

How To Talk About Racism


haveTHAT talk



What is Racism?

Racism is when people are treated badly or unfairly because of their race. It can be caused by the belief that one race or ethnicity is better than another. Racism can include stereotypes, and believing that certain actions, personalities and behaviours are found in some races and not others. Racism can make it hard for people to speak up, especially if they feel less powerful. For example, it might be difficult to speak up to an employer, doctor or other professional. Experiencing racism can also impact a person's mental health. Some of these effects can include: increased feelings of helplessness or worthlessness, anxiety, stress related illnesses, depression and suicide.¹

Individual racism is when a person has negative beliefs about other races. This can be on purpose (conscious) or without realizing it (subconscious). Examples of individual racism are using hurtful words, hurtful behaviours and face-to-face racism. Subtle actions, like favouring people who are white over people of colour, can also be individual racism.

Systemic racism refers to rules and laws in society that discriminate against racialized groups. These rules might not be obvious, but they lead to unfair treatment. They can prevent Indigenous and racialized individuals from being able to move forward in their lives or careers. There are many forms of systemic racism. In 2022, 27 Indigenous reserves and communities in Canada had long-term advisories for unsafe drinking water. Yet, the vast majority of Canadians have easy access to safe drinking water. Another example of systemic racism is the profiling of racialized individuals. Studies show that some Canadian police services stop black and Indigenous people more often than white people. Research also shows that individuals with African, Arab or Latin American names are more likely to face discrimination when applying for jobs.²

Internalized racism happens when people believe the negative stereotypes about their own race. For example, some people might feel like they need to straighten their hair or use skin lightening creams to fit what they believe is more professional or acceptable in society.

Key Messages:

Experiencing racism can harm a person's mental and physical health.

- Racism can cause individuals to experience stress, anxiety, depression and trauma. This can lead to other health conditions like high blood pressure and heart disease.
- It can be difficult to access good health care due to racism in society and the health care system.
- Racism can make it harder to go to school, achieve good grades, and study. It can also impact a person's access to higher education.
- Racism can prevent people from getting and keeping a job, as well as being paid fairly. This can impact a person's access to healthy food and safe housing.
- Racism creates unfair situations that affect people's lives and health.

Additional Resources

English

- [Call it out: racism, racial discrimination and human rights](#)
- [Anti-Racism Learning Series](#)
- [Enslavement of Indigenous People in Canada](#)

French

- [Dénoncez-le : Racisme, discrimination raciale et droits de la personne](#)
- [Série d'apprentissage contre le racisme](#)
- [Esclavage des Autochtones au Canada](#)

¹ Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), (2021). Racism and Mental Health. *CMHA York Region and South Simcoe*. Retrieved from <https://cmha-yr.on.ca/racism-and-mental-health/>

² Souissi, T. (2024). Systemic Racism in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/systemic-racism>

Activity 1: Discussion

Goals

- To learn about racism.
- To understand the impact that racism has on mental health and well-being.
- To learn how to respond and speak to youth about racism, and how it can affect their mental health.
- To learn about different coping strategies and the ways to protect your own mental health after experiencing racism.

Messages

- When experiencing acts of racism, it is okay not to feel okay. You do not have control over stressful events like this. However, help is available if you need it.
- Coping mechanisms such as positive self-talk, self-care, speaking to friends and family, and working through your feelings can help protect your mental health.
- Friends and loved ones can provide support. Speaking to a health professional or accessing counselling or mental health phone lines can also help.
- Take time to process your feelings and talk about them with someone you trust.

Time

- 20-30 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [*"HaveTHATtalk about Racism"*](#)
- Paper and pencils.

Activity

- View the video: *"haveTHATtalk about Racism."*
- In a large or small group, ask the participants the following questions:
 - a) Why was Kwame stopped and searched by the security guard?
 - b) What would you do if you were Kwame's friend and you noticed him experiencing racism?
 - c) How do you think you would feel if you experienced an act of discrimination and racism like Kwame did in the video?
 - d) What changes do you think Kwame's mother noticed in his behavior and routine after the racist incident that Kwame encountered?
 - e) What are some things that Kwame's mother can discuss with him to protect his mental health after he shared his story?
 - f) What actions can parents take to encourage their children to talk to them about their experiences with racism and discrimination?

Possible Answers

a) Why was Kwame stopped and searched by the security guard?	• Kwame is different from his friends because he is from a racialized community. • Kwame was racially profiled because he is a black youth.
b) What would you do if you were Kwame's friend and you noticed him experiencing racism?	• I would be an ally to Kwame by standing up for him and reporting the incident. • I would talk to Kwame and support him during this difficult time. • I would encourage Kwame to tell his mother so she can help him.
c) How do you think you would feel if you experienced an act of discrimination and racism like Kwame did in the video?	• Upset • Hopeless • Stressed • Angry • Anxious • Worried that the incident will happen again.
d) What changes do you think Kwame's mother noticed in his behavior and routine after the racist incident that Kwame encountered?	• Kwame was acting differently. • He was isolating himself and avoided going out in public. • His appetite changed. • He began experiencing nightmares.
e) What are some things that Kwame's mother can discuss with him to protect his mental health after he shared his story?	Kwame's mother might suggest: • Practicing self-care. • Practicing positive self-talk. • Finding coping strategies such as talking to an ally, playing sports, going for a nature walk, eating well, and getting enough sleep. • Creating a strong and supportive network, such as one filled with friends, family, members of the community, faith leaders and other community resources. • Connecting with a support line or a health care professional to talk about any struggles and experiences with racism.
f) What actions can parents take to encourage their children to talk to	• Being supportive when listening to their child/loved one share their

them about their experiences with racism and discrimination?	story. • Acknowledging and reassuring their feelings and reminding them that they are not alone. • Surrounding yourself and your family with allies and continuing to have open and ongoing discussions about it. • Provide messages that promote self-esteem and self-acceptance. • Start talking about racism early and have open discussions. • Consider sharing your own history and lived experiences related to coping in similar situations.
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Activity 2: Timed Challenges

Goals

- To understand what it feels like to live with rules that do not support your success.
- To understand the importance of treating everyone fairly.
- To reflect on the advantages that we benefit from.

Messages

- Reflect on the advantages you have been given in your life. Think about how you can work towards supporting those who do not receive the same benefits.
- Being an ally can be one of the best ways to show support to your family, friends and loved ones. Knowing how to speak up during challenging times can make a big difference. Offering support privately can also be helpful.
- You may feel uncomfortable when you witness these events taking place. These feelings are normal. Share with others how you are feeling, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Time

- 20 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [*"HaveTHATtalk about Racism"*](#).

Activity

- View the video: *"haveTHATtalk about Racism"*.
- Split the participants into two equal groups and tell them that they must race to complete a set of challenges. One group will have half the time, but do not tell them this right away.
- Depending on the number of participants you have, give one group an appropriate amount of time (Group A), and the second group half the time to do the activities listed below (Group B).
- As the timer runs out for the Group B, continue to allow Group A to complete their challenge.
- When the activity has been completed, switch the time for both groups before proceeding to the next challenge (both groups will have a chance to experience the different time limits).
- When all of the challenges are completed, ask the participants the following questions:
 1. "How did it feel to participate in this game?"
 2. "How did you feel about the group that was given less time to compete with you?"
 3. "How did it feel to participate in a challenge that had unequal rules?"
 4. "How do you feel that this activity can be related to challenges people experience in real life?"

Challenges

- Ask the groups to stand in order from tallest to shortest.
- Ask the groups to stand in alphabetical order of their first names.
- Ask the groups to stand in order of birth date (e.g., November 1st, December 10th, etc.)
- Hide two objects of your choice (one per group) and tell the participants that they must find their assigned item before the timer is up. Allow hints for the group with more time and do not help the group with less time.

Possible Answers

1. "How did it feel to participate in this game?"	• "I felt like the cards were stacked against me. Like the game was rigged for me to lose." • "I felt unmotivated to play because I knew I would lose."
2. "How did you feel about the group that was given less time to compete with you?"	• "I was uncomfortable playing the game knowing that the other team was not given the same chances as me." • "I felt like my efforts didn't matter because the other team had no chance of winning. I felt like my win was not satisfying." • "I thought about how I would not be happy if I was given less time to play and it made me sad."
3. "How did it feel to participate in a challenge that had unequal rules?"	• "I don't think it was fair." • "I don't feel like I deserved the extra time." • "I do not feel like I earned my win because I had different rules."
4. "How do you feel that this activity can be related to challenges people experience in real life?"	• "I can see how people that are different from me have been given less opportunities to win or succeed in life." • "It makes me sad to know that some people are given advantages for no reason, while others have to work harder to be equal." • "In my life, I have experienced this unfair treatment, and it makes me feel like I am not enough, or that I am not deserving of success."