

## Role Play Agenda/Guide

This agenda is designed to help groups look at and *practice* skills for responding to moments when people act in ways we perceive as prejudicial, racist, or problematic in some way.

**(1 hour)**

### **Skill-building: Brainstorm: Open/Shut and Skills Role Plays**

Materials: For brainstorm: Chart on the wall with two columns: What opens us up? What shuts us down? For role-play: statements written up on butcher paper, sets of cards with skills

#### **Purpose of piece:**

*First, to brainstorm the difference between responses that ‘open us up’ to change or shift our thinking, or ones that ‘shut us down’. We want to build this awareness to set the tone for effective, constructive responses to racism. Then, we want to dive into some real-life situations that people might be facing and how to respond.*

#### **Assumption**

No matter how long we’ve been doing anti-racism work, there is always room to practice and develop our skills as we grow and change in our awareness and understanding of racism, whiteness, and white privilege. This work is never done, and one of the best ways to build our skills is through practice, and getting positive and constructive feedback from each other to learn from our successes and our mistakes.

#### **Part I: Brainstorm: “Open and Shut”**

5-8 min

- Have a chart on the wall w/ two columns: What opens you up to change? What shuts you down?
- Say to the group:** First we want to begin with a quick brainstorm. We’re working from the assumption that in our interactions, our ultimate goal is to engage people to raise consciousness and foster change. There are ways to engage and challenge people that shuts them down, and there are ways that a better chance of fostering an openness to further dialogue or a shift in thinking/feeling.
- Start with a quick brainstorm. Think: when people challenge you to shift the way you think or feel about something (doesn’t have to be about race - can be anything that you have been asked to shift your thinking/feeling about), what qualities in their approach make you shut down? (or to restate: When someone challenges you to change, what make you shut down or close up?)
- Take a few answers, and then ask the same question about “What make us open up?”
- Make the point: Our skill-building focuses on ways to engage with other people to open them up for further dialogue, to build awareness, etc. etc. We want to figure out together how we can engage, respond, and challenge each other and other people in ways that open us up to change.

#### **Part II: Ways to Respond:**

10 min

- Explain that we are going to move into practicing skills in responding w/ role plays. Before that, we are going to review some possible ways to approach our responses.
- Hand out every 3<sup>rd</sup> person a set of cards with the examples/explanations of the different possible approaches to responding to racism. **Make as many sets as you will need for your group. See different approaches in chart at bottom of agenda. Make four cards for each set, one card with each approach. (If you prefer not to use cards, simply make copies of the chart and use for reference.)**
- Review the approaches: The cards being handing out have some ideas on ways to respond to other people when you hear avoidant statements. There are four cards in each set, and each card

has a different “skill” or “tool” that you will have a chance to practice using today. **This agenda with these responses are specifically designed to deal with avoidant strategies. Feel free to create additional strategies or use Handout 8.5 for examples of more general statements.**

- ❑ Go around and ask people to read the approaches out loud. Ask people to give some examples of times they may have used that strategy, when they have or might use it, questions or comments they might have about it.

### Part III: *Role-Plays*

30 min

- ❑ Have people get into groups of 3.
- ❑ **Instructions:** Each person in your group will play a role. One person will be the “commenter”, one person will be the “responder”, and someone will be the “observer”. Everyone will have a chance to play each role.
- ❑ The “commentor” will make a statement. (This is the person who is speaking in prejudicial or racist ways.) The “responder” will use one of the skills from the cards to practice responding. The “observer” will observe the interaction and will then take a few minutes to give feedback to the person responding. The responder can then take another minute to practice again, incorporating the feedback.
- ❑ Create a brainstorm list of possible statements you might hear from people that you want to challenge. The commenters can use these statements so that the person responding can use the exact issue they are struggling with as part of the practice.
  - If you’d like to create a particular agenda around dealing with avoidant strategies, here are 3 possible statements that you may hear from white folks or that we often find ourselves responding to.
    - Racism is not really a problem anymore. Obama being the President proves that our political system has transcended race.
    - I don’t see people in terms of race. We’re all part of the human race, so none of this matters anymore.
    - This identity politics stuff is an old way of thinking. We live with so much more diversity now that race just doesn’t matter.
- ❑ **Instructions:** The responders decide the topic or statement they want to respond to, and which skill they would like to practice using. Once they’ve decided, “commenters”, make the statement. “Responders”, take a few minutes to respond. “Observers”, listen and offer feedback to the “responder”.
  - Rotate roles until everyone has taken at least 1 or 2 turns in each role, using at least 2 different ways to respond from the skill cards if you have enough time. Gently remind one another to take turns, and have space for feedback.

### Large group Debrief:

10 min

*The group should gather before ending to have a large group discussion on the following topics:*

- ❑ How was the process for you?
- ❑ Take some share-outs about what came up: what was challenging? Why? What worked well? Why?

### *Points to draw out:*

- Feelings that come up towards the “commenter”
- Can refer back to brainstorm poster as well regarding “open” and “shut”.
- Remind one another that the practice role plays are not meant to set us up as the righteous “good people” and the others as “bad racists”. If we assume that we are all on a journey

towards anti-racism and that some people may not be as far along in their process as others, it can help us develop compassion and be better allies.

**Closure:**

- Go around the room and say one word that captures the way you feel as you leave this workshop.

**Feel free to use this chart as a model. Create alternative approaches for various issues you might concentrate on as a group.**

<p><b>Practiced Approaches for Confronting Avoidance Strategies</b></p>	<p><b>Questioning:</b> When a person says something that denies the impacts of race, ask a question that challenges the avoidant strategy. <i>“When you say _____, it sounds like you are saying _____, but I am not sure if this is what you mean?”</i> Continue as needed, with the questions becoming more explicitly challenging. Here are some places to start:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>“Do you really mean that you don’t see color? How is that possible?”</i></li> <li>2. <i>“Even if you don’t believe in race, do you believe everyone feels that way?”</i></li> <li>3. <i>“What if someone else believes that being a member of their race impacts their life? Can you accept that? What if they tell you they have experienced racism coming from you? If you don’t see race, then how do you know it’s not true?”</i></li> <li>4. <i>“What if believing you are colorblind makes you less able to see racism? How would you feel about that?”</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Educating:</b> Inform people why their statements are troubling. Make short statements, such as, <i>“You know, when I hear what you are saying, it reminds of when I thought something similar. But, then I read something that made me realize that _____.”</i> Or, say something like, <i>“Hey, I know sometimes that seems the best way for us to move forward, but I found out recently that _____.”</i> To be more direct, say, <i>“I understand that you mean it as a way forward, but what comes with that idea are often attitudes that ignore and deny continuing racism.”</i></p> <p><b>Expressing personal emotional reaction:</b> Tell people making avoidant statements what it is like for you to hear those things. Ask the person to respect who you are and notice that his or her speech brings up challenging feelings for you. Say something like, <i>“When you say that, I feel _____ and that makes it hard for me to be here with you.”</i> (This strategy may be most effective with close friends and family.) Be sure to explain why you hold the perspective you do, how you came to understand it, and why it’s hard for you to hear the person speaking as he or she does.</p> <p><b>Empathetic relating:</b> Invite people using avoidant language to imagine how they would feel if an important aspect of their lives was being negated. Say, <i>“You know, when you say that, I can’t help but imagine what people who see their race as important would feel if they heard that. Can you imagine what it would feel like if people were sitting around denying how meaningful it is for us to _____?”</i> Then ask, <i>“Wow, how would that make you feel? I know for me it would be hard to have part of my life experience dismissed in that way.”</i></p>
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