**When a microaggression happens to you**

1. **Remain calm and take a deep breath.** Find a way to pause from assuming or reacting right away. If it is the first time and the incident is new, you could ask the person to repeat what he said or did. Responding with anger will only work against you.
2. **Give the benefit of the doubt.** Start by asking for clarification — after you have taken a breath — and take note of the response. You can take time to think it over and decide how to respond later.
3. **Focus on the event, not the person.** By directing the conversation to the behavior, event, or comment you will decrease the likelihood of defensiveness. Any attempts to handle microaggressions by making the situation about you — as much as it is about how you are treated — and them guarantees a power struggle that will tilt to favor those in the majority.
4. **Be clear about the different elements of a microaggression.** Who said/did what? Who was in the room? What is the relationship between you and the sender? Was this a first time or is this an ongoing issue? Having a clear understanding of the factors that surrounded the microaggression helps evaluate next steps strategically rather than emotionally.
5. **Deal with the slight head-on.** The most productive response in the workplace is actually to confront the microaggressor. Using humor helps to diffuse the situation. For example, when people talk over you, consider interrupting them back: “I know you are super excited to get your idea out, but I wasn’t done with mine.”
6. **Raise awareness of them when they happen.** If it keeps happening, approach another member of the team or a supervisor privately and explaining what’s going on as they may not have noticed.
* Adapted from *5 Tips to Handle Microaggressions Effectively, by Anna Giraldo-Kerr,* <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/anna-giraldo-kerr/5-tips-to-handle-microagg_b_5658351.html>

**When you commit a microaggression**

First of all, everyone commits microaggressions.

We have all done or said something that we may not have intended to offend someone, but somehow still ended up doing so. Sometimes we are aware of our actions, and other times it takes another person to point them out to you. If we were completely unaware that something we said or did was hurtful or offensive, there really isn’t anything we can do. However, when we are even slightly aware that we may have committed a microaggression or if we are confronted about it, there are several things that we can do.

There may be moments when you think you may have committed a microaggression.

Have you ever said or done something in which an individual winced or clearly reacted negatively?

When someone’s behavior is noticeable, we might be able to detect that something we said or did may have caused it. If you are able to detect the potential cause, OWN UP TO IT! We need to admit when we commit microaggressions, learn from the wrongdoing, and apologize. We all make mistakes, consciously and not, and need to own up to them when we do.

For moments in which someone confronts you on your behavior, listen to what he or she is trying to tell you and try not to be defensive. The worst thing that we can do is to deny that someone is hurt or offended by something we said or did. In fact, invalidating their experience could be considered a microaggression in itself.

So again, admit to the wrongdoing and genuinely apologize. Furthermore, there are things that we can do to avoid microaggressions altogether. First, be aware of the language that you use.

Common phrases like “That’s so gay!” often go under the radar because people do not realize that the language is actually homophobic and insulting.

If something is weird, say it is weird! Why does it have to be called gay? Be aware of other subtle messages. For example, the color white is often used to convey that something is good (e.g., little white lie, white collar), while the color black is used to denote that something is bad (e.g., black sheep, blackmail, Black Friday).

Finally, education about microaggressions is important. The more people are aware of the term and concept, the less likely they will be defensive when confronted about their behaviors. If we teach kids about diversity and equality from a very early age, we have the power to transform them into open-minded adults. Let us teach our kids to not be afraid, but rather to respect each other.

Excerpted from *A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions* by Kevin L. Nadal

<https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A_Guide_to_Responding_to_Microaggressions.pdf>

**When you witness a microaggression**

**Try Moving from Reacting to Resistance**

Learning about microaggressions has allowed you to see previously unrecognized hostility in your department’s environment. Right now, the way you understand your role in these interactions is “reacting to microaggressions.”

What would happen if you reframed your role? Instead of defensively reacting, what if you saw yourself as engaging in “microresistance”? In other words, instead of reacting to an individual’s bad behavior, what if you proactively worked toward an equitable environment for everyone in your department?

When I understand myself as actively engaging in microresistance, it has a different energy than reacting to microaggressions. It keeps me focused on the structural nature of the problem.

In other words, it’s not just one person acting like an asshole; what’s occurring in everyday interactions is a continual manifestation of privilege. As such, my words and actions matter to the higher-level goals of equity and inclusion. Microresistance empowers me and makes me feel that my daily choices contribute to the overall climate in which I’m embedded.

**Practice “Opening the Front Door”**

* Observe: Describe clearly and succinctly what you see happening.
* Think: State what you think about it.
* Feel: Express your feelings about the situation.
* Desire: Assert what you would like to happen.

For example, an ally at the event I attended could have said something like, “When your response to the fact that this group is almost entirely male is to suggest we ‘meet at the mall’ (observation), it sounds like you think female leaders are primarily concerned with shopping, and that’s insulting to them and their accomplishments (think). I feel embarrassed and uncomfortable feel), and I would like us to take the concern seriously and discuss why women have stopped attending our events (desire).”

It doesn’t have to be perfect, it just has to be authentic -- in your own words and expressing your own thoughts, feelings and desires. I bet you can imagine how different the conversation would have been if an ally had intervened. And whenever you’re acting, just keep in mind that the goal of microresistance is to relieve the person (or group) who is the target of having to fix the problem. That means that even a suboptimal effort is still a step forward.

**Be Committed and Gentle with Your Progress**

While you are learning how to engage in microresistance, allow yourself to set the bar low for success. What I mean is that when you are first learning and practicing new skills, success is when you experiment with new behavior. In other words, for a few weeks you can consider yourself successful if you notice when you start to freeze and do something (anything!). Just breaking through the frozen sensation is a victory.

Once you get comfortable engaging in microresistance, you can raise the bar so that you act in ways that are increasingly sophisticated, effective and a fit with your personality. It will take practice for that to happen, but trust me, since I adopted this approach I’ve gotten better over time. And once you get comfortable with microresistance in daily interactions, you can move on to other ways that you can act as an ally: mentoring, being a sponsor and shaping policy on your campus.

* Excerpted from *Allies and Microaggressions* by Kerry Ann Rockquemore, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/04/13/how-be-ally-someone-experiencing-microaggressions-essay>

**So, what can men do to stop microaggressions in the workplace? Here are four suggestions:**

Admit that microaggressions exist. In conversations about everyday racism and sexism, many white people and males deny its existence. That’s not productive. But listening is. “The whole goal of working with male allies and white allies is to make the invisible visible,” Sue said. Check out @EverdaySexism for a sample of microaggressions against women. They range from being referred to as “girls” to being assigned to take notes in meetings to being quizzed by peers on the job.

Ask difficult questions. Sue recommends starting with the person you have the greatest control over—yourself. What does it mean to you to be a man, or a white person? Then, put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Ask your female friends and family about microaggressions in their lives. Coe, the historian, said it would be helpful if men asked more questions of their colleagues. “Instead of a compliment, and then a paternalistic encouragement,” Coe suggested, “men could give the compliment, and then ask a question like, ‘What are some of the challenges you are facing?’”

Show peers that it’s unacceptable. Suzannah Weiss, 26, makes a living writing about gender issues. When a co-worker said something sexist, she asked another co-worker to address it. “He wasn’t on my team, but I knew he would be supportive,” she said. If a co-worker asks you to intervene on her behalf, find the right time and place to pull the offender aside and label his behavior as inappropriate. And you don’t have to wait for a co-worker to ask for help. If you notice microaggressions happening in your workplace, address them.

Recognize that microaggressions reflect deeply embedded practices, policies and worldviews. Consider how leadership skills are examined in most workplaces as a criterion for promotion. “Often, leadership skills are defined by male, Western-centric values like being assertive. The people who are being promoted are the people that are more prone to take action, to brag or to confront. The leadership style of women and many individuals of color tends to be much more cooperative in nature,” Sue said. Scholars stress that microaggressions are not isolated, individual acts, but one part of a system that discriminates against marginalized groups. “No one is immune to inheriting the racial and gender biases of our institutions. The more we are able to confront it without getting defensive, the better off we will be,” Sue said.

* Excerpted from *4 Ways Men Can Stop Microaggressions in the Workplace, by Marlena Hartz,* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marlenahartz/2017/07/24/4-ways-men-can-stop-microaggressions-in-the-workplace/#67c803fb5d91>

**Steps for Addressing Microaggressions**

Both allies and targeted people can step in and speak up, depending on personal communication style and the situation, by using OTFD, xyz, or ACTION (or any other communication frameworks): Speak up with communication strategies like: o

**Open The Front Door** to Communication (OTFD) to make transparent the nature and effects of microaggressions: adapted from Learning Forum (communication steps)

* **O**bserve: Concrete, factual, and observable (not evaluative)
* **T**hink: Thoughts based on observation (yours and/or theirs)
* **F**eel: Emotions- “I feel (emotion).”
* **D**esire: Specific request or inquiries about desired outcome

*Example:* Let’s pause. I noticed (Observe) that some people are interrupting others while they are speaking. I think (Think) we need to actively listen to all of our ideas so that we can learn from one another and maintain norms of respect at our meeting. I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion. Can we please speak one at a time (Desire) and give others the chance to share their thoughts?”

**Speak up by using XYZ**:

* I feel **X** when **Y** because **Z**.

*Example:* I feel uncomfortable when I hear comments about Claude, because he is not here to defend himself.

**Take A.C.T.I.O.N.** rather than feeling frozen in the moment of a microaggression:

* **A**sk clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions, such as: “I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that…?”
* **C**arefully listen to their response. If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you could end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to “cover their tracks,” you may consider making a statement about the initial comment: “I’m glad to hear I misunderstood you, because, as you know, such comments can be…” If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment. “Can you tell me what you were you hoping to communicate with that comment?” “Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?”
* **T**ell others what you observed as problematic in a factual manner, for example: “I noticed that...”
* **I**mpact exploration: ask for, or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others, by asking questions such as: “What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?”, “As you know, everything speaks. What message do you think such a comment sends?”, or “What impact do you think that comment could have on…”
* **O**wn your own thoughts and feelings around the impact. This can start with such phrases as: “When I hear your comment I think/feel…”, “Many people might take that comment to mean…”, “That comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about…”, or “Such negative comments can cause division and defensiveness. I would like to think that is not your intent.”
* **N**ext steps: request appropriate action be taken. Ways to do that should be specific and clear, such as: “I’d like you to use Mustafa’s real name rather than calling him Mo. Can you do that please?”, “Please listen to everyone’s comments without interruption.”, or “I’d appreciate it if you’d stop making these types of negative comments because…”
* Adapted from *Microresistance and Ally Development: Powerful Antidotes to Microaggressions* by Dr. Cynthia Ganote, Dr. Tasha Souza, and Dr. Floyd Cheung, <https://www.unomaha.edu/faculty-support/teaching-excellence/microaggressions-handout.pdf>