

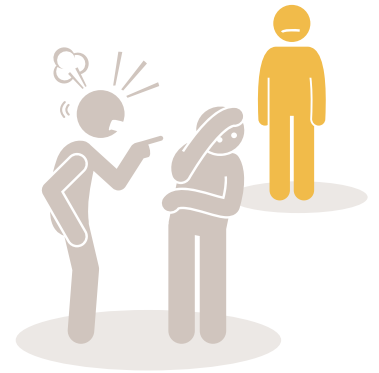
GUIDE

Bystanders of racism in the workplace

How to speak up if you witness racism at work

What is a bystander?

A bystander is anyone who witnesses racism at work but is not directly involved in it. An 'active bystander' is someone who witnesses a situation and takes action. Active bystanders play an important role in preventing racism in the workplace.



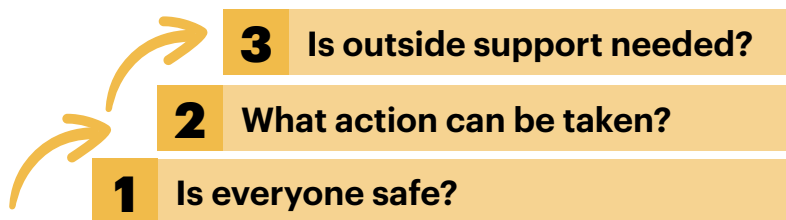
Why speak up?

Any time a bystander actively calls out racism, they help create a workplace free from race discrimination and demonstrate that racist behaviour is not acceptable. When a bystander does nothing, they are indirectly supporting discrimination. However, intervening to stop racism in the workplace isn't always straightforward, safe or easy. All staff should familiarise themselves with organisational policies on staff conduct and the law on race discrimination to understand their role and responsibilities when they witness racism at work.

Below is a guide for active bystanders about what they can do if they witness race discrimination in the workplace.

What can you do?

First, carefully assess the situation and consider:



> Check in and support

Supporting the person targeted by racist behaviour is the most important thing you can do as a bystander during or after an incident of race discrimination in the workplace.

Ways to support a person targeted by racism in the workplace:

- Check if they are okay and/or safe.
- Ask what they need from you, calmly showing your support verbally.
- Help them move away from the perpetrator (when safe to do so).
- If they appear confused or overwhelmed, offer to talk them through your understanding of what occurred.
- Offer to help them report the incident if they wish to do this.
- Help them access employment support services who can provide extra mental health or stress support.



For example: *in an online team chat, a colleague from Afghanistan shares a photo of her newborn niece, to which your manager replies 'Another one!? You lot have too many children'. You message your colleague to see if she's okay and if she would like support talking to someone about the matter.*

> Intervene

Intervene when it's safe to do so. Intervening can help de-escalate the incident, prevent future incidents, and improve the wellbeing of the person targeted by racist behaviour. Interventions vary and will depend on the situation and whether you feel safe.



Ways to intervene:

- Calmly challenge or question the intentions and/or behaviour of the perpetrator.
- Challenge the perpetrator's view with an alternative one.
- Show your disapproval or disagreement with the perpetrator.
- Explain to the perpetrator why the behaviour is not okay and why it's important to stop.
- Look for support from contact officers, employee reference groups or other supportive colleagues.

For example: you overhear a colleague in the kitchen berating an Indian colleague for 'making the whole place oily and smell bad with that awful food'. You intervene by entering the kitchen and calmly telling the perpetrator that what they're saying is offensive and that everyone is entitled to eat their lunch in the kitchen without judgement.

> Report

Reporting or simply documenting the incident is an important step in addressing racism, especially if the behaviour has happened more than once.



Ways to report:

- Support the person targeted by the racist behaviour to document the incident with specific details and dates so that there is a record. If the incident is more serious, discuss with the person whether they might like to report the matter to the police.
- Suggest reporting options to the person targeted (especially any anonymous or external pathways if the person targeted does not want to report to management).
- Raise the incident with a manager or supportive colleague (only if the person targeted is comfortable with you doing so; if they would prefer to raise the incident themselves, you can support them to do it).
- Provide evidence or testimony to an incident investigation/review.

For example: a First Peoples staff member confides in you that they have been experiencing verbal abuse from another colleague over a few months and asks for your support to report the racist behaviour. You explain how they can report the behaviour, help them to record as many separate incidents as possible, and act as their support person when they report the incidents.

What comes next?

Being an active bystander isn't just about standing up to racism in the workplace when witnessed, but all types of racism. Racism can exist in our institutions and systems and often isn't as simple as responding to isolated incidents. Active bystanders should raise systemic or organisational issues when they notice them, such as policies or conditions that aren't fair for all. Active bystanders should also encourage and empower others to speak up and advocate for their organisation to become anti-racist.

For more information, download the Commission's *Guideline: Race discrimination in the workplace* available at humanrights.vic.gov.au/resources or via the QR code.



This information is intended as a guide only. It is not a substitute for legal advice.



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