



ANTI-RACISM AND ALLYSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE: A BRIEF GUIDE

There is a new sense of urgency in the fight against racism. This guide outlines the steps individuals in the workplace can take towards becoming an effective ally.

Race in the current climate

Racism is a lived reality for most ethnic minorities in the UK. A recent YouGov survey revealed that two-thirds of black Britons have had a racial slur used against them or have had people make assumptions about their behaviour based on their raceⁱ.

The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemicⁱⁱ and the brutal killing of George Floyd have highlighted systemic issues and racial disparities.

Actions for leaders

Leaders are in a unique position to influence their organisation and have a far-reaching impact on how people feel at work. And, subsequently, the productivity and value that employees bring to their job.

The below recommendations are not comprehensive. While there are actions all leaders can take, it is important they think carefully about their individual influence and take action that responds to the specific needs of their organisation.

Recognise the advantages of [privilege](#). The first step for an ally is to accept that they have benefited from privileges that are inaccessible to people from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is important to remember that the concept of privilege does not assert that white people have easy lives or that

their accomplishments are unearned, but rather acknowledges that white people have greater access to power and resources than those from ethnic minority backgrounds. To learn more, watch Dr Robin DiAngelo's video on [Deconstructing White Privilege](#).

Be ready to be vulnerable. Being an ally is not an easy task. It requires courage to accept truths outside of lived experience, reflect on your own biases, and speak up when no one else will. Allies will likely make mistakes, which are an opportunity to learn and change their approach, to ensure words and actions make a difference.

Be curious: inform yourself at every opportunity. There is a chasm between people's lived experience at work. Business in the Community (BITC)'s 2018 Race at Work survey shows that **33%** of black employees believe their ethnicity will be a barrier to their next career move, in stark contrast to just **1%** of white employeesⁱⁱⁱ. This difference not only points to existing racial inequalities, but also illuminates why anti-racism work presents a colossal challenge. The lived realities between white and black employees are so vastly different that it can be extremely difficult for those who have not experienced racism to empathise and truly engage with this issue.

It is challenging to act with conviction without building a foundation of understanding and



empathy first. There are opportunities to learn about racial inequality everywhere – not just through countless books, documentaries, and podcasts, but also through having open conversations with the diverse people in the workplace.

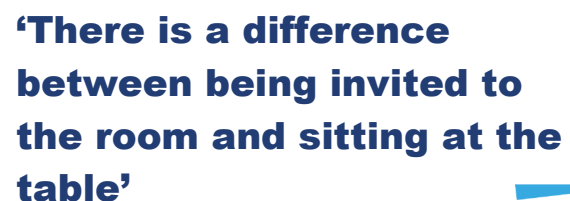
BITC recommends the following resources:

- [Business in the Community: Race at Work 2015](#)
- [Business in the Community: Race at Work 2018: The Scorecard report](#)
- [Business in the Community: Race at Work Charter one year on report 2019](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: Equality, Diversity and Racism in the Workplace: A Qualitative Analysis of the 2015 Race at Work Survey](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: Racism is no laughing banter](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: Is the customer always right?](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: Racism at work in one word](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: Racism is not water off a duck's back](#)
- [Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity: The effects of racism at work](#)
- [Ethnic diversity of UK boards: The Parker review](#)
- [Race in the workplace: the McGregor-Smith Review](#)
- [UK Government: Lammy Review](#)

Examine your internal policies and understand that, as Ibram X Kendi wrote in his book *How to be an Antiracist*, “racial inequity is a problem of bad policy, not bad people”. If the right policies are in place, “bad people” will not have the opportunity to create a racist work environment. Identify the areas where your organisation could be doing better and

take action to address this. For instance, do you have a lack of black, Asian, and mixed/multiple ethnicities (BAME) representation in leadership roles? Do your BAME colleagues feel as though they can bring their whole selves to work? Engage the relevant stakeholders to take meaningful action against racial disparities in your workplace.

Be an active bystander by calling out microaggressions and asking tough questions. If you notice your BAME colleagues being continuously interrupted, speak up and bring them back into the conversation. Leaders have the influence to introduce a zero-tolerance policy to hold people accountable for racial bullying and harassment. BITC’s toolkit [Racism and Inappropriate Behaviours – 5 Actions for Allies](#) has more guidance on being an active bystander.



‘There is a difference between being invited to the room and sitting at the table’

Bring diverse people to the decision-making table. There is a difference between being invited to the room and sitting at the table. Being in the room means colleagues have been communicated with and are aware of your decision-making process. This is important and has its place, but it does not ensure that their voices are heard. Amplify the voices of ethnic minority colleagues by engaging them in decision-making processes. Sitting at the table, and inviting individual’s contributions as part of the discussion, means their unique perspective is heard and valued.

Get comfortable talking about race. Only 38% of employees said they were comfortable talking about race in the workplace^{iv}. Allies need to be informed; BITC’s [Let’s Talk About Race toolkit](#) can help.

Support the recruitment, progression, and leadership of ethnic minority employees.

Despite black people making up more than 3% of the population in England and Wales^v, there has been little success over seven years in addressing the lack of diverse representation in senior leadership roles^{vi}.

ⁱ YouGov (June 2020); Racism BAME 2020; available at [yougov.com](https://www.yougov.com).

ⁱⁱ Public Health England (June 2020); COVID-19: understanding the impact on BAME communities; available at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

ⁱⁱⁱ Business in the Community (2018); Race at Work 2018: The Scorecard Report; available at bitc.org.uk.

Encourage your organisation to capture ethnicity data so they can be transparent on the representation of BAME employees at each level.

For more information on BITC's framework for supporting employers with promoting racial equality in the workplace, visit the [Race at Work Charter webpage](https://bitc.org.uk/race-at-work).

^{iv} Business in the Community (2018); Race at Work 2018: The Scorecard Report; available at bitc.org.uk.

^v UK Government (updated 2020); Population of England and Wales; available at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

^{vi} Business in the Community (2020); The Black Voices Report; available at bitc.org.uk.