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A wellness newsletter from your local EFAP.

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Support for BLACK LIVES MATTER, anti-racism, and a safe space for everyone.

At Upper Island Counselling, we have been listening, learning, and reflecting on recent events that highlight the need for continued anti-racism work. We believe that the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement needs to be amplified and sustained, and that mental health professionals have an important role to play. We also believe that in following our ethical principal of *Societal Interest*, "Upholding responsibility to act in the best interest of society" this work is a necessary responsibility.

As an organization and as individuals, we want to state that:

- We recognize the mental health impacts of ongoing systemic racism, violence, and discrimination.
- We believe that Black, Indigenous, and people of Color (BIPOC) should not have to bear the burden of past and present-day traumas, oppressions, and microaggressions alone.
- We believe in listening to and amplifying the voices of BIPOC.
- We continuously work to acknowledge and challenge our own implicit biases and privileges, both professionally and personally.
- We strive to create a space that is safe for BIPOC.
- We recognize that as White counsellors, our very presence may be triggering and that the space may not feel safe for some individuals. We respect client's preferences for seeking culturally appropriate counselling and do our best to support them in finding the right resources.
- We strive to seek and engage with models of care that are anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

As an organization, we have a moral and professional responsibility to be not only allies but also advocates for the fair and just treatment of BIPOC. We recognize that the urgent calls for societal change are not new, but are in need of sustained action.

We are willing and able to have difficult conversations and to act with courage, empathy, and kindness.

Having conversations about hard things, like racism.

As a White individuals, we are speaking from the perspectives of allies who are committed to continued learning. We do not pretend to be experts on race and racism, and we do not speak for either the BIPOC or White community. We are sharing what we have learned so far, on our anti-racism journeys, from BIPOC and White speakers, authors, and leaders (see some great resources at the end of this article).

Having conversations about race and racism is difficult. For those of us who are White, we might rarely think about the impact of racism aside from watching the news in the

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“if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

*- Desmond Tutu
Human rights activist*

“One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings.”

*—Franklin Thomas,
businessman and
philanthropist*

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

—Barack Obama

Support for BLACK LIVES MATTER (cont’d)

evening. For BIPOC individuals, it might be impossible to go one day without experiencing some form of racial discrimination or violence. For either side, conversations about race can be uncomfortable, confusing, and even unsafe.

But as we often say in counselling, *it’s worth doing the hard things*. Especially when those hard things can foster the development of a racially equitable society. So how do we have conversations that foster understanding, acceptance, and empathy?

Learn about racialized identities and the privileges and disadvantages that are attributed to various identities. Understand systems of oppression and learn about those who have and continue to work towards racial equality.

Explore your own racial identity. We all have one, whether we think about it frequently or not. Be prepared to understand how your experience, because of your background, influences what you bring to and take from the conversation. We all have responses to talking about race and racism - How does your background impact how you think about and understand race, and what kind of emotional responses are you likely to have during these difficult conversations?

Don’t ignore your emotional responses. Many people express feeling frustration, shame, sadness, and guilt when thinking and talking about race and racism. Just like any difficult conversation – it’s hard to be productive when we’re emotionally charged. Spend some time tending to these emotions – journal, talk to a trusted friend – explore where these responses are coming from.

Keep doing the work. Understanding race and racism and fostering empathy in difficult conversations is a continual process. Don’t stop just because you ‘mess up’ or it’s ‘too hard’. It’s worth it.

From difficult conversations to being anti-racist.

Many of you have likely seen the quote from scholar and political activist Angela Davis, “in a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, you must be antiracist”. Below are some ideas to support this work if this is something you are ready to do.

Listen to and learn from BIPOC individuals and communities.

Find the bravery to ask to hear the stories of BIPOC. Listen with the intent to learn and try to understand, to increase empathy, and connection. Don’t be afraid to bring it up – to name it. Make invitations for sharing about racist experiences.

Understand and avoid making unintentional microaggressions.

Microaggressions are unintended discriminations, and many of us make these frequently by mistake – like asking a non-White person “Where are you really from?” or complimenting a non-White person on their English. If you notice someone making a microaggression, let them know. If you find yourself the microaggressor – *apologize and don’t get defensive*. If you’ve hurt someone unintentionally, getting defensive only hurts that person more. Instead, apologize like you would if you’d said something that hurt the feelings of a good friend.

Understand racial identity.

Don’t say you’re ‘color blind’ or ‘see everyone as the same’. People are often proud of their heritage and ethnicity, willfully pretending these things don’t exist is to ignore an important part of who someone is. Claiming to ‘not have a racial identity’ or to be ‘color blind’ also minimizes the real problem of racism and the fact that BIPOC deal with violence and discrimination because of their race on a daily basis.

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Support for BLACK LIVES MATTER (cont'd)

Have a racial identity.

White people often respond with an “I don’t know” or “I don’t really have a race” when asked about their racial identity. It’s ok to say you’re White. Pretending not to have a racial identity illustrates that you have the privilege not to think about race and racism. You don’t speak for your entire race, just as non-White individuals don’t speak for theirs.

Educate yourself about White privilege.

Understand systemic racism and oppression and inspire yourself to work for change, both internal and external.

Speak Up.

You’re allowed to speak up when you hear or see something that you think is racist or discriminatory. Stopping racism is not the responsibility of BIPOC alone and the idea that White people can’t do anything is a misconception. We all have the power to advocate for change.

References for the above article:

<https://www.iheart.com/podcast/559-the-savvy-psychologists-qu-29083047/episode/058-sp-how-to-be-anti-racist-52837563/>

<https://fromprivilegetoprogress.org/blog/f/in-our-white-feelings-on-the-path-to-antiracism>

<http://www.bu.edu/articles/2019/white-fragility/>

Looking for resources?

This List of Books, Films and Podcasts About Racism from NPR:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/06/06/871023438/this-list-of-books-films-and-podcasts-about-racism-is-a-start-not-a-panacea>

Ted Hour Radio – Confronting Racism:

<https://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/707189471/confronting-racism>

Online Resources



For some additional resources on how to support Black Lives Matter:

<https://onesearch.library.utoronto.ca/anti-black-racism-reading-list>

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/news/resources-supporting-black-lives-matter-movement-creative-industry-010620>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/multiculturalism-anti-racism/anti-racism/resiliencebc>

<https://jack.org/antiracismresources>

<https://guidetoallyship.com/>

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/anti-racism-organizations-canada/>