

CHS Ongoing Conversations

Microaggressions in the Workplace

January 21, 2021

Reflecting on January 6th...



Employee Assistance Program

<https://dhr.delaware.gov/benefits/compsych/>

Center for Counseling & Student Development

<https://sites.udel.edu/counseling/>

What is the Goal of the Ongoing Conversations Series?

To continue to engage CHS employees and students on topics related to diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism

From our First Conversation for Change...

What are some characteristics of an anti-racist and equitable culture that we should have within CHS?

- *A culture that allows us:*
 - *To reduce microaggressions through awareness training, dialogues, and personal reflection*
 - *To have authentic, HOT (Honest, Open, and Trusting) conversations about race and racism*
 - *To listen to each other and to learn about ourselves and each other with open hearts and minds*
 - *To recognize privilege and inequities without becoming defensive*
 - *To make mistakes, and to hold ourselves and each other accountable while fostering personal growth and forging a stronger, more inclusive and equitable community where all voices can be heard and celebrated*

From our Second Conversation for Change...

Ground Rules for a Safe Space:

- Everyone is expected “to avoid language that is pejorative or perpetuates stereotypes about gender, age, race, religious affiliation, class, sexuality, national origin, dialect or disability (not an exhaustive list)”.
- Introduce yourself when you enter the breakout room, to help establish rapport
- Leave preconceived ideas at the door
- Be open to other perspectives
- Give everyone a turn to speak without interruption
- Avoid raising your voice and using an aggressive tone
- Respect one another
- Give people the benefit of the doubt
- Listen well, encourage clarification, mirror back to check understanding
- Don't be dismissive of others' feelings
- Establish a protocol for when people say something that isn't “PC” to correct them respectfully without affirming negative ideas

What are *Microaggressions*?

- Can be defined as:
 - *Everyday slights, insults, putdowns, in validations, and offensive behaviors that people of color [and other marginalized groups] experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned individuals who may be unaware that they have engaged in demeaning ways toward target groups (Sue et al., 2019)*
- Verbal or nonverbal
- Via social media, movies and other media, educational curricula, mascots, monuments, and other offensive symbols
- A microaggression involves a perpetrator and a target, but may also include a bystander; goal is for bystander to become an ally

What are the Consequences and Impacts of Microaggressions?

- **Microaggressions are harmful and traumatic, regardless whether intentional or inadvertent**
- **“Micro” reflects “everyday” rather than indicating lesser or insignificant**
- **Harmful impacts range from greatly increased stress levels and adverse health outcomes to major life-threatening harms such as the unwarranted shooting and killing of a Black male suspect by police**
- **“Can feel isolating, painful, and filled with threat” by those experiencing them**



FUSION

**Micro
Aggressions**

Taking Action: Disarming Strategies/Microinterventions

- **Primary functions**
 - **Provide target with a sense of well-being and/or bystanders with a sense of control**
 - **Provide target and bystander with tools, options, words used to combat microaggressions which can be improved through training**

- **Strategies**
 - **Make Visible: Why? Some microaggressions are subliminal – requires ability to read “between the lines”**
 - **Example: “Do you realize what you just said?” or “ouch!”**
 - **Goal: Lets the perpetrator know they’ve been offensive**
 - **Disarm: Why? Most immediate tactic due to the immediate injurious nature.**
 - **Example: “I totally disagree with your comment.”**
 - **Goal: Deflect through disagreement**

Taking Action: Disarming Strategies/Microinterventions

- **Strategies**

- **Educate: Why? Long-term process due to the perpetrator's beliefs or values**
 - Example: "Just because I graduated from a Delaware High School does not mean I'm an average student. In fact, I took all college prep courses in high school!"
 - Goal: Educate, by outlining good intent vs harmful intent; rather than just confront
- **Seek Support: Why? Ensure victim's psychological wellbeing and seek suggestions/advice from others that may have encountered the same.**
 - Example: Join a support group or seek counseling

Break Out Discussion

Microaggression Scenarios 20 Minutes

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m1Pfp-VH-Xxjm-dohPsPvbloAcUhpT1m/view?usp=sharing>

Scenario #1

Susan is meeting her sister, Amy's, new boyfriend Brent over lunch. Susan and Amy are close, but this is the first time Susan is meeting Brent. Susan and Amy are both white and they have an aunt, Rita, who is a member of the Choctaw tribe. Over the course of lunch, the conversation turns to family members' drinking habits. Brent proceeds to declare – well you know – it's a good thing your Aunt Rita doesn't drink – everyone knows that Indians can't handle their liquor.

1. What is the microaggression?

Stereotyping/generalizing about Native Americans (from Choctaw to 'Indians') not being able to hold their liquor as if they are all the same

1. How would you feel if you were the target or the bystander?

Susan: Offended, shocked and upset at the comment about their Aunt; and alarmed and concerned about Amy's choice for a boyfriend who made the offensive comment

1. How would you address it - as the target or the bystander?

Susan might say 'Ouch, that was an offensive comment - do you realize what you just said?'

Reminding Brent of the dangers of generalizing based on stereotypes

Educate them on why it was offensive

Scenario #2

Debbie, a middle-aged white woman, is sitting on the subway. Sara, a young white woman, is sitting across from her. A black father and his 10 year old son get on the subway and sit next to Debbie. Debbie quickly gets up and walks to the other end of the car to sit near a white male.

1. What is the microaggression?

Debbie is non-verbally communicating that she is afraid of the black father and his son

1. How would you feel if you were the target or the bystander?

Target: offended, upset, worn down

Bystander: shocked, uncomfortable, desire to make it right somehow

1. How would you address it - as the target or the bystander?

Target: As the target it's not clear what we might do. You might be concerned of escalation. Could say 'ouch' if you have eye contact with Debbie - and say, 'we're not dangerous' and/or 'perhaps you didn't intend to communicate this, but I felt bad when you moved as it seemed to indicate that you're afraid of me and my son.'

Bystander: Move to where Debbie was sitting, next to the father and son, and strike up a conversation with the son, to convey that you are in solidarity with them.

Scenario #3

Professor Davis teaches a Community Health course. During the first class meeting, she introduces the topic of the coronavirus and begins to explain how the UK and the US have managed the pandemic. She then turns to Sadie, who is an American of Korean descent who grew up in L.A., and says: “Sadie, you’re Asian! Can you tell us what the Chinese think about the novel coronavirus pandemic?” Sadie is stunned and responds that she actually isn’t from China; she grew up in L.A.. Professor Davis responds, “Well that explains why you speak English so well!”

1. What is the microaggression?

Treating Sadie as an alien in her own land - assuming that she’s not American because she is of Asian descent. Complimenting her English adds to the damage.

Refusal to acknowledge intra-ethnic difference by assuming that because she appears Asian, she must be from China.

Believing she knows something about the coronavirus because because she is of Asian descent

In sum: Making an assumption about someone’s country and language based on their appearance.

1. How would you feel if you were the target or the bystander?

Target: Offended and upset, feeling disempowered, alienated. The power dynamic makes it particularly difficult.

Bystander: Shocked, upset

1. How would you address it - as the target or the bystander?

Bystander: Check in with Sadie. Possibly voice opinion to the professor “You may not have known this, but Sadie is an American who grew up in the US.”

Target: Although likely very uncomfortable for Sadie to do this, she could say “Of course I speak English well! I’m an American who grew up in LA.” She could report the incident to the diversity and equity office, if she can be assured that there would be no risk to her (she could wait until after grades are in, to be safe). She could ask her advisor or another trusted individual to meet with the professor after the class to express the hurt and pain from the incident in an attempt to educate the professor so it won’t happen again.

Scenario #4

Tonya is a new African American analyst in the budget office and the only woman on her team. During her first meeting with the team, her supervisor asks her to take notes when no one else volunteers. “It’s great to have a woman around that can take detailed notes,” her supervisor says. Later in the meeting, the conversation veers off topic and her colleagues begin chatting about a team outing to the golf course last spring. “Tonya, do you ever play golf?” one of her colleagues asks. “No,” Tonya says. “I can’t believe it! We head over to Fieldstone Pure Golf in Greenville. It’s super exclusive. Mike’s dad has a membership to the club. I can’t believe you’ve never been!”

1. What is the microaggression?

This scenario incorporates microaggressions based on race, gender, and power dynamics. Tonya is met with a sexist comment (implication that women must take on a secretarial role), as well as a racist comment (implication that as an African American she should be put in the position of service to the group in this way). There is also evidence of the ‘old boys club’ in the supervisor asking about whether Tonya plays golf - and then essentially being oblivious to her answer. Comment about exclusivity of the club: message to Tonya that she is not part of that club.

1. How would you feel if you were the target or the bystander?

Target - insulted, isolated, noting the power dynamic would make it intimidating to speak up for yourself
Bystander - would also potentially feel intimidated by the power dynamic in the room (‘old boys club’)

1. How would you address it - as the target or the bystander?

Some groups suggested the use of humor, to say something like ‘What did you do for notes before I came here?’ or to use sarcasm ‘Sure, I’ll type the notes while you guys go golfing.’ Others suggested that humor might not get the point across and it could pass by the room unnoticed. A bystander (especially a man but another woman could also do this) speak up and say ‘That was sexist and offensive.’ The bystander could volunteer to do the typing today.’

Final Thoughts

- **“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- **“The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”**

Albert Einstein

Thank you for coming!

CHS Social Justice Training

Thursday, January 28th, 12-1 pm

CHS Employee Climate Survey

Deadline, January 31st

Next Ongoing Conversation

Thursday March 25th, 12-1 pm