

RACISM AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS: 5 ACTIONS FOR ALLIES

Advice and best practice on how an individual can address racism and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace

(adapted from BITC 'RACISM AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS – 5 ACTIONS FOR ALLIES')

Introduction

A bystander is an individual who witnesses inappropriate behaviour but is not directly involved themselves. To address racist or non-inclusive and inappropriate behaviours in the workplace, bystanders must become allies – people who step up to intervene to stop or diffuse a difficult situation.

Non-action implies implicit agreement with the perpetrator. However, where there is intervention (directly or indirectly) it has been shown to create a community culture where the person affected feels supported because the inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated.

The Race at Work 2018 survey with 24,310 responses revealed that 1 in 4 (25%), of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees had reported in 2018 that they had witnessed or experienced racist harassment or bullying from managers in the last two years.

Since 2015, there has also been an increase in the proportion of people from a Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority background who report they have witnessed or experienced racist harassment or bullying from customers or service users (up to 19% from 16%). People of a mixed ethnicity have experienced the largest increase in harassment or bullying from customers (20% up from 13%).

One of the Race at Work Charter's five principle calls for action was based on evidence from the 2018 survey on the need for zero tolerance on racial harassment and bullying.

Subsequent BITC research¹ into inclusive behaviours has found that: 44% of employees have experienced non-inclusive behaviours in the workplace over the last 3 years¹. This increases to:

- 58% of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees
- 58% of workers under 35
- 50% of women

Of those who had experienced this behaviour, 11% ultimately left their organisation.

Non-inclusive behaviour can be conscious or unconscious, ranging from bias, harassment and discrimination to interrupting someone, gestures and tone of voice or words used. Although the intention of the perpetrator might not be to cause offence, the impact of these behaviours can cause employees to lose confidence and feel isolated or disengaged.

¹ BITC and Deloitte (2019) YouGov Survey Findings, Workplace Discrimination, October

Actions for Allies

The Race at Work 2018 survey also found that only 22% of employees said that they had received support in calling out racial harassment and bullying behaviour. Allies can follow these actions to discourage the perpetrator during an incident, support the individual on the receiving end of the negative behaviour and help to prevent inappropriate workplace behaviour in the future.

1. Do not wait or assume that others will intervene – take responsibility

Diffusion of responsibility and bystander apathy is very real. Just because other people may witness the event does not mean that they will intervene or report it. Take responsibility to step up and intervene directly or indirectly.

2. Check it is safe to intervene, and use this assessment to determine your actions

Assess the situation before deciding to directly respond: Are you physically and psychologically safe? Is the person being harassed physically safe? Does it seem unlikely that the situation will escalate? Direct intervention is only the correct response if you can answer yes to all these questions.

3. Be confident, clear and not rude when intervening directly

Use general statements such as “that’s inappropriate, disrespectful, not okay, etc.” or “this makes me feel uncomfortable” when speaking up and ask the person who is being harassed how they feel. Be short and succinct, and try not to engage in dialogue, debate, or an argument with the harasser as this risks the situation escalating. If the instigator responds, try your best to assist the person who was on the receiving end of the negative behaviour instead of engaging with the harasser.

4. Indirect intervention works too!

Take an indirect approach to de-escalate the situation by creating a distraction, asking a question or starting a conversation with one of the people involved (“do you know where this meeting room is?” or “have you got a moment to chat about something?”) This draws attention away from the event and may help to diffuse the situation.

5. Don’t be a lone wolf – get help from others if necessary

Speak to someone near you who notices what is happening and might be in a better position to intervene and work together. Better yet, find someone in a position of authority, like HR or a management committee member, and ask them for help. If this is not possible, use your best judgement on how the individual might want you to intervene.

Support after an incident

After an occurrence of racist or inappropriate behaviour has taken place, the best thing you can do to support the person affected is to record the incident (i.e. in a live document, or by sending emails to yourself). This can be done in the moment if someone else is helping out, or after the fact if you chose to intervene. Do not forget to add the time, date and location and always ask the person who was on the receiving end of the negative behaviour what they want to do with the record. Never share it online or use it without their permission.

Make a point to communicate with the individual afterwards to let them know what you witnessed and ask how best you can support them. Keep your attention on the individual who has been affected and make sure everything you do is focused on helping them. Signpost them to resources and possible next steps, and offer to help them make a report if they want to. Tell them that you have documented the incident and ask them if they would like you to share it. Be sure to engage with the individual a few days later to check if they're OK, and don't forget to allow yourself the time and space to reflect on what you have witnessed and seek support for yourself if you feel you need it.

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