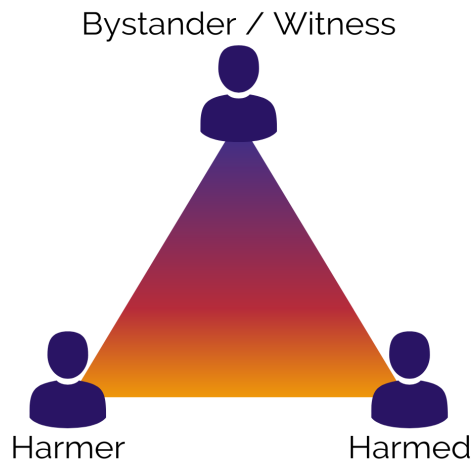


AARISE

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE IN MICROAGGRESSIONS + WAYS TO RESPOND & ADDRESS THEM

The American Psychological Association defines microaggressions as "everyday derogations, slights, and invalidations that are often delivered to people of minority or marginalized backgrounds."

We would like to expand the understanding of microaggressions beyond being a binary case of Harmer vs Harmed, with each role staying static. In reality, each of us has caused harm to others and has been harmed. What's more, in many instances, there is a third role: that of the bystander, who witnesses the microaggression happening.



In coming to understand how we might have been in the role of Bystander/Witness, Recipient/Harmed, or Harmer at different points in our lives, we are able to:

1. Develop compassion for those in the other roles
2. Deepen understanding of impact & constructive ways to handle these situations
3. Better be able to respond in whatever situation that comes up in future or whatever role you find yourself in

This pdf is a support tool sharing some different ways you can respond to or interrupt a microaggression situation.

AARISE

BYSTANDER / WITNESS

- **Notice what you're feeling in your body/emotions.**
 - Do a quick body/feelings scan. Notice any sensations coming up in your body or emotions arising. This can inform you whether you are going into a certain stress response (fight, flight, freeze, or even fawn). If it feels possible, take a few moments to breathe into the discomfort and then act from there.
- **Ask a question of the Harmer from a place of curiosity.** This will help you gather information of where the speaker is coming from & might cause them to reflect on what they'd just said:
 - "Can you clarify, what do you mean by that?"
 - "What makes you ask that question?"
 - "You just said _____. I'm curious, what makes you believe this is true?"
 - "Can you elaborate on that?"
- **Share the impact you noticed within yourself.** This is a way to speak from personal experience without blaming. This can lessen defensiveness in the other person.
 - "I heard you say _____. I'm noticing that I am feeling _____ and this is the _____ (type of impact) it is having on me."
- **Distract/Re-direct.** Change the topic so the attention is no longer on the person being harmed or direct a question to another person in the group so that attention shifts.
 - "I'm interested to hear what _____ has to say."
 - "How about we open this up for other people to share their thoughts?"
- **Center the receiver.** Check in to see if they are ok either during the conversation, or touch base with them after the experience.
- **When sharing, keep in mind impact & desired result.** Even when feeling strong feelings, it is helpful to check in with yourself about what your desired result is out of addressing the microaggression. Is it to have the Harmer change their behavior or understand their impact? Is it to make them feel bad or shame them? Your intention will affect your choice of words as well as your tone of voice. Keep your intention in mind to guide you.

AARISE

RECIPIENT / HARMED

- **Body/Feelings scan + create internal/external safety.** Notice emotions & sensations coming up in your body. This can inform you whether you are going into a certain stress response (fight, flight, freeze, or even fawn). If it feels possible, take a few moments to breathe into the discomfort and then act from there. If you find yourself frozen or at a loss for words, how can you bring some loving compassion to yourself in the moment? You may want to ask yourself: *What do I need in this scenario to stay safe? What would feel most supportive to me right now?*
- **Ask a question of the Harmer from a place of curiosity.** This will help you gather information of where the speaker is coming from & cause them to reflect.
 - “Can you clarify, what do you mean by that?”
 - “What makes you ask that question?”
 - “You just said _____. I’m curious, what makes you believe this is true?”
 - “Can you elaborate on that?”
- **Share the impact you noticed within yourself.** This is a way to speak from personal experience without blaming. This can lessen defensiveness in the other person. “I heard you say _____. I’m noticing that I am feeling _____ and _____ (the type of impact).”
- **State impact & then clearly state personal needs.**
 - “When you said _____, I felt _____. I would like you to _____.”
 - “What I’d like is _____.”
- **When sharing, keep in mind impact & desired result.** Even when feeling strong feelings, it is helpful to check in with yourself about what is your desired result? Is it to have the Harmer change their behavior or understand their impact? Is it to make them feel bad or shame them? Your intention will affect your choice of words as well as your tone of voice. Keep your intention in mind to guide you.
- **Leave situation:**
 - If the conversation is feeling like too much, you can always excuse yourself for a bathroom break or go take a call. From here, you can recalibrate & decide what to do next: return or take your leave of the situation for the time being.
 - During the break, check in with your body & notice if you need to do some breathing or shake things off. Your body may be going through a stress response and it can be helpful to release.
- **Post-microaggression experience**
 - Find an ally or friend to have a debrief conversation afterwards. If it feels supportive, you can brainstorm a plan to address the situation with the Harmer.

AARISE

HARMER

- **Pause & scan body language of Recipient/Harmed.** If something lands wrong, take a moment to scan the face/tone of voice/non-verbal body response of the recipient.
- **If you notice that you said something off, you can call yourself out, correct yourself or even apologize in the moment.**
 - “I just noticed I said _____. Let me rephrase that. ”
 - “I’m so sorry, I realize that could have come off wrong. Let me try this again. _____.”
 - “Wait, let me rewind. This is what I meant to say. _____.”
 - “I’m sensing _____. Can you help me understand what went wrong.”
- **If someone pushes back or calls you out, some ways to respond.**
 - Notice your initial response (whether that’s defensiveness, anger, wanting to explain, freezing etc) and take a breath. Allow yourself to pause & reflect.
 - If you find yourself getting defensive, slow down & ask yourself: “Is there something true in this for me? What am I missing here?”
 - If you need a moment, ask. “I hear you. Give me a second to take that in.” And then respond.
 - Ask a clarifying question. “What do you mean by that?” “Can you share more?”
- **Apologize.**
 - When you apologize, do so authentically & sincerely. Remember, it’s not about you, it’s about the person being harmed. Don’t center yourself.
 - Acknowledge what you did, the impact your words might have had, and thank the person for speaking up. Commit to changing your behavior.
 - “Thanks for pointing that out. I agree that _____ was offensive & I will not say that again. Thanks for letting me know. Moving forward I will _____.”
- **If you don’t realize you made a microaggression until later, you can still address it afterwards.**
 - Before you approach the person harmed, make sure you take some time for yourself to process. Make space for any emotions you’re feeling, whether that’s anger, irritation, confusion, shame, embarrassment, or something else. Find a trusted friend, ally, colleague or professional you can talk to who is able to hold space, give feedback in what might have gone wrong & brainstorm next steps. You may also want to check in with another person who was present and ask them if they noticed the same thing as the recipient.



About AARISE: A program and community focused on justice and liberation for all that centers Asian American activist history, AAPI experiences, emotional processing and somatic healing. AARISE aims to blend intellectual learning with emotional processing & body awareness building so that people feel more empowered to speak up and take powerful action in their lives. The founders of AARISE bring together their different backgrounds as well as personal & professional experiences ranging from their work in corporate, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, grassroots organising, immigrant rights advocacy, social justice and somatic & body based healing.

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