

learn more about Microaggressions & Mental Health

What are
microaggressions?

Microaggressions are “**brief everyday exchanges** that send **denigrating messages**” to **marginalized people**.

They are often verbal but can also be conveyed in gestures, looks, and snubs (Sue et al., 2007).

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>

What causes
microaggressions?

Microaggressions are based in **power** and **oppression**. They often stem from **negative stereotypes** of marginalized people that serve to perpetuate that marginalization.

Microaggressions are **not micro in the harm they cause**. They can be a source of **chronic trauma** for those who experience them day-to-day and can lead to **anxiety**, **depression**, and other mental health effects.

How are
they
harmful?

What if
someone calls
me out?

As Dr. Maya Angelou said, “**do the best you can until you know better, then when you know better, do better.**” If someone tells you that something you’ve said or done is harmful, try not to get defensive; instead, **listen** to what they have to say, **thank** them for letting you know, and **commit to reflecting, educating yourself, and doing better.**

If you face microaggressions, the priority should always be your **well-being and safety**. You **do not need to** bring it up if you do not feel comfortable or safe doing so. **Debriefing** with a trusted person can help, as can **reaching out for support**.

What if I am a
bystander?

As a bystander, you can help by **identifying microaggressions as harmful**:

- First, be **direct** and check in with the person harmed about how they would like to be supported (they might not want you to get involved at all).
- **Diffuse** the situation. This doesn’t mean sweeping it under the rug but de-escalating without bringing unwanted attention to the person who was harmed.
- **Delay**: if you feel safe to do so, address the microaggression after the fact with the person responsible, explaining why their actions were harmful. Ensure that you follow up with the person who was harmed to check in on whether they need any support.

What if I
am the one
harmed?

If you have experienced microaggressions at work, you are not alone, and support is available. At the University of Windsor, you can find support via the **Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Mediation**, as well as accessing mental health resources via the **Employee Mental Health Strategy** website. For students seeking mental health supports, the **Student Health, Counselling, & Wellness** websites provide more information.

Where can
I find support?

You are not alone, and reaching out for support is always a sign of strength.

