

Anti-racism
resource series

Microaggressions: staff presentation and guidance

Co-authored by
BLAM UK



Anna Freud

Introduction

This guidance document will walk you through how to deliver a presentation on microaggressions to staff members.

To deliver this staff training session, you will need:

- the Anna Freud Centre's microaggressions PowerPoint slides
- a whiteboard or pen and paper
- printed resources (we have highlighted these below).

Through this training, staff will learn more about:

- what microaggressions are
- the mental health impact of experiencing microaggressions
- how to avoid committing microaggressions
- what to do if they experience or witness a microaggression.

This training session was designed to be delivered by a senior leader in a school to all school staff including support staff, and we would estimate it taking around an hour to deliver in full. You could deliver this session as part of an Inset day, or as a standalone session in a staff meeting.

This session is an introduction to the topic of microaggressions, and can easily be delivered by someone without much or any prior knowledge of the topic. The person(s) delivering the training may want to acknowledge the limitations of their knowledge with a commitment to the staff group continuing to learn about this topic together.

Slide 1	Welcome staff to the meeting.
Slide 2	Begin by explaining the group agreement for this session, reading through the statements on the slide. This topic may be sensitive.
Slide 3	Explain to colleagues that today we're going to be talking about the topic of 'microaggressions'. They may know what the term means already, or they may not. Acknowledge that some staff members in the room are likely to have experienced microaggressions in their own lives. Reflect on the quote by Maya Angelou – today is not about casting blame or feeling guilty; it's about learning so that in the future we can do better. This definition is from Oxford Dictionaries.
Slide 4	It's important to recognise that microaggressions are subtle, and often the person who has done something that would fit into this category may not even be aware they have done it. They are often committed by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. We have probably all committed microaggressions. Reiterate: this session is not about assuming harmful intent if someone commits a microaggression. It is about taking the time to self-reflect and educate ourselves on how to do better.
Slide 5	Invite staff to read the quotes on the slide. Explain to staff that all of the quotes shared here are microaggressions that staff members at the organisation BLAM UK (blamuk.org) have personally experienced. Pose a question to colleagues and ask them to discuss it with the people near them in the room: what are the hidden messages behind some of these quotes? What is being communicated to the person experiencing the microaggression? (For example: you're really pretty for a Black girl suggests that other Black people are not pretty; you speak English so well suggests that just because someone isn't White that English isn't their first language).

Slide 6	Note to staff that microaggressions happen within the school environment too. Share the second set of examples on the slide.
Slide 7	The “micro” refers to micro-level interactions rather than the degree of harm caused by them. A metaphor often used to describe microaggressions is a papercut – one papercut is not a big issue, but accumulated papercuts all over your body is very different. The above information is from a systematic review of 138 studies into microaggressions.
Slide 8	Elicit a group discussion by asking colleagues: How might regularly experiencing microaggressions impact someone’s mental health and a student’s ability to thrive at school? Following the brief discussion, show these examples. They are from Edinburgh University.
Slide 9	Before sharing this list, re-iterate that if we do commit microaggressions, it is usually not on purpose; these are unconscious, subtle acts that even the most well-meaning and caring educators may accidentally perpetuate. **You may want to print and share this resource for this section of the meeting.**
Slide 10	We may also experience microaggressions ourselves, either from students or from fellow staff members. It’s very important to note here that the pressure should never be on the person who has experienced a microaggression to respond to it. Doing so can be very emotionally taxing, and members of racially minoritised groups may have concerns about the person becoming defensive, or worried about being labelled as ‘too sensitive’ or ‘angry’. If a staff member wants to address the microaggression but not directly, they should speak to their line manager about the incident.

Slide 10	If they do want to address the microaggression directly, they could try: • Asking the person for clarification on what they meant. This gives people a chance to reflect on what they have said and how it has been perceived • Taking the person aside later on. Some people may be more comfortable doing this as it gives some space to the incident and allows for a more tempered responses. • Explain intent vs impact. Letting the person know that it isn't about what they meant or intended (a common response to a microaggression being pointed out may be 'I didn't mean it like that) – it's about the impact it had on you. **You may want to direct staff to this article for more information**.
Slide 11	**You may want to print and share this resource for this section of the meeting.**
Slide 12	You will need a whiteboard or some paper for this section of the meeting. Split colleagues into pairs and ask them to spend 10 minutes discussing what they think could be done to address this issue in your school. To start the discussion, you may want to share examples like: As a school: • implement a reporting system for microaggressions and deal with reported cases seriously • whole-school assembly on what microaggressions are and the impact they have • look into more training for staff • learn more about the different communities our students come from, through cultural exchange events. Ask the pairs to share some ideas and note them down on your whiteboard/paper throughout the discussion.

Slide 13

We're returning to the quote we started with for reflection.

Now we know a bit more about microaggressions, we can take that learning forwards and keep working to be better.

It's important to emphasise to staff members that this session is just one part of your school's commitment to becoming an anti-racist school; learning about microaggressions is one step on this journey.

It's also important to note that this is just an introduction to the topic, and that you will likely want to revisit it in the future.

You may want to end the session with some takeaway questions, which you can then explore further in a future session:

- How will we use this new knowledge to improve our practice?
- How will staff having this new knowledge directly and positively impact our students? How can we ensure that they feel this shift in practice in the classroom and in the corridors?
- How will we measure the impact of us having this knowledge on our students and staff?
- Should we make this topic a pastoral focus or whole-school priority moving forwards?

Getting help and advice

There are many organisations dedicated to anti-racism who will be able to share more information and advice on microaggressions.

Further information, resources and networks

- NAHT Leaders for Race Equality
- Runnymede Trust
- BAMEed Network
- Black Educators Alliance
- NEU Black Educators
- Muslim Teachers Association
- Taraki
- Jami

Paid for support services (including training, consultancy and therapy)

- BLAM UK
- Muna Abdi
- BAATN (The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network)
- The Black Curriculum
- Diverse Educators
- Black Minds Matter UK
- Show Racism the Red Card

Anna Freud. All rights reserved. Anna Freud is a charity registered in England and Wales (1077106). Registered address: Anna Freud, 4-8 Rodney Street, London N1 9JH. Company number 3819888.

Anna Freud