How to respond to microaggressions

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Latinas
# How to respond to microaggressions

**Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Latinas**

## Meeting agenda

**approx 90 mins**

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## Activities

- **Activity 1: Reviewing strategies**
- **Activity 2: Workshopping responses**
- **Activity 3: Mitigating the impact**

## One Action

- 10 mins
Member updates

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

3 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Circle Leaders will read aloud the below list of common workplace microaggressions faced by Latinas in non-Latin contexts. Raise your hand if you’ve experienced these microaggressions at work:

- You felt judged for your accent or manner of speaking
- Someone questioned your abilities or judged you as less than capable at your job
- You were ignored or spoken over in a meeting
- You were left out of social events or meetings due to your race
- Someone talked negatively about people who share your background
- Someone else got credit for your idea or work
- Others made assumptions about your culture or nationality (e.g., someone asked you, “Where are you really from?”)
- Someone assumed you wanted to prioritize your family responsibilities over work
- Someone assumed you were more junior or less educated than you are
- Someone commented how good your English is
- Someone judged you for not speaking Spanish
Icebreaker (continued) 10 mins

- Someone judged you for speaking Spanish in the workplace
- You received comments on your emotional state

Discuss icebreaker

- What did you learn from seeing other people’s responses?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Are there any microaggressions you’ve experienced repeatedly that weren’t on the list?
- How did you feel about the microaggressions experienced by your fellow Circle members?

“I’ve heard a million times, ‘You’re so articulate, you don’t look like what you sound like.’ Again, I’ll hold a mirror up to the person and ask, ‘What makes you say that? What were you expecting?’”

Yesenia Reyes, managing director, consulting firm, Texas, USA (she/her)
Before we dive into this activity, know that it’s always OK to *not* respond to a microaggression. The burden shouldn’t be on those most impacted to fight injustices themselves, and it’s fine to just focus on staying safe and taking good care of yourself. But if you do want to respond, research shows it can make you feel more empowered and in control.

Here are the main research-based strategies for responding to a microaggression:

- State the facts (e.g., tell someone your job title or qualifications in a simple, direct way and then move the conversation on)
- Ask a question (e.g., say, “What makes you say that?’’)
- Follow up privately

**Discuss as a group:**

- Which of these responses have you used in real life?
- How effective were they? What was the impact of your response?
- Which responses do you think would be most helpful to use in the future?
Activity 2: Workshopping responses

- Think of a microaggression you’ve experienced where you wish you’d responded differently, or responded at all.

- Go around the room and have everyone share with the group what happened and what they wish they’d done differently.
  - Then, if you feel comfortable, ask other group members for their advice—what would they say in that situation?

“I’ve received many microaggressions over the years, and I’ve gotten better about speaking up. Early in my career, I would just shut down and be intimidated. Culturally, my father was the dominant person in the home, and when he raised his voice or when he wanted something, my mother would quiet down and I would quiet down. So when I got to the workplace, if a man interrupted me, I found myself doing the same thing, but knowing it was wrong, knowing that I need to be speaking up. But I didn’t have the courage. It wasn’t until I started to get involved with Lean In, and I started to learn about women being more interrupted in meetings than men are, that I became more able to speak up for myself.”

Anna Dapelo-Garcia, executive, healthcare industry, Lean In Network Leader, California, USA (she/her)
Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

● Discuss as a group: How have microaggressions impacted you?
  ○ Have your physical and mental health been affected?

● What strategies have helped mitigate the impact (e.g., talking to others, reminding yourself of your worth, basic self-care)?
  ○ What does self-care in your professional life look like? What does it look like in your personal life?

● Consider setting up a group chat with others in this group to share stories, advice, empathy, and validation (e.g., a Slack channel or WhatsApp group).
  ○ Research shows there are tremendous mental health benefits in talking to others who share your identity about any disrespect you face at work.
One Action 10 mins

- Think about one strategy you could use to mitigate the impact of microaggressions in your own life (e.g., self-care or setting up a group chat to share stories).

- Commit to implementing one of these strategies in your own life the next time you experience a microaggression.

- Share your commitment with your Circle (spending 1 minute or less per member).

- When you meet next time, you can check in on each other’s progress.

Congratulations on a great meeting!