

## Tackling Racist Incidents and Creating an Anti-Racist Culture

**This supplementary guidance for staff should be read alongside the Communities and Families ‘Procedure for Preventing and Responding to Bullying and Prejudice’ and your establishment procedure.**

It should be known and followed by all staff and administered by the designated member of the senior leadership team / Equalities Co-ordinator. Whilst this guidance focuses on responding to racist incidents experienced by children and young people, the principles apply equally to racist incidents experienced by staff and parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Incidents experienced by staff will be dealt with using the relevant Council policies and procedures.

### 1. WHAT IS RACISM?

**Racism** is when someone is discriminated against because of their race, the colour of their skin, nationality, ethnicity (includes culture, religion and language) or national origin.

**A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.**  
*(The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 1999, Recommendation 12)*

Any incident which is perceived to be racist must be recorded and investigated with rigour, commitment and transparency. Whether or not the person responsible intended their behaviour or actions to be racist is irrelevant. When dealing with an incident, the person’s intentions and attitudes are an important consideration. However, at the stage of initial recording and investigating, their attitudes, motivation and awareness are not the main issue. The main issue is that they have behaved in a racist manner.

#### **What can racism look like? For example:**

- Isolating or marginalising someone because of the colour of their skin, nationality, ethnic\* or national origin. \*Ethnicity includes culture, religion and language.
- Verbal or non-verbal abuse, e.g. threats, derogatory name-calling, gestures, racist jokes
- Damage to property
- Physical assault and harassment, e.g. hitting, tripping, pushing, kicking
- Visual - racist text or images such as posters, notices or graffiti
- Incitement of others to behave in a racist manner
- Cyber - using social media to promote or incite racism
- Provocative behaviour such as wearing racist badges or insignia.
- Refusal to co-operate with other pupils because of their race or ethnicity, or their perceived race or ethnicity

Many of these behaviours can also take place online, through social media or messaging platforms.

#### **Racist language, negative views and their impact on children and young people**

Racist language, stereotypes and jokes around the school can exclude, threaten, hurt or humiliate young people, whether experienced directly or indirectly. Sometimes, racist language can be used without malice or understanding, but this does not mean that it has no impact on young people who hear it used in this way. Both minority ethnic young people and the wider school community may be seriously affected by these negative messages. The cumulative effect on the emotional and mental health of minority ethnic children and young people should not be under-estimated. It can lead to: loss of self-esteem; feelings of exhaustion; reduced ability to thrive in an environment; mistrust of peers, staff and the ‘system’; decreased participation and ability to study; underachievement; reduced attendance. Not all racist incidents would be considered bullying. For example, a teacher might observe a young person telling a racist joke which isn’t directed at anyone in particular. This should still be addressed and recorded as a racist incident.

## 2. TACKLING RACIST INCIDENTS

### A racist incident may be a hate incident or hate crime

A racist incident is a hate incident if the victim or anyone else thinks it was carried out because of hostility, discrimination or prejudice based on race. In the case of hate incidents, the designated member of staff / Equalities Co-ordinator should seek advice from the Police School Link Officer.

If the incident is a criminal offence and the offender targeted the victim because of their prejudice or hostility based on race, this is a hate crime. All possible hate crimes should be reported to Police Scotland through the School Link Officer.

### Supporting a child or young person who has experienced racism

This guidance applies in the following situations:

- A child/young person tells you about a racist incident towards them
- A child/young person (third party) tells you that they have seen or heard about a racist incident involving another child/young person
- You witness a racist incident involving a child/young person
- A parent tells the school about a racist incident that their child has experienced or has witnessed.

Be aware that a child / young person from a black and minority ethnic background may react strongly to racism because they experience this not just as a personal attack but as an attack on their family, community and culture. Furthermore, the immediate incident may be only the latest in a series of other racist incidents (micro-aggressions or more significant incidents) which the child or young person has experienced. The child/young person's strong reaction may itself be unacceptable. In such cases, it is important to treat both the racist incident and the young child/young person's reaction appropriately and proportionately.

**NOTE: at all times child protection / risk management procedures should be followed if necessary.**

#### Show belief and treat the concern seriously

Children and young people often say they don't feel believed or taken seriously; they can be deeply affected at their core by what they perceive as racism against them, and even if it doesn't appear to you to be a racist event, it is important that you show belief and investigate thoroughly before making a judgment.

#### Discuss what the child/young person would like to happen - follow this as far as possible

Children and young people often feel teachers want to help but don't always handle it well and may make it worse; they may under-react or over-react. Teachers, especially those with less experience of responding to racist incidents, may not feel confident about what to do. So, ask the child/young person what they would like to happen and as far as possible follow their feelings.

They may want nothing to happen at this point – it may be enough to tell you, and you have to take a decision on how serious the issue is, and whether you can hold on to that information and support the child for a bit, to help them resolve it in their own way. Take the views of the child or young person seriously, with awareness that racism cannot go unchallenged even when they may be reluctant to seek a solution or want to avoid a direct approach.

In all cases, tell them what you plan to do and who you need to tell, so they can feel in control as far as possible.

#### Parents as Partners

Taking into consideration the views of the child or young person, inform their parents/carers of the incident, how their child is being supported and how the incident is being dealt with.

### Give as much feedback as possible on actions and outcomes

Children and young people often say they report racism and they never hear about it again. This can happen even where the incident has been very effectively handled in terms of the child or young person who displayed racist behaviour, because of the need to recognise their rights and privacy too. There needs to be a balance between the privacy of the child/young person who displayed racist behaviour (in terms of the consequences and support for them), and the rights of the child/young person who experienced the racist behaviour to feel that justice has been done.

### Rights Respecting and Restorative approaches

Two of our core practices in developing positive relationships are: Rights Respecting and Restorative. Our aim is to address the root causes of the racist behaviour and for the behaviour to stop. Where appropriate, we will use restorative approaches, balancing this with respecting children and young people's rights. We recognise that for the child / young person who experienced racism, a purely restorative approach may not feel enough for justice to have been done and their rights to have been respected.

### Revisit to check on a sustained basis

Children and young people often say that the teacher dealt with it and it stopped for a time, and they didn't want to keep going back because they would be seen as a 'wimp' or a 'moan'. So, it's important that you take the initiative on a sustained basis, to check that the child or young person is not having problems again. Peer mentoring or buddy systems may be supportive.

### Follow up

Ensure that key staff are aware on a need-to-know basis and can help you monitor for future events / occurrences.

## **Working with a child or young person who has displayed racist behaviour**

A child or young person who is displaying racist behaviour may not do this consciously. Nevertheless, all racist behaviour and language must be challenged, with support to change. Pupils who present racist behaviour will be treated fairly and consistently using actions that are proportionate and appropriate to the age and stage of the child and to the incident. Our aim is to address the root causes of the behaviour and for the behaviour to stop. (See examples of actions in main procedure.)

An approach which relies only on consequences can be counter-productive; it does not address the underlying cause and can generate resentment and reinforce racist feelings or behaviour. Similarly, a 'zero tolerance' approach ('we don't allow racism here - no further discussion') may merely suppress the behaviours or beliefs and allow them to grow stronger, below the surface.

Fully addressing racist attitudes and behaviour (rather than a simple 'consequences' or 'zero tolerance' approach) is more time-consuming in the short-term but is essential to eliminate racism. There is clear evidence that school policy and practice in dealing effectively with racist incidents is an essential part of creating an anti-racist school culture.

Some suggested approaches:

- Avoid confrontation.
- Repeat the comment or define the action to ensure you have understood it correctly – ask the child / young person concerned to repeat themselves and/or explain what they mean.
- If there is any uncertainty, point out that the event could be construed as racist, and ensure they understand this.
- Ask the child / young person why they said or did this.
- Challenge the ideas – not the person. Use humour if appropriate.
- Acknowledge any sense of grievance or hurt which has led to the racist comment/action, without accepting that it justifies the comment/action. Ensure that any valid sense of grievance or hurt is addressed too. This is vital to avoid increasing resentment.

- Relate the issue to the child or young person's age/gender/class/disability and try to find some parallels, to gain empathy.
- Expose irrational or contradictory arguments by sharing the relevant research/statistics/counter-arguments/historical context/legislation.
- Seek a positive way forward which enables the person to retain self-esteem, (while ensuring that the needs of the child/young person who experienced racism are fully met).
- Where appropriate, encourage witnesses/others involved to suggest an appropriate response/way forward.
- Revisit the situation as often as necessary with both parties to ensure the resolution is effective and there has been no repetition or negative ramifications.
- Where appropriate and helpful, inform parents to try and gain their support in ensuring that the racist behaviour does not happen again.

**Recording:** at all stages, all actions and outcomes should be fully recorded, monitored and updated on the SEEMiS Bullying and Equalities module.

**Monitoring:** the number of racist incidents reported and recorded should be monitored on a regular basis, along with other types of incident recorded on the SEEMiS Bullying and Equalities module.

### 3. CREATING AN ANTI-RACIST CULTURE

#### Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are the most common way racist and other forms of discrimination are expressed on a daily basis, both online and face-to-face, so tackling them is very important. Racial micro-aggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to people based solely on their race. In many cases, these hidden messages can invalidate the person, demean them on a personal or group level. Micro-aggressions communicate that they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment. The individual and cumulative impact of racial micro-aggressions can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing.

Examples of micro-aggressions:

- A teacher continually mispronounces a pupil's name or suggests using an anglicised version because that will be 'easier' for them to pronounce (Hidden message: You are an outsider and don't belong here. To belong, you need to change to fit in with 'us'.)
- An Asian Scottish pupil, born and raised in Scotland, is complimented for speaking "good English." (Hidden message: You are not a true Scot. You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.)
- A black couple is seated at a table in the restaurant next to the kitchen despite there being other empty and more desirable tables located at the front. (Hidden message: You are a second-class citizen and undeserving of first-class treatment.)

#### Managing pupil views – an anti-racist stance

It is the teacher's responsibility to create and maintain an open, safe and supportive learning environment where children and young people can explore and develop their understanding of sensitive topics related to 'race' at an age-appropriate level. At times, children and young people may express views which may be controversial or distressing to others. If these views remain unchallenged by the group or by the teacher, the silence effectively condones the views. This may leave others feeling unwelcome, unsafe, or marginalised and doesn't give children and young people the opportunity to really consider the issues and examine their personal, or learned, assumptions. Censorship is counter-productive. However, it is important that children and young people develop the skills to put their point across in a clear and respectful manner and that the teacher is able to manage the learning situation to support all to feel safe and learn.

## Responding to micro-aggressions using the ACTION framework

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/responding-to-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>

Whether we are the observer, the target, or the unintentional ‘perpetrator’ of micro-aggressions, we may not know how to respond to them in the moment. Common reactions are to feel ‘frozen’ (if the observer) or defensive (if the target or ‘perpetrator’). How we respond can have an immediate effect on students and the learning environment. Certain practices can increase the likelihood of maintaining a supportive climate. One of these is the **ACTION** communication framework (Cheung, Ganote and Souza, 2016).

### **ACTION Framework**

**Ask** clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.

*“I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that...?”*

**Come** from curiosity not judgement.

- Listen actively and openly to their response.
- If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you could end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to “cover their tracks,” you may consider making a statement about the initial comment to encourage learning.  
*“I’m glad to hear I misunderstood you, because, as you know, such comments can be...”*
- If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment.  
*“Can you tell me what you were hoping to communicate with that comment?”*  
*“Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?”*

**Tell** what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.

*“I noticed that . . .”*

**Impact** exploration: ask for, and/or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others.

*“What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?”*

*“As you know, everything speaks. What message do you think such a comment sends?”*

*“What impact do you think that comment could have on ...”*

**Own** your own thoughts and feelings around the impact.

*“When I hear your comment, I think/feel...”*

*“Many people might take that comment to mean...”*

*“In my experience, that comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about... I would like to think that is not your intent.”*

**Next** steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

*“Our class is a learning community, and such comments make it difficult for us to focus on learning because people feel offended. So I am going to ask you to refrain from stating your thoughts in that manner in the future. Can you do that please?”*

*“I encourage you to revisit your view on X as we discuss these issues more in class.”*

*“I’d appreciate it if you’d consider using a different term because it is inconsistent with our course agreement regarding X...”*

With practice, the ACTION framework can become a tool to organize your thoughts and unpack the micro-aggression in a way that addresses the situation and cools down tension. In this way, we can engage thoughtfully and purposively in strategies that maintain a positive climate that is conducive to learning and at the same time, model the skills needed to respond to micro-aggressions in any context.

## REFERENCE

### Harassment and Victimisation (Equality Act 2010)

**Harassment** related to a protected characteristic is unwanted behaviour which is related to a relevant protected characteristic and which has the purpose or effect of:

- Violating a child, young person's dignity or
- Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the child or young person

The word 'unwanted' means 'unwelcome' or 'uninvited'. It is not necessary for the child or young person to say that they object to the behaviour for it to be unwanted.

**Victimisation** is defined in the Equality Act as:

Treating someone badly because they have done a 'protected act' (or because you believe that a person has done or is going to do a protected act).

A protected act is:

- Making a claim or complaint of discrimination (under the Equality Act)
- Helping someone else to make a claim by giving evidence or information
- Making an allegation that you or someone else has breached the Act.
- Doing anything else in connection with the Act.

### Direct and Indirect Discrimination (Equality Act 2010)

**Direct Discrimination** is when you are treated worse than another person or other people because:

- you have a protected characteristic
- someone thinks you have that protected characteristic (known as discrimination by perception)
- you are connected to someone with that protected characteristic (known as discrimination by association)

**Indirect discrimination** happens when there is a policy that applies in the same way for everybody but disadvantages a group of people who share a protected characteristic, and you are disadvantaged as part of this group. If this happens, the person or organisation applying the policy must show that there is a good reason for it.

A 'policy' can include a practice, a rule or an arrangement. It makes no difference whether anyone intended the policy to disadvantage you or not.