

*Guidelines for Engaging in Conversations About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo and Jamie Jin Lewis

- **Listen to understand, not to respond.**
- Lean into discomfort. The work of addressing injustice is sometimes uncomfortable, especially aspects we've never had to think about it before. Trust that the reward will outweigh discomfort.
- Name race and racism. Avoid using coded or vague language. Use the words you know to talk about racism specifically.
- Flow in, flow out. Monitor how much space you're taking up in a conversation. If you tend to be the first one to speak up, challenge yourself to listen to others first. If you usually hang back in a conversation, challenge yourself to speak your truth.
- Speak from the "I" perspective; avoid generalizations.
- What's said here, stays here. What's learned here, leaves here. This is a space to build trust and deepen relationships. If you feel an urge to gossip about something you heard, challenge yourself to think about why that story feels so thorny and how you might address that underlying issue in a constructive way.
- **Remember, this is not a debate. We are talking about people's lived experiences and real pain that people are feeling and your goal should not be to be declared the "winner."**
- **Think about your goal for the conversation and state it at the beginning, so that everyone in the conversation will be on the same page and you'll have a touchpoint to bring the conversation back to if things get off track.**
- **Remember that people of color are often speaking from a lifetime of painful experiences around race, and therefore their emotional response in the conversation may not be one that white people will fully understand, but that doesn't make those responses any less valid.**
- **Seek growth, not closure.**

**Norms as discussed by IDEA:**

- New England schools will be represented in the review of BlackAt posts.
- Remember, we are amplifying the voices of black students, and we can't let fragility get in the way of that.
- This is not meant to point fingers at anyone. As stated in the previous norms, we are speaking from the "I" perspective. No one should be asked to discuss or defend what is shared.
- You also shouldn't take comfort in your school not being mentioned--no institution is absolved from the issues we are discussing. We need to assume that these are happening at your school as well.
- Defensiveness, right to comfort, fear of open conflict, etc... are characteristics of white supremacy culture. Put these feelings aside.
- If you are feeling fragile or guilty, remember this session is optional.

**Notes from the main group conversation. We are focusing on #BlackAt accounts, which have been shared mainly on Instagram to reflect Black students' experiences at predominantly white institutions, both at the secondary and college level.**

- Review of white supremacy culture, from the Dismantling Racism Handbook

- Definition of white supremacy culture: the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs and actions at white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs and actions
  - How are we contributing to that culture, whether we know it or not?
- Characteristics:
  - Perfectionism: having little appreciation for the work others are doing; not naming or appreciating what is right but rather identifying what is wrong
    - People/their work are viewed as inadequate - others gather and talk about inadequacies behind people's backs and not face-to-face in most case
    - Making a mistake is confused as BEING a mistake
    - Closely linked to the culture of blame
  - Sense of urgency: makes it difficult to be inclusive or encourage thoughtful decisions because people are not giving the opportunity to consider long-term implications for decisions
    - Often reinforced in funding - too much work to be done with too little money → need to create realistic work plans, make the time for things, be clear and be flexible
    - Urgency might be the expectation but rushing can take more time in the long run, and people who don't have a voice might become resentful
  - Defensiveness: spending time/energy defending those in power or covering up abuses in power - for example, white people spending time defending against charges of racism rather than examining how they are contributing TO racism
    - Manifests itself in not listening to each other or not helping others feel heard
    - Criticism of those in power leads them to feeling threatened → this keeps growth opportunities or change from happening in your organization
  - Quantity over quality: things that are measured have higher value than things that cannot be measured; little or no capacity to capture qualitative information
    - We can combat this by making sure our organizations have a value system and recognize times when we need to get off the agenda and recognize/acknowledge underlying concerns
  - Worship of the written word: if it is not written down, it does not exist - empower those who have stronger writing/documentation skills
    - Analyze how people in/out of your organization are gathering and organizing information
    - Recognize what people are bringing to the table beyond written words
  - Only one right way: notion that things are not up for discussion that creates a huge barrier to change - disallowance of creativity into the workplace which prevents change from happening
    - Need to recognize that there are many ways to do things - there are many paths up the same mountain

- Paternalism: decision making is clear to those in power, but unclear to those without power → eventually, those without power come to just accept the power structures in place
  - Can alleviate this by being transparent in decision-making process up, down and across the chain, and also include those being impacted by the decision making
- Either/Or thinking: no acknowledgement that things can be both/and
  - We should push for more than 2 alternatives whenever possible to help alleviate this
- Power Hoarding: the sense of leader worship, the idea that only one person or one group can have power
  - Example: white people having a savior complex, “the white hero”
  - Realizing that changes in power can actually be quite productive can help alleviate this
- Fear of open conflict: way to maintain control and silence those who challenge the status quo -- blaming people rather than the issue itself, saying that anything that is “different” or “against” is viewed as “rude”
  - Tone policing is an example - we should allow people to express themselves in ways they feel most comfortable and focus on the issue being presented rather than focusing on the tone or person who presented the issue
- Individualism: valuing competition over cooperation
  - Eradicating white supremacist culture means that we must push for teamwork and team culture rather than focusing on individualism
- “I’m the only one”: if something is going to be done right, I have to do it! → not trusting others will lead to resentment on both parts
  - We can alleviate this by evaluating people on their abilities to delegate to others and be part of a team
- Progress is bigger, more: belief that success is synonymous with “more!”
  - Gives no consideration to the cost associated with expansion
  - Cost/benefit analysis
- Objectivity:
  - Alleviate this by pushing yourself to be uncomfortable
  - Acknowledge that everyone has a valid point and seek to understand what that point is
- Right to comfort: those in power are the ones who have the right to comfort → can lead to scapegoating
  - Individual acts of injustice toward white people are often conflated with structural and systemic racism that target members of the BIPOC community
- #BlackAt Posts + themes
  - Tokenization
    - Students were used as props at school photoshoots
    - Student followed by photographers for photo ops

- Using photos from a decade ago of Black students in print/social media for diversity purposes
  - Undermatching
    - A college counselor removing a top school because it was “too much of a reach” - mother had to make sure that the student was able to apply to the school, and ultimately, the student graduated from the school that the counselor thought she could not get into
    - “This is the best college you can hope for...” - learning that the counselor was consistently undermatching other POCs as well
    - You only got into that school because you’re Black
  - Institutional discomfort/lack of transparency
    - Art department taking down “I, too” artwork that spoke about racism and bigotry experienced by students
  - Harmful action followed by bystander inaction
    - A student put up a poster asking other students not to use hurtful words (the n-word, etc.) and a white student tore it down. Other students said nothing, and the student who tore the sign down clearly did not care about the hurt of the Black student who spoke out against her taking the sign down
  - Otherization/being made to feel different
    - Suggestion that it was unfair that a Black student received a scholarship when another student did not because they both attended the same school and lived in the same town
    - “It’s a good thing the school has to let in a few Black kids otherwise you wouldn’t be here” - spoken to a Black student by a white student
      - The longer the Black student stayed at the school, the more the student felt like they only “looked good on paper to the school”
    - Being told you’re a scholarship kid or a diversity initiative
      - Those without power know they don’t have it and also know who does
    - Students receiving financial aid being made to write letters to their financial sponsors to prove worth each year
    - “Affirmative action is the only reason minorities get into college” - making a Black student wonder if they only got in because of being a minority and not because of academic ability
    - A Black student was not congratulated by her teacher when she announced that she was admitted to Penn, even though the teacher congratulated every other student in the room
    - Watching liberal white students complain about affirmative action being the reason they DIDN’T get into their dream schools - and now watching the students engage in performative allyship
- Notes from Breakout Room 1
  - We ask you to acknowledge the ways you have contributed to white supremacy culture, to share what you are personally committed to doing on your journey to

become anti-racist (books, practices, policies, etc.), and to share what you are doing to ensure that Black students are no longer harmed

- One office is doing weekly conversations as a group centered around an article, podcast, etc. to further education and reflection
  - White supremacy culture is big and this session helped a participant understand/name so many aspects of white supremacy culture that you may not normally think of or point to
  - One attendee is trying to read the Instagram feeds from their school to really understand what is going on, and in conjunction, reading *White Fragility* so that they can act on what they might read on the Instagram feed about their school
  - One attendee is trying to look at things from new perspectives, and not just looking at things from how they grew up; also wanting to go back to their institution and see if things are unjustly reflected in performance review metrics
    - Not taking being in a position of power lightly
    - Reading “How to Be an Anti-Racist”
  - Acknowledging the intersectionality that exists within conversations about race - making room for other identities that exist within the Black community, for example - issues for indigenous, bi-racial, and trans individuals
  - Noticing that there are many affinity groups and identities that are absent from the NEACAC organization - how can we elevate missing voices?
- Notes from Breakout Room 2
    - Led an anti-racist white-affinity group at my institution today.
      - Thinking about the needed and necessary work to think about where I engage in white silence and white privilege
      - Working with other faculty in our institution to identify the personal work that we need to do in our own offices, classrooms, and divisions to stop traumatizing individuals that we claim to care about
    - For my institution, we are a PWI, and a lot of people are hopping on the Black Lives Matter bandwagon from the large international protests. People are realizing there is a lot more progress to be made. I have been working on an anti-racist workshop for the Student Government Association
      - I am realizing people are in different places in this conversation
      - I wonder how you scaffold a workshop when people, especially white people, need to learn about identity prior to action steps
      - Talking to white people through a white lens, I struggle with how to meet people where they are in this point in the movement
    - I'd like to talk to my directors about paternalism and speak up in committee when we don't admit someone based on whether or not they can “do the work”

- Thanks to the IDEA committee for providing this platform. Having been a veteran of so many diversity trainings at the many colleges I've worked at and having seen white supremacy practiced in that space
- My university put out a common read for Kendi's book (How to be an Anti-Racist). I took on the initiative to lead these conversations. Kendi notes that it's important to see how others are defining racism. I want to learn how to take concrete steps. We are looking at data and statistics and when you see the common data point of diversity, you realize now in this lens, that it is just a piece of paper and it means nothing. It makes it easier for white students to say something about affirmative action. I share with students that it is meaningless. The only thing that means something is if you go on campus and see people being a community; that puts meaning into the numbers.
- Thank you for this program. I need to develop and strengthen my courage to address the comments and behaviors that are indicative of white supremacy.
- Advice for being a better ally to your Black students:
  - Listen, listen, listen.
  - Stop policing their narratives.
  - Stop policing their tone.
  - Identify students by their name and pronounce it correctly.
  - Partner with the diversity office on your initiatives.
  - Stop relying on tradition as a guide--some of your events/activities may need to be completely redesigned or come to an end.
  - View failures as a problem of the institution, not the student.
  - Understand undermatching and acknowledge the moments where you may have done it. Commit to holding students to high expectations and truly believe that they can succeed (let them define success).
  - Question your school's policies and procedures and pay attention to how they are implemented. Ask yourself, "Are Black students being negatively impacted?"
  - Include students in steering committees to ensure their voices are heard when it comes to equity, diversity, inclusion, and access initiatives.
  - Demand that your institution invest in high quality diversity, equity, and inclusion training for all faculty and staff.
  - Promote self-care practices and identify allies on campus to help with support and wellbeing.
  - Check your privilege, embrace it/own it, and use it to create change. Check your biases.
- Last things:
  - Sign up for the CASL (College Access and Success Listserv) listserv: <https://www.neacac.org/neacac-college-access-and-success-listserv>

- This was built out of the Coming Together Conference Planning. We noted the need to acknowledge more access and there wasn't really a space to create those conversations about inclusion, equity, and access
- Anti-Racism Resource Document created by IDEA:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/15SRfX3jeNQiP6nYqWFmBG1R7i8X999c72N77si1mnNA/edit?usp=sharing>
- Encouragement to participate/volunteer for the subcommittee of IDEA on inclusive policies and procedures