

White People—What We Can Do:

Our country is on fire with racism and white supremacy and has been for centuries. We were just protected from witnessing or experiencing its harm or violence by design so this may feel “new” or “chaotic” all of a sudden but we have always been sitting on a tinder box fueled by state-sanctioned violence and inequities deeply impacting the lives of Black and Indigenous People and People of Color in every aspect of society. Resoundingly, BIPoC are demanding that we step up, speak up, and act rather than perpetuate continued racial violence and oppression. I have had many white people reach out confused and uncertain about what to do. I have had moments of feeling this way myself as a white woman. While that likely infuriates BIPoC—the “I don’t know” or “Can you tell us what to do?,” as a white person committed to this work and dismantling the racism that lives in me and my community, I get it. Yet understanding the confusion doesn’t excuse it and we must work together to figure out what to do today, this week, and for the rest of our lives. I do not pretend in any way to have this figured out or that I will get it right. I will mess up and fall short in this work every day. I did yesterday. I will learn and get better and show up differently tomorrow. But I have to still act and not let fear of any personal discomfort stand in the way. Our perceived fear or discomfort as white people does not hold a candle to what George Floyd faced the moments (and likely the years) before he was murdered. So here’s a start of some actions we can take—that I can take—that are not nearly enough but a start. Please keep adding as we work within our communities to be and do differently, especially as white people.

- Do not bombard your BIPoC friends and colleagues with your need for connection and questions about what you should do right now BUT if they offer their perspective, *listen* deeply and in an undefended manner.
- Do not tone police, judge, or correct in any explicit or subtle form the way Black People in particular and other communities of color are expressing their pain, anger, and grief right now. It is not your place and you cannot ever fully understand what this feels like so it is not your right to say what expression should look or sound like right now.
- Talk to your white family, neighbors, partners and your kids about what is happening—be very explicit about what a white policeman did to murder a Black man and the legacy of state-sanctioned violence against communities of color and Black communities in particular. I watched the video and I will watch it with my kids. Don’t soften the blow or prioritize the comfort and racial innocence of your white family. Our kids can and need to learn to handle these harsh realities if they are going to participate in creating something different as white people. Black children do not get to opt out of these harsh realities and the innocence of their childhood has never been prioritized. Pretending this isn’t happening and just “talking about happy things” in the face of these

repeated murders is the ultimate display of white privilege. Obviously, if your child is 3, you need to adapt your approach. I get it. But don't let that be the reason you can't talk with your partner or your 14 year-old. Notice if you are looking for a way out of the discomfort.

- When you talk to your white community, focus on the injustice, the murders committed by racist police officers, the legacy of racism in Black communities, and the outrageous racism displayed by our President sanctioning violence against these communities. It is very common for the narrative in white spaces to turn to the perceived violence of the protestors of color, property damage, or how a broken window or burned vehicle is somehow far more dangerous or violent than a knee to the throat for eight minutes. While I don't ever want to condone violence, I can only imagine the frustration and rage Black communities in particular feel right now as law enforcement, many government officials and a President promote racism and perpetuate their suffering. Stay focused on the *source* of the frustration and violence, not only the outcome that it produces or a very small piece of the full story.
- Donate to activist organizations seeking racial justice and providing resources for the hardest hit communities right now. While throwing money at the problem is not nearly enough and should not let us sleep well at night, resources are needed and typically white folks have more access to generational wealth than communities of color systemically denied the accumulation of wealth for centuries. Give intentionally and significantly.
- Support political candidates of color with an equity and anti-racist agenda with financial resource, your time, and your vote. Likewise, amplify, act in solidarity with, and support colleagues of color with an equity agenda in your organization. Step aside when you need to, speak up when you should interrupt other white colleagues being harmful intentionally or unintentionally (do not hesitate or wish you would have), listen more, reflect more deeply on any feedback you receive and ultimately recognize how much your organization and this country critically needs their talent, leadership and perspective.
- Educate yourself and be in a learning process about racism and white supremacy with other white people. Your free time is a profound privilege. Use it to read every book and article you can about racism and white supremacy—especially those written by authors of color willing to share their insight. There are countless resources available and you should be engaging constantly (not feeling good about the one book you read or one class you took years ago that makes you feel like you get it now)—*The New Jim Crow*, *Between the World and Me*, *So You Want to Talk About Race*, *Me and White Supremacy*, *Mindful of Race*, and *My Grandmother's Hands* are just a few to get you started and never stop learning. Watch 13th, Fruitvale Station, and just keep watching. Yes it will be hard and yes it will make you feel uncomfortable and you will be

okay. Your life is not often on the line so develop a deeper empathy for what it might be if this was different. Your Netflix shows can wait. Be aware that reading and watching is never enough—just part of shifting your consciousness. Dismantling racism and white supremacy is far from a purely intellectual endeavor and we cannot “think” our way out of this brutality. It is a full body process and must become deeply personal.

- Watch or read *multiple* news sources, blogs and Twitter feeds—not just Fox News—and stay engaged with what is happening on the ground from multiple perspectives, especially perspectives of color. I hear many white people say “the news just makes me too anxious,” “I can’t handle that right now,” or “let’s just focus on the positive” and I can only imagine how that might feel to communities of color. The world is on fire and has been for a long time—face it. Don’t hide behind your privilege. Feel it. Let it churn inside and make you feel sick. Let it upset you and wreck your sunny day. Feeling unpleasant or uncomfortable is not a reason to avoid the brutal reality of what communities of color face daily. If you have a significant mental illness, of course you need to make choices that keep you stable. Many of us do not though and avoid racial pain to stay comfortable and within our protective bubbles of whiteness.
- Be very very very conscious, self-aware and other-centered if you engage or dialogue with your friends, neighbors, or colleagues of color right now. I would imagine that many BIPOC are feeling a range of intense emotions right now and one of those likely is exhaustion and profound frustration with white people. They may need space from you or more time with other BIPOC to grieve, express anger, and heal. This isn’t about you and what makes you feel good/reconnected/like an ally. Don’t take reluctance, wariness, or outright dismissal personally right now. Let it be. Get your needs met elsewhere.
- Don’t wait to speak, act, or engage until you feel “ready,” “woke,” or sure you will “get it right.” You will never get that feeling and if you do, question it. Uncertainty and confusion are the journey. Step up and contribute anyway—differently than you did yesterday. Speak up and disrupt racism in your home, your schools, at work, in your churches, your boardrooms, and your neighborhoods. Today.
- Get collective. We operate regularly as individuals or in isolation and rarely is individual action as impactful as collective action. Organize with other white people to amplify your efforts. If BIPOC want to collaborate with you, absolutely do that and center their requests, needs, leadership, and ideas but don’t wait to be asked or told what to do.
- Raise your white sons, daughters, and children differently—with explicit and consistent communication and efforts to disrupt the formation of white supremacy within them. It is being constructed within their minds and hearts as we speak—whether you want it or not, see it or not, or wish it was different or not. Racism and white supremacy is the default

and pattern of this country and your white children are breathing it in *every single day*. If you are not working intentionally and aggressively *every single day* to disrupt it then you may raise a cop willing to place a knee on the neck of a Black son, father, or brother until he dies. You may be raising a daughter who becomes a woman ready to threaten the life of a Black bird watcher by fabricating racist accusations to the police when asked to leash her dog. Your baby can become this person. Face that and act differently.

- This includes ensuring that what your child reads and watches expands their exposure to the brilliance and extensive contribution of communities of color—as well as the systemic racial oppression that has dominated our history and our present reality. It includes ensuring they develop authentic, sustained relationships with other children and adults who do not look like them. It means reflecting on who comes over for dinner and sits in your backyard for BBQs. What messages are you sending and what lived experiences are you cultivating with and for them? If their education and home life is a white world, they are learning racism and white supremacy from you. Having one friend or relative of color at some point is not enough.
- Protesting—here in lies a real dilemma for me and this may feel super frustrating to some when I say it. I have attended numerous protests over the last decade and I believe deeply that numbers matter and Black and Brown folks can't always be the ones putting their bodies on the line or standing together for justice. Numbers send a strong message that injustice is seen and matters—not only to a few people but to many of us who seek a better world. White bodies should be protecting Black bodies from police in riot gear and from arrest right now and...the pandemic is throwing a curve ball in this one for me right now. Sheltering in place has slowed its devastation and curbed its spread. Even so, 100,000 have died and communities of color have been disproportionately harmed—from higher death rates to unemployment and shortages of necessities to meet basic needs. Joining together with thousands of others spreads the very thing that could continue to kill people in our communities right now and spread joblessness and homelessness. I deeply admire and do not hold judgment in any way for the people gathering to protest police brutality and state-sanctioned white supremacy right now. And I am torn in this moment. If you are not going—do not judge those that are and support them in any way you can. If you are going, put on a mask, and do all that you can to keep a bit of distance between you and others—for their safety as much as yours.
- Stay creative. Keep trying to come up with more impactful than this to actively and collectively dismantle racism and white supremacy in this moment. Don't just take a week off and hope for the best. Lives depend on it.

- Read this perspective from a Woman of Color, Kandise Le Blanc, about what she wants you to do:
https://insidethekandidish.wordpress.com/2020/05/30/dear-white-people-this-is-what-we-want-you-to-do/?fbclid=IwAR2XjZJXxQNRlevJXsU0AmZ79gU7DRUdUZuCo7JTVBJLX6_gBcxIreyMdE. And ACT.
- Read this list of 75 more actions you can take:
<https://medium.com/equality-includes-you/what-white-people-can-do-for-racial-justice-f2d18b0e0234>. And ACT.
- If you find yourself wasting your time and energy critiquing these lists or getting defensive, use that energy instead to disrupt racism and white supremacy in your home and your community—today. Don't lose the forest for the trees. If you have a better idea, do it. Better yet, do it and then add it to the list and get your white friends to do it too. We don't have time to split hairs right now and usually that just allows us to get out of action or discomfort.
- Recognize this is nowhere near enough and should not make us feel better in any way. There is no feeling better until an unarmed Black person is NEVER killed or harmed by police again. Period.