</i></li> <li>● <i>Covering your mouth with your hand.</i></li> <li>● <i>Leave the situation.</i></li> </ul>
7. Interrupt and redirect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"Whoa, let's not go there.</i></li> <li>● <i>"Maybe we should focus on the task at hand."</i></li> <li>● <i>"Danger, quick sand ahead."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I don't want to hear the punchline, or that type of talk."</i></li> <li>● <i>"Please stop that type of talk (or behavior)!"</i></li> </ul>
8. Remind them of the rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"That behavior is against our organization's code of conduct and could really get you in trouble."</i></li> <li>● <i>"We don't tolerate or condone those type of comments here."</i></li> </ul>
9. Disengage from dialogue or remove yourself from the situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>I think we are getting too "hot" and emotional, let us talk about it later.</i></li> <li>● <i>Excuse me, but I am leaving until we can calm down.</i></li> <li>● <i>Let us take a break.</i></li> </ul>

# EDUCATE THE PERPETRATOR

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Engage in a one-on-one dialogue with the perpetrator to indicate how and why their behavior is offensive to you and others.
- ◆ Facilitate a possible more enlightening conversation and exploration of the perpetrator's biases.
- ◆ Encourage perpetrators to explore the origins of their beliefs and attitudes toward targets.

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Allow targets, allies and bystanders the opportunity to express their experiences while maintaining a relationship with the offender.
- ◆ Lowers the defense of the perpetrator and helps them recognize the harmful impact.
- ◆ Perpetrator becomes keen to microaggressions committed by those within their social circle and educates others.

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Differentiate between intent and impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"I know you meant well, but that really hurts."</i></li> <li>● <i>"You obviously wanted to compliment Xu, however, that comment also implied...."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I know you meant it as a joke, but it really offended Aisha."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I know you want the women on this team to succeed, but always putting them on hospitality committees will only prevent them from developing leadership skills."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I know you kid around a lot, but think how your words affect others."</i></li> <li>● <i>"I know you meant it to be funny, but that stereotype is no joke."</i></li> </ul>
2. Contradict the group-based stereotype through personalizing opposing evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"I know Elena, and she is a good and decent person who can be trusted like you."</i></li> <li>● <i>"Are you talking about someone in particular?"</i></li> <li>● <i>"I think Eric and Juanita (both African American) work very hard and put in more time than most workers."</i></li> <li>● <i>"Actually, I've met many immigrants who have learned to speak English well. It is not easy. Have you ever tried to learn another language?"</i></li> </ul>
3. Appeal to the offender's values and principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"I know you really care about representing everyone on the team and being a good manager, but acting in this way really undermines your intentions to be inclusive."</i></li> </ul>

# EDUCATE THE PERPETRATOR

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
4. Point out the commonality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“That is a negative stereotype of Arab Americans. Have you actually talked to Maryam? You two have so much in common. Did you know she is also a dedicated cyclist? Her daughter is also in medical school, like your son. Talk to her.”</i></li> </ul>
5. Promote empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“The majority of Latinos want the same things as you. Jesus works hard and wants to advance in his job and make enough to support his family. Do you know how he must feel to be described as being lazy and be deprived of a promotion opportunity? How would you feel if that happened to you? Can you place yourself in his shoes?”</i></li> </ul>
6. Point out how they benefit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“I know you are undergoing diversity training and hope to increase your ability to manage a diverse workforce. Learning about why those stereotypes are harmful is going to make you a better supervisor.”</i></li> </ul>
7. Reframe the meaning of the statement or action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Is there another way to look at the situation?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“What would happen if....?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Is it possible that Jesus feels/believes....?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Can you think of other reasons for Xu’s behaviors?”</i></li> </ul>
8. Revisit the incident later.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“I want to discuss/revisit what happened yesterday?”</i></li> <li>● <i>“I didn’t think it the right time to say something last week, but can we talk about it now?”</i></li> </ul>

# SEEK OUTSIDE SUPPORT AND AUTHORITATIVE HELP

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Partake in regular self-care to maintain psychological and physical wellness.
- ◆ Check in with self and others to ensure optimal levels of functioning.
- ◆ Send a message to perpetrators at large that bigoted behavior will not be tolerated or accepted.

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Mitigates impact of psychological and physiological harm associated with continual and cumulative exposure to microaggressions.
- ◆ Reminds targets, allies, and bystanders that they are not alone in the battle.
- ◆ Ensures situations of discrimination or bias do not go unnoticed.

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Alert Leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ask to speak to a manager or someone who is in authority</i></li> </ul>
2. Report Incident.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Report the incident in person or use anonymous online portals such as the Southern Poverty Law Center or use a hashtag on social media to make your experience go viral</i></li> </ul>
3. Seek therapy/counseling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Seek out individual or group counseling with culturally competent providers for self-care and well-being</i></li> </ul>
4. Fortify self through spirituality/religion/ community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Turn to your community leaders or religious elders, and community organizations for support and validation.</i></li> </ul>
5. Develop a buddy system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Choose a friend with whom you can always check in and process discriminatory experiences</i></li> </ul>
6. Find a support group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Join a support group such as "current events group" that meets weekly to process issues concerning BIPOC.</i></li> </ul>
7. Debrief and process the event or situation with a mentor or senior ally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"Can, I talk to you about what just happened."</i></li> <li>● <i>"Can we take some time to process and discuss my (your) reactions?"</i></li> </ul>



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# MAKE THE “INVISIBLE” VISIBLE

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Bring the macroaggression to the forefront of people’s awareness.
- ◆ Increase awareness of the unfairness of a policy, program or practice.
- ◆ Convince and motivate those in leadership positions, stakeholders, and public that action is required.
- ◆ Make stakeholders aware of the harmful impact of institutional and societal macroaggressions.

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Provides a method of demonstrating the existence and need to address issues of inequities and disparities.
- ◆ Removes the entire burden for change to individuals, assigns the responsibility to those in authority, and holds institutions accountable.
- ◆ Encourages individuals to work together and combine their power and influence in a collective way.

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Monitor and document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Monitor and keep a log of inequitable policies, programs, and practices; report them to decision-makers (i. e., document inequitable trends around recruiting, hiring, retention, and promotion).</i></li> <li>● <i>Create partnerships with institutions to analyze data related to disparities in education, healthcare, and employment.</i></li> <li>● <i>Ask questions and share data at meetings and evaluation periods.</i></li> <li>● <i>Solicit feedback from marginalized group members about how policies and practices impact them.</i></li> </ul>
2. Encourage implementation of systems of evaluation, accountability, and rewards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Work with others to develop and implement continual evaluation of supervisors and supervisees.</i></li> <li>● <i>Hold peers and those with power accountable for potentially biased hiring trends, promotions, or questionable actions.</i></li> <li>● <i>Engage in continual consultation and soliciting feedback for ongoing evaluations.</i></li> <li>● <i>Create new systems of accountability that ensure equitable practices.</i></li> </ul>
3. Leverage your power and privileged identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Use your power and your ability to sit at tables that other members of the community cannot access.</i></li> <li>● <i>Advocate for the rights of marginalized members in your institution/organization.</i></li> <li>● <i>Be deliberate about making space for voices that are oftentimes unheard or silenced.</i></li> </ul>

# DISARM MACROAGGRESSIONS

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Provide a potent and effective means to confront biased institutional or societal policies
- ◆ Apply pressure on key stakeholders to institute change through persuasion
- ◆ Utilize coercion and disruption to cause embarrassment and/or inconvenience to motivate change

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Raise public awareness through media
- ◆ Persuade and demand change from stakeholders and decision-makers
- ◆ Make an impact through collective organizing that cannot be dismissed or ignored

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Protest and persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Deliver a public speech or create a mass petition</i></li> <li>● <i>Utilize advertisement to challenge stereotypes and inform individuals on injustices (editorials, radio, television, print, op ed pieces, news, billboards etc.)</i></li> <li>● <i>Protest by displaying or wearing symbolic images. For example, hanging a LGBTQ flag in your office or wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt.</i></li> <li>● <i>Hold vigils and memorials to put pressure on officials and/or cause inconvenience to initiate change.</i></li> <li>● <i>Organize legal public assemblies, protests, teach-ins, town halls or silent protests, walk-outs, strikes, and boycotts.</i></li> </ul>
2. Engage in civil disobedience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Boycotts, refusal taxes or rent, refusal to pay fees or dues, slowdown strikes, resignations, excommunication, social isolation, hunger strikes, overload facilities, nonviolent sabotage, reluctance or slow compliance, office invasions, blockades</i></li> </ul>
3. Challenge the status quo through media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Disseminate research on disparity trends to general public and media</i></li> <li>● <i>Utilize traditional media (television, radio, and print) as well as social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</i></li> <li>● <i>Write a letter or hold a press-release</i></li> <li>● <i>Offer to hold an interview with a news paper</i></li> <li>● <i>Work with other artists to create documentaries, posters, &amp; pamphlets</i></li> </ul>
4. Enhance collective action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Exercise your rights in government and politics and encourage others to do the same (vote, serve on boards, attend town halls, revise and veto community policies, call elected officials, etc.)</i></li> <li>● <i>Create caucuses for targets and allies</i></li> <li>● <i>Create local affiliates for organizations that support your beliefs</i></li> <li>● <i>Focus efforts on building a sense of community and collective identity to enhance collective action</i></li> </ul>

# INCREASE AWARENESS THROUGH EDUCATION

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Help stakeholders and decision-makers develop critical consciousness about systemic inequities
- ◆ Encourage community level educational engagement
- ◆ Illuminate the benefits, gains or the advantages

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Creates opportunities for conversation and learning
- ◆ Encourages institutions to look inward and address issues that typically go unnoticed
- ◆ Engages stakeholders at various levels with the community

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Raise critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Facilitate an open discussion on how race, culture and ethnicity affect marginalized group members.</i></li> <li>● <i>Participate with local community centers and faith based organizations to support and facilitate open dialogues about race, racism, and legal rights</i></li> <li>● <i>Raise consciousness by directly teaching stakeholders how to recognize discrimination</i></li> <li>● <i>Teach people of color how to confront possible internalized beliefs</i></li> </ul>
2. Support anti-bias education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Support formal anti-bias education and training in all organizations</i></li> <li>● <i>Encourage educators to include discussions of race and bias in lesson plans</i></li> <li>● <i>Organize reading and discussion groups around books written by authors of color</i></li> <li>● <i>Conduct field trips to historical places that embody the racial struggles and lessons of oppression and courage</i></li> <li>● <i>Encourage people to join civil rights organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, American Civil Liberties Union, and the Anti-Defamation League</i></li> <li>● <i>Publicly support policies that allow for equal access and opportunity</i></li> </ul>
3. Highlight the benefits of diversity and equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Approach companies with information on how lack of diversity and multiculturalism results in lower work productivity, low morale, high employee turnover, and lost profits</i></li> <li>● <i>Describe the benefits of workforce diversity on education, employment, healthcare, and all other aspects of society</i></li> </ul>

# SEEK EXTERNAL SUPPORT

## OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Call on human rights organizations to get involved
- ◆ Take legal action when necessary to hold systems, laws, and practice accountable
- ◆ Foster a sense of community support through mentoring, engagement, and alliance

## RATIONALE

- ◆ Connect with institutions to call on their support and access to resources
- ◆ Provide a solution for when all else fails
- ◆ Instill confidence and hope by utilizing the legal justice system to hold laws, practices, and policies or other forms of inequities accountable

TACTICS	EXAMPLES
1. Call on the support of human rights organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Report incidents to human rights organizations and communicate with leaders in the organization directly to learn more about how they can help</i></li> <li>● <i>Utilize resources, guides, and how to documents provided on websites as tools for social justice advocates</i></li> <li>● <i>Connect with other individuals who are in the organizing and mobilizing sphere to learn from them and share tools</i></li> </ul>
2. Initiate governmental action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Communicate with Members of Congress</i></li> <li>● <i>Advocate on behalf of your field and raise awareness of its contribution to the key issue</i></li> <li>● <i>Challenge political leaders if they fail to act due to bias or assumptions</i></li> <li>● <i>Research and perform your legal rights</i></li> <li>● <i>Help file an Amicus Brief</i></li> <li>● <i>Help write an expert brief or testify as an expert witness</i></li> <li>● <i>Help file an administrative charge</i></li> </ul>
3. Seek community support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Encourage students to apply for fellowships and scholarships in fields with underrepresentation</i></li> <li>● <i>Create networking and mentoring opportunities for underrepresented employees and students</i></li> <li>● <i>Join groups with mutual goals</i></li> <li>● <i>Join planning committees and organizations that aim to foster and support marginalized communities</i></li> <li>● <i>Participate in celebrations and events</i></li> <li>● <i>Organize celebrations and events</i></li> </ul>