

So you want to talk about race

rules of engagement from Ijeoma Oluo

Is It Really About Race?

It is about race if a person of color thinks it is about race.

It is about race if it disproportionately or differently affects people of color.

It is about race if it fits into a broader pattern of events that disproportionately or differently affect people of color.

"When we only use the first definition of racism, we inaccurately reduce issues of race in America to a battle for the hearts and minds of individual racists -- instead of seeing racists, racist behavior, and racial oppression as part of a larger system."

Basic Guidelines

1. State your intentions (or determine together your purpose) for the conversation.
2. Remember your top priority in the conversation.
3. Do your research (before, during, and after).
4. Don't fight racism with sexism, ableism, transphobia, or any other form of oppression.
5. When you start to feel defensive, stop and ask yourself why.
6. Do not tone police.
7. If you are white, watch how often you say "I" and "me."
8. Ask yourself: Am I trying to be right, or am I trying to do better?
9. Do not force people of color into the discussion.

"If you want to talk about race, there is plenty of opportunity."

Handling Microaggressions

State what happened. → You just assumed that I don't speak English.

Ask some uncomfortable questions. → Why did you say that? I don't get it. Please clarify.

Ask some more uncomfortable questions. → Is this something you'd say to a white person?

Reinforce that good intentions are not the point. → If you don't mean to offend, you'll stop doing this.

Remember, you are not imagining things and you have every right to bring this up. → I can see this is making you uncomfortable, but this is a real problem that needs to be addressed.

"While many people are afraid to talk about race, just as many use talk to hide from what they really fear: action."

"I am so glad you are here. I am so glad you are willing to talk about race. I'm honored to be a part of this conversation with you."

-- Ijeoma Oluo

So You Want to Talk About Race (2018)

"Yes, it is about class -- and about gender and sexuality and ability. And it's also, almost always, about race."

Defining Racism

Racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race. ❌

Racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power. ✅

"You're going to screw this up royally. More than once. It's going to happen, and you should have these conversations anyway."

Learn How to Fail

Stop trying to jump back in when a conversation is beyond saving.

Apologize.

Don't interpret or retell this conversation as "the time you got yelled at."

Don't insist that people give you credit for your intentions.

Don't beat yourself up.

Remember that it is worth the risk and commit to trying again.

"When someone asks you to 'check your privilege' they are asking you to pause and consider how the advantages you've had in life are contributing to your opinions and actions, and how the lack of disadvantages in certain areas is keeping you from fully understanding the struggles others are facing."

Turn Talk Into Action

Vote local.

Challenge schools to address opportunity gaps.

Bear witness to racism and stop to help, if safe.

Speak up in your unions.

Support POC-owned businesses.

Boycott banks that prey on people of color.

Give money to anti-racist organizations.

Boycott businesses that exploit workers of color.

Support POC-created music, film, TV, art, books.

Support increases in the minimum wage.

Push your mayor/city council for police reform.

Demand college diversity.

Vote for diverse government representatives.