Every Meal Microaggression Guide - External Use

What is a Microaggression?

A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority (Oxford Dictionary).

When learning and talking about Microaggressions, we must also understand:

Stereotypes - widely held but oversimplified beliefs about a particular type of person or group. It happens when someone groups individuals together based on some factor and makes a judgment about them without knowing them (NEA).

Implicit/Unconscious Bias - the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (NEA).

When to Use This Guide

When another individual knowingly or unknowingly commits a microaggression. The goal of intervening is to stop harm, educate others, and support targets, particularly when the behavior is public, direct, or part of a pattern.

Examples of Microaggressions

- How do you know kids are hungry? They have new shoes.
- What if families take advantage of the program?
- Why does the child have to help their family? Why aren't they doing more for their kids?
- Is this for all those Somali kids in the Twin Cities?
- Why is the food specific? Why don't they just eat what they get?

How to Respond

Posture - Take into account your own posture:

- Remain calm and take a second to breathe.
- Discern whether it is worth addressing/if you have the capacity to address it.
- Consider their intent as well as the impact of their statement - neither should supersede the other.

Consider - If you decide to address the statement, consider:

- Acknowledge what they said
    - "I'm so glad you brought that up!"
    - "Thank you for sharing your perspective with me."

Understand - Seek to understand:

- "Tell me more about…"

- “How do you think that thought process has formed in you?”
- “Can you help me understand what you mean by that?”
- “What has been your experience with XYZ?”

Educate - Take the opportunity to educate:

- “Something I’ve learned about this since working at Every Meal is…”.
- Rephrase what they’re saying with more appropriate language, i.e. “undocumented” instead of “illegal”.

Educate

Take into account the following:

- There is not a single “best way” to respond when we witness a microaggression.
- Regardless of our own beliefs and biases, institutional and structural racism are barriers to achieving our mission of fighting child hunger.
- You may not change someone’s stance on a particular topic, especially right away.
- Continue to be curious and engage in your own inner work consistently.

Microaggressions and Unconscious/Implicit Bias - RESOURCES:

National Education Association - Implicit Bias, Microaggressions, and Stereotypes Resources

- Filled with resources, tools, books, articles, videos, partner organizations AND racial justice in education links - A treasure trove of a site!

National Equity Project - Responding to Microaggressions

- Includes thoughtful considerations, suggested strategies/sample responses, and questions to ask yourself if you receive feedback about your own actions.

Active Minds - Stay C.A.L.M. (w/ CLASP and The Trevor Project)

- Breaks down examples of microaggressions with respect to key identities (mental health, racial, sexuality, gender, disability) through scenarios, phrases, and actions.

Things to Keep in Mind

Implicit/Unconscious Bias:

- Encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments.
- Not easily accessible through introspection.
- Lead to feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance.
- Develop over a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages.

At one point in life, we’ve all had thoughts or questions that were perhaps insensitive. Exercising our empathy can be a powerful tool to make someone feel heard and understood while opening a door to a new pathway of thinking. No one has it all correct, so let’s help each other!

Sources:

- https://www.oed.com/dictionary/microaggression_n?tl=true
- https://www.nea.org/resource-library/implicit-bias-microaggressions-and-stereotypes-resources
- https://www.nationalequityproject.org/responding-to-microaggressions-and-unconscious-bias?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw99e4BhDiARIsAISE7P9yRlGajE2mFgOIOzKPjZcko_SCT9RKutgnoVg5Wln8ybkF1weMEHQaAsIcEALw_wcB
- https://www.activeminds.org/about-mental-health/microaggressions/