

learn more about Microaggressions & Mental Health

What do
microaggressions
look like?

Learning what microaggressions look like can help us to avoid perpetuating them. The below **examples of common microaggressions** are provided as a learning tool. Please note that they contain **references to harmful stereotypes**, which may be distressing to read.

Race, Ethnicity, and Indigenous Identity

- Assuming that a racialized person is not qualified/is a "DEI/EDI hire"
- Assuming that racialized students need extra help
- "I don't see colour" (invalidating the impact of racism)
- "That wasn't racism. You're too sensitive."
- "Where are you really from?"
- Assuming an Asian person is good at math/plays the violin/is a doctor, etc. (based in the model minority myth)
- Assuming a racialized person does not speak English
- "Wow, you're so articulate" (assuming that a racialized person would not be)
- Holding a purse tighter/crossing the street away from a Black or racialized person
- Assuming that a Latina or racialized woman works as a cleaner
- Using the word "gypped" to mean cheated (racial slur against Romani people)
- Trying to touch a Black or Indigenous person's hair
- "I can't pronounce that name. Can I just call you Joe?"
- Assuming Indigenous people live in a teepee or igloo
- Associating Jewish people with being cheap or wealthy
- "All lives matter" (invalidating specific experiences with anti-Black racism/police violence)
- Assuming Indigenous people get things for free
- Suggesting that a woman wearing a hijab does not have agency

Gender and Sexuality

- Viewing a woman being assertive as mean or bitchy
- Assuming a man to be the employee with the most senior role
- Assuming someone's spouse to be opposite gender
- Refusing to acknowledge someone's correct name and pronouns
- Assuming that a man needs to explain things to women on the basis of her gender (mansplaining)
- Assuming women are the primary childcare givers in a family
- Interrupting/talking over people of marginalized genders
- Assuming anyone using the prefix Dr. will be a man
- Asking a trans person about their body/transition
- Assuming that all women have/want to have children
- Implying that only certain genders can face gender-based violence
- Telling a woman "you'd be prettier if you smiled"
- Implying that gender-based violence or sexism did not occur/was misinterpreted/was "not that bad"
- Suggesting that someone's gender or sexuality is invalid or "just a phase"

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Class and Socioeconomic Status

- Assuming people living in poverty are lazy/dirty/deserve to be poor
- “You have so much potential!” (implying that someone needs to achieve more, get a new job, earn more money, etc. to be successful)
- Assuming that all service industry workers are students/temporary workers
- “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps” (implying that working hard guarantees wealth)
- “You just need to budget better!” (implying that those who are struggling financially are misspending their money)
- Assuming people on social assistance are taking advantage of the system
- Assuming that anyone working-class or in poverty is uneducated/unintelligent
- Assuming that someone in a more expensive outfit is more qualified

Disability

- Talking slowly and raising your voice to a blind or otherwise disabled person
- Assuming that a disabled person needs assistance
- Speaking **about** a disabled person to their partner, friend, or interpreter rather than **to** the person themselves
- Being condescending or childlike in tone
- Calling things “lame,” “stupid,” or “dumb” (language based in ableism)
- Explaining things that don’t need to be explained
- Pushing someone in a wheelchair without being asked to
- Suggesting that someone is faking or making up their disability (“I bet they don’t really need that cane”)
- Suggesting that seeking accommodations means someone is being difficult, exaggerating, or taking advantage (“They’re just taking advantage for the better parking spot!”)
- Calling disabled people brave or inspiring for just existing

Mental Health and Illness

- “That test gave me PTSD!/I’m so OCD, I love to be tidy!” (using mental illness as short-hand)
- “Is she on a **real** sick leave or a mental health leave?” (implying mental health conditions are less serious/not real/taking advantage)
- “That’s a crazy story!/He was driving like a psycho!” (using stigmatizing language)
- Assuming that people with mental illnesses cannot lead happy and successful lives
- “Oh, I’m sure it’s not all that bad!” “You need to get over it”
- Implying people with mental illness are weak, less resilient, or less smart
- Suggesting that people with mental illnesses are violent
- Being patronizing or treating people with mental illness like they are children
- “Just go for a run/change your diet/think positive!”
- “What do you have to be depressed about? My life is way worse!”
- Judging people for using prescribed medications

