

# AVOIDING MICROAGGRESSIONS



The following guide contains examples of microaggressions and how they can affect underrepresented groups. It also includes ways in which we can address and combat microaggressions to create inclusive environments where everyone feels welcome.

## WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION?

Microaggressions are defined as the everyday, subtle, intentional — and oftentimes unintentional — interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups.

## EXAMPLES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THE MESSAGES THEY SEND

### Where are you from? You speak good English.

Message: I am assuming you are a foreigner. I do not see your American identity.

Inclusive alternative: Where's home right now? Where did you grow up? What's your story?

### Your Husband/Your Wife...

Message: I am assuming you are heterosexual. I do not see your LGBTQ+ identity.

Inclusive alternative: Your partner/Your spouse...

### Assuming a Person of Color is in a junior/service role.

Message: I am assuming you are my subordinate. I do not see POC as occupying senior roles.

Inclusive alternative: Ask folks to share their name, pronouns, and role instead of making assumptions.

### Interrupting/talking over women at meetings.

Message: I am assuming my point is more important. I do not see your idea in the same hierarchical level as mine.

Inclusive alternative: Allow women to finish making their point, acknowledge and build on their statements to foster collaborative environments.

## WHY ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS DANGEROUS?

Microaggressions are dangerous because they marginalize and ultimately underutilize talent, impair recruitment and retention, erode an individual's performance, stifle innovation, inhibit teamwork, and adversely affect business growth. Microaggressions have also been linked to elevated levels of depression, trauma, and suicide risk amongst marginalized groups.

## HOW TO COMBAT MICROAGGRESSIONS IN 4 EASY STEPS

### BE VIGILANT

In order to disrupt the cycle, we must all be aware of our own biases and fears.

### LIVED EXPERIENCES

Actively look to start dialogues with folks who differ from you in terms of race, gender, sexuality, or other lived experiences to understand perspectives outside your own.

### OPEN MINDS AND HEARTS

Be open to discussing how your attitudes and biases might have hurt others, or how your actions might have revealed some bias on your part, even if unintentionally.

### BE AN ALLY

Use your voice to stand up against other forms of bias and discrimination you witness. The most helpful action you can take with your newfound knowledge is to help others understand as well.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[I too am Harvard  
LGBTQ+ Microaggressions](#)

[MTV's Look Different Day.](#)  
[HBR's When and How to Respond](#)

[PCOM Physical and Mental  
Impacts of Microaggressions](#)