

6 Healthy Attitudes for Managing the “ist” in your Life

The evidence is clear; the way you think about things can affect your emotional, and physical, and spiritual wellbeing. Your attitude in negative relationships and in response to stress matters. Your attitude can make the difference between healthy coping and unhealthy coping. This month we look at the “ist” in your life — the racist, sexist, ageist, et cetera and how to manage their micro-aggressions. Keep reading for your health’s sake!



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Have you ever had a conversation with someone you have known for a while and discovered that their values are different from yours? In fact they seem to be a racist. Or sexist. Or some other “ist” that leaves you feeling upset, disappointment and dismayed. You may have even experienced their comment or action as a micro-aggression.

Your next steps in such a situation are crucial to your emotional and spiritual resilience.

1) First define and label your experience.

Was your experience one of stereotype, prejudice, discrimination or racism?

Some definitions explained:

Stereotype: A mental picture about a group of people that is a simplistic opinion, prejudiced attitude, or misinformed judgment. A stereotype assumes that all people who share a characteristic will conform to a certain type of behavior and prevents us from seeing people as individuals.

Prejudice: A preconceived, irrational, sometimes unconscious thought, belief, attitude, opinion or emotion not based on facts. Prejudice can be positive or negative, can involve strong feelings, and can be difficult to change. A person who thinks, "I don't like (name of group)," is expressing a prejudice.

Discrimination: When people act on their prejudices or stereotypes, they are discriminating. Putting other people down, not allowing them to participate in activities, or denying them something they are entitled to by right and law is discrimination.

Racism: When one group of people benefits from an institutionalized system of advantage and privilege based on race (e.g. advantage in education, access to jobs, housing, health care) while other groups do not. In American society, Caucasians can be racist while other groups can be prejudiced, but not racist.

2) Accept that prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.

Despite the best efforts of many parents, school curricula on tolerance, cultural sensitivity training in the workplace, etc. people can still be prejudice and practice discrimination. In addition to diversity education, it is important to address prejudice and discrimination when and wherever they occur, to point out inequities, and to let others know such ideas and actions are unacceptable.

3) Model compassion and caring.

Showing compassion and caring when one is wronged is an act of courage that can be contagious. This does not mean we condone or ignore prejudiced behavior. See # 2 above.

4) Foster a culture of inclusion.

Review your school's or workplace's policy and procedures on discrimination and prejudice and post them in a prominent location.

5) Validate and assert your identity, values, and needs.

Set boundaries in your relationships of what you will and will not tolerate. Address prejudiced comments and behavior without aggression, blaming, or slandering others.

6) Accept help for feelings that overwhelm you.

There can be negative mental effects of discriminatory relationships for both the perpetrator and recipient. Feelings of anxiety, sadness, guilt, depression or stress can result from environments of prejudice and discrimination. Counseling can help you explore ways of having a healthy relationship with oneself and others.

Sources:

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/nursery/policies/prejudice-stereotyping-guide.html>

<http://www.socialchangetraining.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/The-Moving-Walkway-of-Racism.pdf>

Note: Information provided in this article is designed to support, not replace the recommendation of your medical doctor or mental health provider.

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