

How Black women can respond to microaggressions

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

How Black women can respond to microaggressions

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

Meeting agenda

approx 90 mins

Member updates

15 mins

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Activities

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

15 mins

15 mins

15 mins

One Action

10 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates
- Spend 10 mins on activity 1 and activity 3

Getting started

Member updates

2 mins or less per member

15-20 mins depending on group size

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

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Read aloud to the group: I'm going to read a list of the most common workplace microaggressions faced by Black women. Raise your hand if this has happened to you:

- Someone questioned your abilities or judged you as less than capable at your job
- You were ignored or spoken over in a meeting
- Someone talked negatively about people who share your background
- You were expected to speak on behalf of people with your identity
- Someone else got credit for your idea or work
- You felt judged for the way you speak
- You were criticized for your demeanor (e.g., told that you're too angry or too loud)
- Someone judged your hairstyle or appearance—or asked to touch your hair
- Someone was surprised by your language skills or abilities
- You felt like you needed to provide more evidence of your competence

Continue activity on next page

Icebreaker (continued)

10 mins

Discuss icebreaker

- What did you learn from seeing other people's responses?
- Did anything surprise you?
- How did you feel about the experiences your fellow Circle members shared?
- Have you experienced any kinds of disrespect at work that aren't on the list?

"I've experienced countless microaggressions related to being a Black woman. Colleagues have made assumptions about my education, about where I was from, and about the kinds of things that I enjoy. I've dealt with those things by pushing back, by challenging the assumptions, by using that as an opportunity to talk about how it's important for all of us to get to know who people really are.

Dawn Cornelius, CEO and entrepreneur, tech and consulting industries, Tennessee, USA (she/her)



Activity 1: Reviewing strategies

15 mins

Read aloud to the group: Before we dive into this activity, know that it's always okay to **not** respond to a microaggression. The burden shouldn't always be on Black women advocate for change, 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:

- **Simply 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** that encourages the person to question their assumptions (e.g., researchers recommend asking, "What makes you say that?")
- **Follow up privately** with the person later, so that you have a chance to prepare..

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?
- Are there any other types of response to workplace disrespect that you would recommend??
- Which responses do you think would be most helpful to use in the future?

Activity 2: Workshopping responses

15 mins

- Think of time when you experienced a microaggression and 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?

“Even now, as a senior manager, I’ve had people assume that I was an intern until I let them know otherwise. What I typically have done is make sure that I’m very clear about my role and use very direct language.”

Filsun Moussa, senior manager, regulatory affairs, Lean In Network Leader, Tennessee, USA (she/her)



Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

- Discuss as a group: How has the experience of workplace 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 important aspects of your identity about any disrespect you face at work.



“When you experience microaggressions, you need to take care of yourself afterwards. Recognize how you're feeling, name the emotion. Allow that feeling to be there. And then ask yourself, what can you do to make yourself feel better? Maybe it's writing a text to a friend or calling someone and just having a sounding board. Maybe it's going for a walk, maybe it's doing exercise.”

Zee Clarke, CEO and entrepreneur, author of *Black People Breathe*, New Mexico, USA (she/her)

One Action

10 mins

- Think about one strategy you could use to mitigate the impact of workplace microaggressions in your own life (e.g., self-care or setting up a group chat to share stories).
- Commit to implementing this strategy the next time you experience workplace bias or disrespect.
- Share your commitment with your Circle (spending 1 minute or less per member).
- When you meet next time, you can check in and discuss how well the strategy worked.

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Notes

Notes