

Confidence in Conflict: Guide to Bringing Microaggression Response to Your Workplace

Tia Tucker MD, MPH & Cortney Crespo MD

Microaggression Response Toolkit

To be combined and adapted as needed for each person and situation

Response Strategy	Description	• Sample language
Practice MicroAffirmations	Behave positively in ways that counter a microaggression; communicate respect, promote another persons' ideas, or recognize their contributions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "X is an exceptionally trained medical professional and we are lucky to have her on our team." • "I'd like to listen to what X was saying." • "X had a great idea. Will you share that with us again?"
Assume best intent	Underlying principle is separating intent from impact. Can involve explicit appeal to common values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It sounds like you intended to compliment X, however that comment can also imply that ___." • "I know you really care about ___. Acting in this way undermines those intentions."
State your take	Share your experience objectively, without apologies or accusations, then state what those facts mean to you and invite others to discuss.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I felt ___ when I heard/saw/learned ___, and it ___ (describe impact on you)." • "I was so upset by that remark that I shut down and couldn't pay attention to anything else. What did other people experience?"
Depersonalize	Use objective non-personal statements to describe what is occurring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I notice you are speaking negatively about other groups of people." • "We are not giving everyone an opportunity to contribute to this conversation."
Get curious	Inquire about another person's perspective or intended impact. Provides opportunity for person to self-correct or to engage in dialogue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Can you say more about that?" • "I'm curious. What makes you say that?" • "Can you help me understand what you meant by that?" • "Will you tell me more about what was going on?"
Repeat/reflect	Repeat back verbatim or paraphrase. Conveys respect for person and relationship and provides opportunity for reflection and self-correction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I think I heard you say ___. Is that correct?" • "It sounds like you believe ___." • "I hear you saying that ___. Do I have that right?"
Reframe	Use hypotheticals or strategic questions to empower the receiver to reflect and decrease defensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Could there be another way to look at this situation?" • "What would happen if ___?" • "How do you think this interaction would be different if ___?"
Redirect	Shift the focus to a different person or a different topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Let's shift the conversation to ___ (other topic)." • "I'd like to hear what others have to say"
Use preference statements	Clearly state what you would prefer in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It would be helpful for me if we limit our conversation to your medical problems" • "I would like all team members to be spoken to with respect"
Set boundaries	Name the behavior and set a clear limit to what you will tolerate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We don't tolerate negative comments about people's race/ethnicity/gender here" • "I care about you as a person, but I will not tolerate offensive language or behavior. Now, let's focus on ___." • "I don't think that joke was funny. Please stop."
Disengage	Extract yourself from a situation that is harmful and/or not productive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This is not a productive conversation right now. I will return later when we both are calmer" • "Excuse me, I need to go discuss this with one of my supervising physicians." • "I don't feel comfortable. I am going to leave now."
Debrief	Discuss with others after the event. Especially important if you are the leader or most senior member of a group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Let's talk about what just happened." • "That was a very difficult situation. It is important to me that we have a chance to debrief as a group." • "Would anyone like to share their reactions/thoughts/feelings?"
Revisit	Return for discussion or response with person who committed microaggression at a later time when you have had opportunity to reflect and prepare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I want to discuss something that happened yesterday." • "I have been thinking about your comment last week about ___. I wanted to say ___."

Figure 1 Microaggression response toolkit.^{2,4-6}

From Fisher et al., 2021

Grounding

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 things you can taste

beyond the exercise:

focus on on any of the senses, for example:

- name red objects
- clench fists & release
- listen to music
- smell essential oil/perfume
- sip cold ice water or tea

Grounding can be used in situations of overwhelm to bring us back to the present moment

References:

- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). (2014b). Chapter 4 Screening and Assessment. In *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207188/>
- Fisher, H. N., Chatterjee, P., Shapiro, J., Katz, J. T., & Yialamas, M. A. (2021). "Let's Talk About What Just Happened": A Single-Site Survey Study of a Microaggression Response Workshop for Internal Medicine Residents. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 36(11), 3592–3594. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-06576-6>
- Peckham, M. (2021). Self-Care and Grounding. In A. Hershler, L. Hughes, P. Nguyen, & S. Wall (Eds.), *Looking at Trauma: A Tool Kit for Clinicians*. Penn State Press.
- Ph.D, P. O., & Fisher, J. (2015). *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy: Interventions for Trauma and Attachment* (Csm edition). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Richard, C. (2015). *20 Quick Strategies to Help Patients and Clients Manage Stress*. Brush Education.
- Treatment (US), C. for S. A. (2014a). *Exhibit 1.4-1, Grounding Techniques* [Text]. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207188/>
- Zerubavel, N., & Messman-Moore, T. L. (2015). Staying Present: Incorporating Mindfulness into Therapy for Dissociation. *Mindfulness*, 6(2), 303–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0261-3>
- Zhu, J., Wekerle, C., Lanis, R., & Frewen, P. (2019). Trauma- and stressor-related history and symptoms predict distress experienced during a brief mindfulness meditation sitting: Moving toward trauma-informed care in mindfulness-based therapy. *Mindfulness*, 10(10), 1985–1996. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01173-z>

Questions? E-mail us at:

ttucker@challiance.org, ccrespo@challiance.org