

TOPICS + QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR WHITE PEERS + WHITE FAMILY MEMBERS

FYI: This list has been compiled + created by white people I know to help better guide you.

IMPORTANT NOTES BEFORE BEGINNING:

We as white people have many privileges. One way to weaponize our privilege against systems of oppression is to use our voices. We have white audiences that members of the Black community may not have. Let's use our voices and privilege to amplify messages to our white peers who may not be listening closely to black voices. Let's urge them to listen to Black stories more intently.

Lean into the discomfort of these topics. We often feel uncomfortable talking about racism with white peers, but without challenging that discomfort, we cannot contribute to meaningful change. Black people live with the discomfort of not being heard every day. If we remain silent, we are enabling racism.

An important note: before engaging in public conversations, or appealing to a white audience, please take time to educate yourself on the topic you plan to speak on. Listen to and learn from the Black community, but be mindful not to ask Black folks for free education. There are many resources linked that you can use to educate yourself. We have outlined recommended books, podcasts, articles, questions and topics you can bring to a conversation with a white friend or family member. Starting **TODAY**.

TOPICS

Racism is not always overt

Most of the topics below address covert racism, but it's useful to explain up front to our white peers that racism goes beyond the KKK, hate crimes, racial slurs, nazis, etc.

This is a [helpful link](#) re: the topics below which address covert racism. It is useful to explain up front to our white peers that racism goes beyond the KKK, hate crimes, racial slurs, nazis, etc. See more information and the triangle of White Supremacy [HERE](#).

White privilege plays into systemic racism present in Healthcare, Education, Justice Systems, etc.

Engage in conversations about ways in which we have benefited directly from systems such as healthcare, education, and the justice system. Read up on statistics regarding the ways in which Black people do not benefit from these systems and use these facts as tools. Discuss this with white peers to help better understand how racists structures

contribute to the oppression of Black people. Great resource doc can be found [HERE](#).

Proximity to Black people does not erase our white privilege

If our white peers or family members begin to express that they are not racist because they have Black friends, let's remind them that we cannot use our Black friends, children, spouses, or any Black person to mask our white privilege. No matter how many Black friends, partners, employers, or family members we have, as white people we will always benefit from our white privilege.

Defend Black individuals protesting

Our white peers will often say things like "rioting, looting, and violence won't get us anywhere." Let's express to our white peers that Black individuals have been speaking peacefully and kneeling for years while seeing no justice or change. Ask them if they value merchandise over Black lives. Remind them that we can never relate to Black individuals' anger because we have never experienced Black trauma. Remind them that anger is a direct reaction to trauma caused by white people. Explain the ways in which looting/rioting can be a language for those who are unheard. Explain the many ways in which white people have stolen from Black people through wage theft, lack of housing, lack of healthcare, etc.

Use history as a tool, and relate it to the present

Discuss historical events of white violence against Black communities and create examples for how those historical events are still relevant today.

Color Blindness

"I don't see color" is a damaging message to this movement. Explain the ways in which seeing color is important in differentiating our privilege. Our experiences differ greatly from those of Black people, and statements such as "we are all one race" or "we're all human beings" are detrimental in understanding how we can bring about justice and protect the rights of Black people.

In regards to the statement "Not all cops are bad"

Talk to family members and peers about how our experiences with cops come from a privileged lens. Talk to them about how we benefit from experiences with cops. Suggest that their reasoning for thinking not all cops are bad is likely because a cop has not harmed or intimidated them. Give several examples of how Black people have suffered at the hands of police. Remind them that when an individual chooses to become a cop, they have chosen to be complicit and to participate in a system that harms Black individuals. [Research the history of the American police system and learn how it was started to enforce slavery.](#)

Media Sources

Suggest Black owned, and Black run publications/ media sources for family and peers to get information from rather than solely white reporters on main media outlets.

Ask your friends and family if they want to learn with you

If you have friends and family members who are interested in learning and working towards anti-racism, choose a piece of literature/ film/ podcast to listen to together or separately. Talk about what you learned from it, hold each other accountable for doing this on a regular basis. You can use the [anti-racism resource doc](#) as a great starting point for a selection of linked articles + PDFs.

We're in a "post-racial world"

This statement serves to minimize the experience of Black communities today, and ignores that racism goes beyond individual intentions to collective group patterns. Talk about how mainstream media works to concurrently to uphold a (false) a common narrative that systemic violence and racism are no longer significant barriers to success in our nation/world.

"Racism only relates to slavery"

White people are truthfully quite misinformed when it comes to both the history and continuing presence of racism. This serves to further reinforce an extremely simplistic white narrative that reinforces racist and harmful WHITE narratives, which serves to deny further conversation. Acknowledge that racism has been and continues to be perpetrated against all communities of color in the US (and Canada).

"Call Out Culture is Harmful"

This isn't about call-out culture, this is about accountability. What system are you protecting (and perpetuating) by not saying anything?

GENERAL QUESTIONS - NOTE THESE ARE IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

Do you understand that allyship is something that is earned and not self-defined?

Have you used your platform to the most full extent to spread the message of equality?

Would you be willing to share relevant donation links to family members who you might think are less inclined to do so?

Why have you been silent— online and/or in person?

Would you be willing to write about the times you've been racist on a piece of paper?

Would you be willing to accept that your previous racist actions may conflict with your understanding of yourself as anti-racist?

Are you registered to vote?

Have you signed any petitions?

Do you recognize that criticizing the way black people are protesting is racist? Please see [HERE](#) for further info.

Do you understand that it's not the job of your black peers to educate you on systematic racism?

How old were you when you learned about the racial inequality of this country?

How much time was spent on this history?

Do you feel confident that when you apply for a job, you won't be denied because of your race?

Do you understand that sharing video footage of racist murders can actually desensitize people to black murder?

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Do you feel overwhelmed by guilt each day because you feel so "bad" and that nothing can be done?

Are your doctors and nurses usually the same race as you?

What is your reaction to the idea of white supremacy as an ideology?

Where do you see white supremacy play out in institutions to which you belong?

Do you see white supremacy as a collection of ideas that values whiteness over other cultures? Would you be willing to have a conversation with your immediate friends about why they posted the black square but nothing else?

Is it easy for you to find children's books, toys, literature, and films that represent your race?

How have you profited off the labor of black people?

How have you contributed to the profiting of corporations who have been built on systemic racism?

Do you fear for your life when you interact with a police officer?
Explain that it is a privilege to have peaceful interactions with cops

Do you live in pain each day because you see people who look like you being murdered at the hands of police?

Do you support any black owned businesses?

Are you willing to confront the times you have been racist?

Do you feel like you need to see video evidence of someones murder to believe and defend black first-hand witnesses?

Do you feel more comfortable when you don't talk about race and racism?

Is it easy for you to ignore the connection between police brutality against Black bodies and white people hanging out in parks without ramifications?
Have you considered that when you view these deaths on TV (especially when they happen as frequently as they do) you might be becoming desensitized to the reality?

Do you benefit from Black culture by way of enjoying Black music, sports, television, etc.? Ask white peers and family members if they are aware of the ways white people commodify black entertainment for our own benefit. [Useful link here.](#)

Do you understand that Black Lives Matter is about the protection and safety of Black Lives because they are the most in danger at the hands of white supremacy?

Call up a friend who is white and ask the following:

How do you feel about the recent events?

Would you be willing to read an article with me, and we can discuss it after?

Would you be willing to share relevant donation links to family members or friends who you might think are less inclined to do so? The amount or how many people is up to you.

Would you be willing to check back with them at the end of the day and ask them if they did it?

If they didn't would they be willing to explain why?

Do you understand that just because you didn't "intend" to be hurtful or racist, that the impact is more important? This is part of the minimization of White Supremacy. For family members you reached out to regarding donations, would you be willing to check back with them at the end of the day and ask if they did it? And if not, why?

You have noticed a friend that you've known for a long time, and you're very fond of, has not posted about what is happening to the Black community. You can say: "Hi friend, I noticed that you haven't posted anything in regards to George Floyd's death at the hands of a police officer. Why is that?"

Do you understand that racism is not just individual acts of meanness but is part invisible systems built from hundreds of years of oppressive violence that: disproportionately impacts black and brown lives while simultaneously benefitting and providing dominance to white people? See [Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack](#) for more information.

The primary goal for white people working to understand racism is not to learn how racism impacts people of color. People of color know how racism impacts them as a group – one of the primary goals for white people is to recognize how the system of racism shapes our lives, how we uphold that system, and how we might interrupt it.

Racial stereotypes exist in the world and in our heads even if we don't want them to. Racial stereotypes can cause deep harm even if nobody actively "intends" that harm. In order to expose these stereotypes and to explore how they shape our interactions with others despite our best intentions, we first have to acknowledge their existence.

Would you be willing to write out 3 racial stereotypes we each have and we can discuss between us why they are harmful and untrue?

When people in privileged demographics and neighborhoods comment on the craziness of the riots and in turn, their safety, do you agree with that comment?

Would you be willing to explain that their safety, the safety of their neighborhoods and property are what fuels the systemic oppression and violence of the police state? Does that statement sound extreme? If so would you be willing to explain why?

Are you willing to accept that arguing with a person's experience with racism, or ridiculing their viewpoints as extreme, is a racist impulse? Are you willing to accept that you are unable to have an argument, or a position, against matters of systemic oppression?

You have noticed a family member has posted something about all lives matter or not all cops or photos of cops kneeling during the protests. You can say: "Hi family member, I noticed that you have posted ____ content. While I'm sure you didn't intentionally mean it this way, would you be open to having a conversation about why this is extremely harmful? See note above.

Do you listen to Black voices even when they are expressing anger or frustration? White people often say that they would listen more if Black people would not be "so angry." Explain how these statements place blame on the Black community for white people not fighting against racism. We must remember that white people are responsible for racism, and therefore we are responsible for the Black community's anger. Urge them to always listen.

Are you willing to confront the times you have been racist? Would you be willing to write it down on a piece of paper? Would you be willing to accept that this might gravely conflict with your previous understanding of yourself as anti-racist?

Do you feel discouraged when you are called out for saying something racist? Explain that it is likely we might say the wrong thing. Explain that we should adjust and learn from Black people when they express frustration with what we are saying, and not allow for our mistakes to discourage us from continuously working towards anti-racism. We can learn by reading basic articles explaining how racism functions to suppress and harm Black and Brown communities.

Do you recognize racism as a white person problem? Many of our white peers will deny that racism is our problem by saying things like "Well I'm not racist, so what are you mad at me for?" Explain the ways in which we as white people are all responsible for racism because of the ways we benefit from white privilege. Also explain that being "not racist" is not enough, we have to be actively anti-racist.

Are you aware that slavery is still present within our Prison systems?

Explain that prisons are disproportionately populated by Black people. MANY companies profit off of free or dramatically underpaid labor from Black people working in prison. A few examples: Whole Foods, Walmart, Starbucks, etc - Watch the film 13th

Do you recognize the ways in which the media misrepresents Black people and demonstrates favorable bias towards white people? Talk about how media sources use pictures of Black people to try to portray them as “criminals” by using mugshots or photos where the individual appears aggravated. White people convicted of crimes are portrayed as “upstanding citizens” through professional school portraits, in suits, smiling. Your friends or family may respond that they have wanted to say something, but aren't sure what to write because they're afraid they will say something wrong. You can direct them to this doc [RIGHT HERE](#), and let them know that dwelling on whether you're saying the right or wrong thing is part of the same system which serves to center whiteness and white feelings and the idea that your comfort / optics of being "right" is more important than speaking up on the issue. Right now, it is more important to say something. If we don't say something, we are complicit and are part of the problem because it sends the message that protecting Black Lives, and by virtue equality, is not essential.

Were you taught about our race's history during school? Explain how white people have the privilege to learn about our race's history in school, whereas Black history is often taught as an elective course. Some examples of important history that are not taught in schools are the massacre at Tulsa (Black Wall Street), the history of the American police force (created to round up escaped slaves), etc. How do you care for Black lives on a day to day basis? Many of our white peers and family members express shock and disapproval when Black individuals are murdered. Let's suggest ways we can offer support and solidarity with the Black community while they are living. Examples include: buying from Black owned businesses, sharing Black stories, offering support to Black friends, creating recurring donations to funds that directly work to support Black lives.

Do you recognize that you have racist thoughts even if they are contradictory to your belief system?

SPECIAL NOTE This one is important. I would tell people to challenge themselves to work through this thought process. If you are anti-racist, you may still find yourself having racist reactions to things you see (even if they only last half a second). This stems from how we were socialized and how media, representation, etc. have altered how we see race. We are actually able to rewire our brains. The more we expose ourselves to Black folks (if you don't have black friends or live in close proximity to Black people, diversifying your echo chamber can help), the more we can rewire our brains to not work in this way. We can also rewire our brains by challenging them: “Why did I have this thought? Is it a stereotype that has been exacerbated by media?” Recognize that and lean into it.

QUESTIONS WHEN ENGAGING IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK - HERE IS A RESOURCE FROM JANE ELLIOT ON [TYPICAL STATEMENTS FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO CONSIDER](#)

Why are we doing this work? I.e., does it benefit our organization, improve optics, broaden our member base? Is that a good reason for engaging in justice work? Justice work should be a way to use your privilege for greater good. Not to benefit myself or my org. (Food for thought)

“Are we willing to step outside our mission?” Non profits are mission driven, and corporations are profit driven. Engaging in justice work may mean stepping outside of our usual drives, and using our voices in ways we have not done before. It may mean donating or reallocating resources. This is an important conversation to have up front to set realistic expectations.

How are we going to make this work long term and sustainable? How much time and resources do we plan to set aside for this? It’s important if your workplace wants to take on justice work, to make a plan for commitments, including budgeting time and monetary resources for trainings, etc.

“Who will lead this work?” - Rather than asking members of marginalized or oppressed communities to teach us about their trauma, we should put the burden on ourselves to commit time and energy to learning. That said, if nobody at your place of work has formal background, expertise, or training on this topic, it can be important to hire outside consultants to aid and make sure the work is being done in a meaningful way.

BOOKS FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO READ PLEASE SEE LIST OF BLACK OWNED BOOKSTORES [HERE](#)

Understanding and Dismantling Rascism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America Joseph Barndt

On Terror, Captivity, and Black-Korean Conflict Tamara K. Nopper

Uprooting Rascism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice Paul Kivel

Bad Feminist
Roxane Gay

Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race

Debby Irving

‘On Transpacific Antiracism: An Interview with Yuichiro Onishi’
Keisha N. Blain for Black Perspectives

White Fragility
Robin Diangelo

When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America
Paula Giddings

How to Be an Antiracist
Ibram X.Kendi

The Autobiography of Malcom X
As Told to Alex Haley

So You Want to Talk About Race
Ijeoma Oluo

Women, Race, and Class
Angela Davis

Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics
Lester K.Spence

A Black Feminist Statement
The Combahee River Collective

Race Matters
Cornel West

Black Women’s Manifesto
The Third World Women’s Alliance

Black and White Styles in Conflict
Thomas Kochman

Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminism, and Social Change
Julia Chinyere Oparah, Julia Sudbury, and Margo Okazawa-Rey.

Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields

Towards the Other America: Anti-Racist Resources for White People Taking Action for Black Lives Matter

Chris Crass

How I Shed My Skin: Unlearning the Racist Lessons of a Southern Childhood

Jim Grimsley

White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide

Carol Anderson

Witnessing Whiteness

Shelly Tochluk

The History of White People

Nell Irvin Painter

The Possessive Investment in Whiteness

George Lipsitz