

Coping with Racism & Discrimination

Considerations for Students of Color

Racism and discrimination continue to be a fact of life for many students of color on college campuses. At times, racism is overt, such as the use of racial slurs, graffiti, or even violence. However, it can also frequently arise in more subtle forms, such as stereotyping, assumptions, or exclusion. In any form, racism and discrimination add stress and challenges to the lives of students of color.

Possible consequences of racism for students of color at CSU:

- A sense of being isolated and an outsider in the CSU community
- Pressure to “prove oneself” and defy stereotypes
- Stress related to being seen as a “representative” of one’s community
- Feeling fearful, anxious, frustrated, helpless, depressed, or angry
- Considering dropping out or transferring to another school
- Difficulties with concentration and motivation for classes
- Being unsure or confused about whether one is being treated differently because of race or ethnicity

What Can You Do?

Taking active steps to combat the effects of racism and discrimination can have an extremely positive impact on students’ well-being at CSU. Consider these tips:

-Get Support- Talking to or spending time with supportive friends, family, professors, or mentors can be an effective way of releasing stress and reducing isolation. You are not alone! If you’re unsure where to start, consider getting connected with one of the many student groups on campus. If you’re in need of a confidential space to talk, Counseling Center counselors are a great resource for getting support privately.

-Get Empowered- If you are experiencing racism or discrimination, finding a way to push back is empowering and healthy. It can reduce feelings of depression or helplessness, and give frustration and anger a positive outlet. This will look different for different people in different situations. You might use humor to challenge an offensive statement with a group of friends; get involved in a political or activist cause; blog or get involved with online discussions; or simply offer a differing opinion in a group discussion. You might file a complaint with the [Office for Institutional Equity](#). Whatever your style, it’s important to have a way to make your voice heard.

-Practice Good Self-Care- In dealing with the pressures of being exposed to racism and discrimination, it can be easy to lose track of the things we need to do to take care of ourselves. Students may become exhausted, frequently using extra energy to process and combat these experiences. It may sometimes be hard to resist using unhealthy ways to cope, such as using drugs and alcohol excessively, or isolating oneself from the broader community. Taking good care of your physical, mental, and spiritual health will leave you better equipped to cope with the stress of bias, and make empowered choices for yourself.

Addressing Racism & Discrimination

Considerations for Allies

An **ally** is a person who does not belong to a particular community, but is actively engaged in advocating for and supporting that community. White students can be allies to students of color, and students of color can be allies to each other. (For example, an African American student can be an ally to the Asian American community). Allies are important partners in countering racism and discrimination on campus.

Tips for Being an Effective Ally:

- Get educated. You don't have to have a Ph.D. in ethnic studies or be a history scholar. But making an effort to learn the history and current issues relevant to the communities you support is an important part of being an ally. Getting educated includes learning about the way that power, privilege, and oppression have impacted others' lives, as well as your own.
- Speak up (but speak for yourself). When you see racism rearing its head in your day-to-day life, say something. Too often, people of color are left holding all the responsibility for educating others and speaking up about racism, but racism is everyone's issue. At the same time, avoid speaking for other groups of people (which can be inaccurate, reductionist, or even unintentionally condescending), and stick to sharing your own opinions and viewpoints.
- Know the difference between intent and impact. It's easy to recognize overt racism, but it can be harder to recognize - and therefore, to challenge - racism when it comes with good intentions. Allies recognize that well-intended actions can sometimes have an unintentional negative or hurtful impact. They are willing to listen non-defensively, and try to understand the perspectives of people of color when they express discomfort, hurt, or anger.
- Challenge the behavior, not the person. Accusing another person of being a racist automatically puts them on the defensive, shutting them down and ending the conversation. Encourage thoughtfulness and dialogue by addressing racist behaviors and language, without escalating into hostility and name-calling.
- Be willing to make mistakes. When racism is part of the culture, we all absorb beliefs and attitudes that are shaped by that reality. Our actions will sometimes reflect this despite our best efforts, meaning that we all make mistakes from time to time, and can unwittingly cause anger or hurt. Don't panic or despair. A willingness to genuinely listen, engage, and apologize when necessary, goes a long way.

The CSU Counseling Center provides online group, individual and couples' counseling, case management, and psychiatry (Monday – Friday, 9-5 with some 5 PM appointments). Our Crisis hours (Monday – Friday, 1-3 PM) are call-in hours (216-687-2277 - no walk-ins). After-hours phone counseling is available for crises (216-687-2277, select option 2).