

Racial Discrimination & COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic has stirred up many strong emotions within all of us, including anxiety, fear, uncertainty, sadness, and loss. The experiences of fear and anxiety, in particular, have brought to light many challenges within our American society as we struggle to make sense of an unknown, threatening situation. Unfortunately, individuals of certain racial/ethnic groups and nations of origin are being targeted as threatening, dangerous, or even responsible for the spread of COVID-19. This treatment is harmful, fear-driven, and must be stopped.

The purposes of this handout are to:

1. Educate students on how societal forces including privilege, oppression, and discrimination are currently playing out in light of COVID-19.
2. Provide support, coping strategies, and resources for survivors of this discrimination and oppression.
3. Provide guidance and tools for non-victims to cope with anxiety and fear, intervene when witnessing the discrimination of others, and become allies to those currently being targeted.

Privilege and Oppression in American Society

In America, some groups of people have privilege while others experience oppression (note that these are not mutually exclusive).

Privilege – the unearned, invisible, and often unacknowledged granting of power or status

- Example: white, straight, or able-bodied privilege

Oppression – prolonged cruel, unjust treatment or control

- Maintains advantage and disadvantage based on social groups
- Operates at multiple levels (individual, systemic, cultural, etc.)

Current privileged groups in the wake of COVID-19:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Individuals of non-Asian descent▪ White/Caucasian individuals▪ “Americanized” or acculturated individuals▪ U.S. natives
Current oppressed groups in the wake of COVID-19:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Individuals of Asian (especially Chinese) or Pacific Islander descent▪ Asian Americans▪ Non-acculturated individuals▪ Immigrants, non-natives to the U.S. (i.e., residents or green card holders), and non-U.S. citizens

Discrimination: Oppression in Action

Individuals who are oppressed experience discrimination in multiple forms.

Discrimination – the unjust treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or gender

Racism – unjust treatment or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior

Xenophobia – dislike or unjust treatment against individuals from other countries

What do discrimination, racism, and xenophobia actually look like?

These forms of discrimination can look a number of ways, ranging from the overt to the more subtle. Examples include:

Referring to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus”	Posting negative messages about Asian individuals on social media
Blaming individuals of Asian descent for spreading the virus	Saying to someone, “go back to where you came from”
Thinking of or behaving towards a person of Asian descent as if they are “dirty” or “infected”	Avoiding stores or businesses with Asian owners or employees
Using racial slurs	Physical assault or violence against Asian Americans or immigrants

Another important, more subtle form of racism are **microaggressions** – brief, often daily words or behaviors that communicate hostile or derogatory racial slights. Examples include:

Asking “where are you from?”	Pulling a scarf or mask over your face when near an Asian individual
Walking away from people of Asian descent in grocery stores	Social distancing only from those of Asian descent
Refusing to sit near a person of Asian descent when using public transportation	

Survivors of Discrimination: How to Cope and Heal

First, **take a deep breath and remind yourself that this is not about you.** This is about the anxiety, fear, and uncertainty that people are feeling about this international pandemic. This by no means excuses their behavior; it is to remind yourself that while you are being unfairly targeted, you are not at all at fault for what is happening.

It is important to practice **coping skills** and **self-care practices** during this time that help to make you feel **safe, calm, and connected.** These can vary person to person, but here are some helpful things to try:

Calming:	Creating safety:	Fostering connection (to both yourself and others):
Meditation and deep breathing	Calling or texting loved ones	Video-chatting with friends, family, and loved ones
Journaling, writing poetry, or creating art	Grounding techniques	Playing virtual card games or puzzles online with friends
Listening to music	Spa activities (e.g., lighting a candle, taking a warm bath)	Reading a book
Watching a new movie or show	Using a weighted blanket	Trying a new skill (learning to cook, play an instrument, etc.)
Going for a walk outside		Revisiting an old hobby (e.g., video games or knitting)

Members of Privileged Groups: How to be an Ally

What if you're someone not targeted by current COVID-19 discrimination but have recognized some of the above discrimination in your own behaviors? It's okay. Here's how to start fresh and be an ally to our targeted folks:

1. **Forgive yourself.** We as humans are all guilty of biases and mistreating others at times. Now you can work on practicing kindness and healthier ways of coping.
2. **Manage your own stress and anxiety.** Use the techniques above or other coping skills to calm your nerves so that they don't impact how you relate to others.
3. **Apologize.** Acknowledge what went wrong. Own your mistakes. Commit to different actions going forward.
4. **Express care and concern.** Reach out to those in your life being affected by discrimination. Check in, ask them how they're doing, and offer to be a listening ear.
5. **Intervene when you witness discrimination.** Correct stereotypes when you encounter them. Offer kind words to someone who has just been targeted. Stand up for those being harassed and lead by example.

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