

# Systemic Racism

## Defining Systemic Racism

Racism is not only an attitude, but it is the specific actions that result from this attitude which impact upon, marginalize and oppress some people. In acknowledging and defining racism it is important to recognize that racism effects people not only on a theoretical level, but in the wider structures of society, most notably in the systems of education, justice, media, policing, immigration, and, employment, as well as in hate activity and government policies.<sup>1</sup>

As defined by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, systemic racism is “an infrastructure of rulings, ordinances or statutes promulgated by a sovereign government or authoritative entity, whereas such ordinances and statutes entitles one ethnic group in a society certain rights and privileges, while denying other groups in that society these same rights and privileges because of long-established cultural prejudices, religious prejudices, fears, myths, and Xenophobias held by the entitled group.” In short, it’s the use of state power to advantage one ethnic group over another.<sup>2</sup>

## Institutional Racism

Institutional racism, also known as systemic racism, is a form of racism that is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or an organization. It manifests as discrimination in areas such as criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, education, and political representation.<sup>3</sup>

The institutionalization of discrimination through policies and practices which may appear neutral on the surface but which leave an exclusionary impact on particular groups. This occurs in institutions and organizations, including government, where the policies, practices and procedures (e.g., employment systems – job requirements, hiring practices, promotion procedures, etc.) exclude and/or act as barriers to racialized groups.<sup>4</sup>

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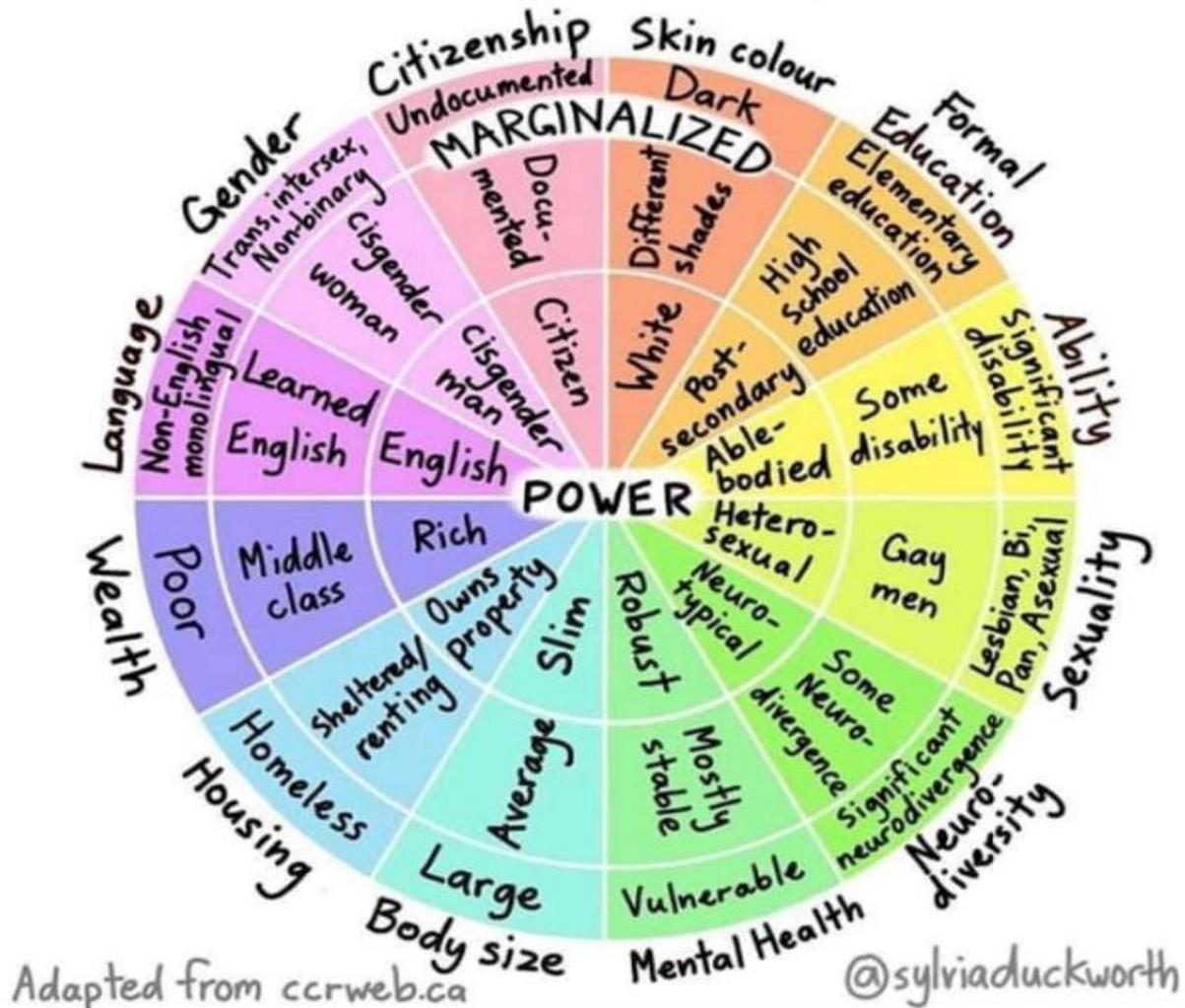
<sup>1</sup> [Fact Sheets - Acknowledging Racism \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](#), Retrieved 16, May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [Joe Biden & ‘Systemic Racism’ Canard: Why Concept Should Be Retired | National Review](#). Retrieved 16, May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> [Institutional racism - Wikipedia](#). Retrieved 16, May 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [CRRF Glossary of Terms \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](#). Retrieved 16, May 2022.

# WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



Source: [Intersectionality.png \(728x704\) \(ubc.ca\)](https://www.ubc.ca/~intersec/intersectionality.png)

The University of British Columbia suggests **ways to fight systemic racism:**

**1. Reflect** - Accepting that racism lives within our society is an important first step. Reflect on the ways systemic racism and your position has impacted you and your perspectives. The experiences of marginalized groups can also vary, so don't forget to apply an intersectional lens when you consider the ways different groups face oppression. You may feel uncomfortable, but this sets a solid foundation for you to explore the complexities of racial discrimination, challenge your notions of race and culture, and see anti-racism in new ways.

**2. Educate** - In order to move forward, it is essential to confront our past with racism and oppression as a country. Having knowledge and understanding in Canada's history with racism provide us with the necessary foundation to the fight against injustice.

As you learn more about Canada's history with racism, ask yourself the following questions: How have the laws changed? Is the targeted group still experiencing the effects of this event today? Were you familiar with this historical event? If not, what is the significance of you not knowing about this event?

**3. Speak up** - Challenge yourself and your communities by bringing conversations into your spaces. Regardless of our intersectional identities, talking about racism is no easy task, but your ability to have more meaningful and productive conversations will grow as you practice more.<sup>5</sup>

The National Network to End Domestic Violence suggests **eight ways to fight racism** in your community:

**1. Learn to recognize and understand your own privilege.**

Learn to recognize and understand your own privilege. Racial privilege plays out across social, political, economic, and cultural environments. Checking your privilege and using your privilege to dismantle systemic racism are two ways to begin this complex process.

However, race is only one aspect of privilege. Religion, gender, sexuality, ability-status, socio-economic status, language, and citizenship status can all affect your level of privilege. Using the privileges that you have to collectively empower others requires first being aware of those privileges and acknowledging their implications.

**2. Examine your own biases and consider where they may have originated.**

What messages did you receive as a kid about people who are different from you? What was the racial and/or ethnic make-up of your neighborhood, school, or religious community? Why do you think that was the case? These experiences produce and reinforce bias, stereotypes, and prejudice, which can lead to discrimination. Examining our own biases can help us work to ensure equality for all.

**3. Validate the experiences and feelings of people of color.**

Another way to address bias and recognize privilege is to support the experiences of other people and engage in tough conversations about race and injustice. We cannot be afraid to discuss oppression and discrimination for fear of "getting it wrong." Take action by learning about the ways that racism continues to affect our society. The best way to understand racial injustice is by listening to people of color.

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<sup>5</sup> [Systemic racism: What it looks like in Canada and how to fight it? | VPFO | UBC](#). Retrieved 16, May 2022.

#### **4. Challenge the “colorblind” ideology.**

It is a pervasive myth that we live in a “post-racial” society where people “don’t see color.” Perpetuating a “colorblind” ideology contributes to racism. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described his hope for living in a colorblind world, he did not mean that we should ignore race. It is impossible to eliminate racism without first acknowledging race. Being “colorblind” ignores a significant part of a person’s identity and dismisses the real injustices that many people face as a result of race. We must see color in order to work together for equity and equality.

#### **5. Call out racist “jokes” or statements.**

Let people know that racist comments are not okay. If you are not comfortable or do not feel safe being confrontational, try to break down their thought process and ask questions. For example, *“That joke doesn’t make sense to me, could you explain it?”* Or *“You may be kidding, but this is what it means when you say that type of thing.”* Do not be afraid to engage in conversations with loved ones, coworkers, and friends. Microaggressions, which can appear in the form of racist jokes or statements, perpetuate and normalize biases and prejudices. Remember that not saying anything – or laughing along – implies that you agree.

#### **6. Find out how your company or school works to expand opportunities for people of color.**

Systemic racism means that there are barriers – including wealth disparities, criminal justice bias, and education and housing discrimination that stack the deck against people of color in the workplace or at school. It is important for companies and schools to address these issues and promote a culture of equity.

#### **7. Be thoughtful with your finances.**

Know the practices of companies that you invest in and the charities that you donate to. Make an effort to shop at small, local businesses and give your money back to the people living in the community.

#### **8. Adopt an intersectional approach in all aspects of your life.**

Remember that all forms of oppression are connected. You cannot fight against one form of injustice and not fight against others. Many survivors of domestic violence also face racism and other forms of oppression. We must recognize and support survivors’ unique experiences. Learn more about domestic violence and how you can help end it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [8 Everyday Way to Fight Racism - Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(nnedv.org\)](https://www.nnedv.org/8-Everyday-Way-to-Fight-Racism-Elimination-of-Racial-Discrimination). Retrieved 16, May 2022.