

How to fight racism in school

Adaptation: WikiHow

“Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me.”

This is a lie. What we say matters. The unkind things we communicate can soil the best of relationships; even with the deepest of regrets...

what lingers is a stain of hurt that may fade but will never truly go away.

The wounding words we say are like feathers released in a harsh wind, once said; we will never get them back. ~Jason Versey”

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- **Stand up for yourself.** Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself (or a friend or even a stranger) when you encounter bullying around racism. Bullying related to racism often continues because bullies see that the person won't defend his- or herself or speak out. Stop the cycle and say something! You don't have to be mean, just show that you won't let these comments go on. You can say, "Why would you say something like that?" or "That's a really mean thing to say."
- If someone being bullied sees you stand up for yourself, you may inspire him or her to stand up as well.
- **Fight back with knowledge.** When someone says something racist to you, get the last word and make it count. Responding in knowledge can feel empowering as well as arm you with information as power. If someone says something racist, respond with events, facts, or statistics that help you educate people that may be less aware of how these comments affect people. Some comments are made from a place of ignorance, but words can hurt. You can comment, "When you put indigenous people down, it perpetuates a mentality of them being less than you."
- You can also respond, "When you say that Asians are better at math, you're stereotyping a whole group of people, which isn't fair to them."

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- **Respond with humor.** While you may strongly dislike racist comments, you also may want to approach the situation more lighthearted, yet to the point. Humor is an excellent way to communicate something in a more casual way, yet still make a point that those comments are not ok. If someone makes fun of an immigrant's accent, say, "Hey, how's your second or third language coming along?"
- **Confront micro aggressions.** Micro aggressions are small but significant acts of separation that can deeply affect how people feel. While these acts are not as blatant as a jab shouted from across the hall, they can be equally painful. Notice when you or your friends engage in any race-related micro aggressions, and make sure to speak up. Often micro aggressions aren't purposefully hurtful, but have a negative effect. A micro aggression can be as simple as not wanting to touch someone from a different race.
- If you see someone make a face at someone from a different race, say, "What was that about? Just because that person is a different race doesn't make him any different as a person."
- If you ask someone where she is "really" from, this is a form of micro aggressions. If you're curious about someone's family lineage, say, "I'm interested to hear if you're connected to cultural customs and what your ancestry is."

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- **Report offenses.** If you've experienced prejudice, racism, or discrimination, document it and bring it up to an authority (like a teacher, school dean or principal, or police officer). This is an important way to make sure these actions don't happen in secret but that people are aware and taking action. It's important to show others that this kind of behavior is not okay and will not be tolerated.
- **Join (or start) a diverse organization.** It's unlikely you're the only person in your school who feels on the sidelines because of your race. You may be the only Korean at school, but there are probably other people that aren't in the majority as Laotian, Croatian, or Ecuadorian. Start a club or group for people that are diverse in your school. Unite people who feel different (and those who actively want to support inclusion and diversity) by joining with people that may have similar experiences in similar contexts, and you can begin to create an in-group identity. You can talk about how other people's misunderstanding affects your life, how you've all experienced racism, and how you've responded to it.

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- **Ask your school to teach about racism.** Teaching about racism in school is important so that all students can learn about what racism is, how it hurts, and how to not tolerate it. Ask your teachers and even your principal to include units on racism built in to the curriculum; there are lots of books and lesson plans that address racism. You can also ask your teachers to include books with diverse themes.
- **Celebrate multicultural history at school.** Ask your school to celebrate the history of other cultures at school. Many people have heard of Dia de los Muertos, but few have heard about Quyllur R'iti , a festival celebrated high in the Andes mountains in Peru, the Aboakyir Festival in Ghana, which celebrates the migration from West Sudan, or Qingming Festival, which is celebrated in China in reverence to one's ancestors. It can be fun to celebrate other countries' holidays while learning history, customs, and culture. It's also important to know devastating events in order to be informed and to not make the same historical mistakes such as Armenian Genocide and Tiananmen Square. It's important not to forget these events and the people that lived and died in them.

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- **Have your school create a statement on inclusiveness and a zero-tolerance policy.** If your school doesn't have these in their code of conduct or policies, strongly encourage the teachers and administration to adopt these policies at school. It's important for schools to create clear guidelines in regard to race and treatment of people on the school campus. Inclusion can mean that all students have access to education and receive support and that all school members feel safe from marginalization and harassment.
- Zero-tolerance policies often include banning weapons and drugs, but can also include behaviors that include racist remarks and hate crimes based on race. Schools can more effectively implement zero-tolerance policies by creating higher stakes, such as pairing with juvenile justice or juvenile detention centers.
- **Discuss race.** Somehow, racism doesn't just go away by avoiding discussions about it. Yes, it may feel uncomfortable, but get some friends and classmates together and have an honest discussion about racism, what it looks and feels like, and how it affects your school. When you talk about racism, it actually helps with more understanding and more tolerance. Put some signs around your school and advertise a group discussion one afternoon after school. Encourage people to talk about their experiences, their fears, their biases or stereotypes. Allow the space to be safe and caring, where no questions are too silly to ask.

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- **Be an ally.** Maybe you have a friend that's from a different country and hate seeing her treated unfairly. "But I'm from the majority group, what can I do?!" You can be an ally. Use your position as someone in the majority to reach out to people that may not know better or that choose to make hurtful comments. Being an ally means you use your position to help others. If someone says something to your friend, stand up for your friend in that moment and say, "It's not okay to say things like that; that's racist."
- **Have international friendships.** You can start a club at school that encourages students to have friendships with students from other countries. More and more schools participate in programs like this. Ask your teachers and school leadership to help you connect with students in other countries. It can be exciting to learn from other students your age about their way of life, what they eat, what they do for fun, and where they live. While some things may be really different, lots of things are likely similar.

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- **Educate yourself.** Immerse yourself in all things that celebrate cultural diversity. Often racism is rooted in misunderstanding or not bothering to take the time to learn. So, read books about Kwanzaa, Ramadan, and Chinese New Year. Read books and watch movies about kids living in other countries. Is there a new kid at school from Peru? Go up to her and talk to her. Ask her questions about her own culture and how it's different. Meet as many people from as many places as you can. Even when traditions are different from your own, be respectful. If someone is telling you about a custom, refrain from saying, "Ewww!" or "That's weird." Remind yourself that it's different, and that's okay.