

Embodying Inclusion- Tips for Responding to Microaggressions

Examples of Microaggressions

Here are some examples from MHYC:

- **Scenario 1:** A project partner asks an Asian American Corpsmember about her ethnicity. He continues to nag her “Are you sure you’re not Navajo? You really look Navajo”.
- **Scenario 2:** A Corpsmember who uses “they/them” pronouns is being misgendered by their crew. Another Corpsmember says “But I don’t understand. You’re a girl”.

Strategies for Responding to Microaggressions

1. **"A 'Brave Space'**
 - A space where courage meets compassion, where we embrace the challenge of discussing tough topics openly and respectfully. Here, holding space isn't just about listening, it's about being present with empathy, ready to respond and connect deeply.
2. **"Pause Practice"**
 - ‘Pause Practice’ involves three key steps: Stop, Breathe, Reflect. This simple method can transform potential conflicts into opportunities for growth and deeper connection. By pausing, we create the space needed to consider the perspectives of others before we speak.
3. **Inquire**
 - "What did you mean by this?"
 - "Why do you think that?"
4. **Paraphrase/Reflect**

- "I'm hearing you say ___, but it sounds like you're saying ___."
- "It sounds like you think ___. Can you give me some examples?"

5. Respond with Empathy

- Hold space

6. Reframe

- "Is there another way to look at this?"
- "I wonder what messages this sends. Would you say this to a white male?"
- "How would you feel if this happened to you?"

7. Use 'I' Statements

- "I felt ___ when you said ___ because ___."

8. Impact

- "I don't think you meant it, but let's consider the impact on ___ when you said ___."

9. Separate

- "That could be perceived as a racist comment."

Addressing and Revisiting

Research indicates that leaving a microaggression unaddressed can do just as much damage as the comment itself.

Example Scenario: Addressing and Revisiting a Microaggression

Situation: A colleague comments, "Wow, you're really articulate," after another team member's presentation.

Addressing

Immediate Reaction: "I'm curious why you pointed out being articulate. Could we explore what led you to say that?"

Discussing Impact

Discussion: "Saying 'articulate' might unintentionally imply surprise at their eloquence, potentially because of their background. This could feel stereotyping. What are your thoughts on the impact of such comments?"

Revisiting

Later Reflection: In a follow-up, discuss why such remarks can be problematic and how to avoid unintended implications in the future.

Moving Forward

Educational Opportunity: Decide to host a workshop on effective communication and inclusive language, emphasizing the importance of how words are perceived, not just the intent behind them.

If You're Called Out for a Microaggression

1. Pause Practice

Practice involves three key steps: **Stop, Breathe, Reflect.**

This simple method can transform potential conflicts into opportunities for growth and deeper connection. By pausing, we create the space needed to consider the perspectives of others before we speak. When you feel triggered or are quick to judgment/reaction, remind yourself to pause and reflect on 4 questions:

- What feelings have been triggered?
- What are the objective facts of the situation?
- What are my assumptions and judgments?
- What do I really desire?

2. Don't Make It About You

- Remain focused on the issue at hand.

- Respond with empathy
- Hold space
- Ask more questions

3. Take Accountability Sincerely

- Offer a genuine apology without excuses. You can state what you've learned, what you'll do differently next time, and appreciation for the other person being understanding and willing to continue to engage