

MICROAGGRESSIONS

What are microaggressions?*



- the brief, commonplace daily comments, actions and designs that are hostile, derogatory or slights and insults against a marginalized individual or group
 - often unintentional or unconscious
 - repeating regularly, typically daily
 - subtle – may include insinuations
 - one alone can be tolerated; the repetition is torture
- the same comments may not hurt you – the key is others may be hurt

What about workplace policies?



- workplace harassment policies (in BC) rely on the “reasonable” person test:
 - would a reasonable person be offended?
 - would a reasonable person be hurt?
- relies on an inherent understanding of microaggressions as damaging to mental health
 - unreasonable assumption without training
- 2022 BC Human Rights Tribunal case to test the omission of micro-aggression from workplace policies

What do they look like?!



- micro-assaults: aggressors’ deliberate behaviour that openly states their bias but that they do not think is hurtful
- micro-insults: back-handed compliments and statements
- micro-invalidations: statements that undermine another’s experience of being discriminated against

feels like “death by a thousand cuts”

NOTE: A comment or action may not hurt one person but that same behaviour may hurt another. The key is: **IF IT HURTS SOMEONE, IT IS A MICROAGGRESSION.**

THE IMPACT

When people experience repeated microaggressions, they may

- become overwhelmed and lash out inappropriately
- suffer migraines, GI disorders, lack of appetite, sleep disorders
- feel depressed, anxious and traumatized
- develop a negative world view
- develop drug- or alcohol-related issues
- suffer intense psychological distress



When people witness microaggressions, they may

- become confused about the experience – was it a microaggression?
- feel unsure about how to respond
- exacerbate the issue by creating defensiveness in the aggressor – especially if they didn’t realize what they did in the first place

PROTECTING OTHERS AND YOURSELF

Advocate with empathy²

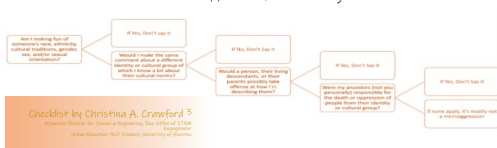


- speak up against the microaggression
- express your response gently and clearly
 - “hey, that hurts”
 - “not appropriate”
- check in with the victim to see if they are okay
 - seek social support and/or counselling

Educate yourself and others



- direct aggressors to resources like this
 - attend workshops and training events
 - acknowledge that the aggressor may be completely unaware of the hurt they are causing



Checklist by Christina A. Crawford³
 Assistant Director for Science & Engineering, The College of STEEP
 Faculty of Science, Simon Fraser University

Recommendations to add to the list? Let us know at the address below!

² see infographic titled “Belonging” for more on fostering inclusion

For more information: about how microaggressions feel, view ¹ <https://youtu.be/hDc3baA7450>; about defining the term and behaviours, see ² <https://bit.ly/guide-to-responding-to-microaggressions>; for training and foundational details, see <https://www.diversityresources.com/workplace-microaggressions-training/>; or watch this workshop ³ by Christina A Crawford (2020) <https://diversity.asee.org/diversitycommittee/2020/10/03/understanding-addressing-microaggressions/>. This infographic was developed by Dr. Katherine Tarnai-Lokhorst, P.Eng, FEC, FCC (hon). Those wishing to use this document are welcome to do so at no charge. If you pull content from this document, please acknowledge the author and use the same Creative Commons attribution. All images developed using the tools of flaticon.com.