

RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS WITH THE TRIANGLE MODEL



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TIP SHEET

Microaggressions are commonplace interactions, intentional or unintentional, that convey negative messages about specific groups of people.¹

The **Microaggressions Triangle Model** was developed by K. Ackerman-Barger and N.N Jacobs as a **humanistic approach** to responding to microaggressions that considers the perspectives of **all involved**.² It focuses on how to construct responses to rebuild relationships.



Source: ASSIST

Acknowledge Your Bias

Avoid getting defensive. Anyone can have unconscious biases: use the experience as a learning opportunity.

Seek Feedback

Ask questions and show that you care about the recipient's feelings.

Say Sorry

Apologize for hurting the other person. Avoid saying things like "I didn't mean it like that." Focus on the impact, not the intent, of your words.

Impact, Not Intent

Say Thank You

The person just took a risk to teach you. See this as a gift and an opportunity for learning and self-growth.

Bystander: ARISE

Awareness

Consider how the recipient feels. Put yourself in their shoes.

Respond with Empathy

Demonstrate empathy towards the recipient and avoid judgement.

Inquiry of Facts

Approach the situation with curiosity. Gather facts and perspectives.

Statements Starting with 'I'

Use 'I' statements when expressing feelings/perceptions.

Educate and Engage

Highlight opportunities for learning. Move towards a common goal.

1. Pierce, C. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In Pierce, C., Barbour, F. B. (Eds.), *The Black seventies: An extending horizon book* (pp. 265–282). Porter Sargent Publisher.

2. Ackerman-Barger, K., & Jacobs, N. N. (2020). The Microaggressions Triangle Model: A Humanistic Approach to Navigating Microaggressions in Health Professions School. *Academic Medicine*, 95(12S), S28-S32. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000003692. PMID: 32889926.



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Recipient: ACTION

Ask Clarifying Questions

Ask a clarifying question like, "can you explain what you meant by...?" Come from a place of curiosity.

Come from Curiosity

Tell What You Observed

Describe your observation of factual, objectively-observable events.

Impact Exploration

Explain the impact of the microaggression and your thoughts and feelings in response to it.

Own Thoughts/Feelings

Next Steps

If you feel safe doing so, and the source has been able to hear your concerns, you may want to offer up further opportunities to discuss.

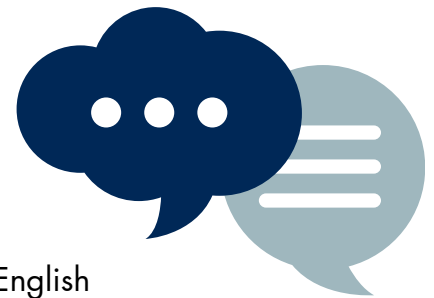
Scenario Example: ACTION

Source: Your English is really good!

Recipient: I'm not sure I understand. Why did you assume I wouldn't speak English well?

Source: Well, it looks like you're not really from Canada, so I assumed English is not your first language.

Recipient: I noticed you singled me out and didn't say the same thing to my other colleagues here. It stings when people make assumptions about me based on how I look. Can we chat about this later during a break?



Want to Learn More?



Read the original article by Ackerman-Barger & Jacobs in Academic Medicine. [Click here to access.](#)



Explore the findings of the largest study on the experiences and influences of microaggressions among US medical students. [Click here to access.](#)³

3. Anderson, N., Lett, E., Asabor, E.N. et al. (2022). The Association of Microaggressions with Depressive Symptoms and Institutional Satisfaction Among a National Cohort of Medical Students. *J GEN INTERN MED* 37, 298–307. doi: <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.nosm.ca/10.1007/s11606-021-06786-6>

