



WILLIAM & MARY

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## Inclusive Leader Insights

### How to Respond When You Witness Microaggressions

Microaggressions are defined as instances of subtle or indirect slights that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups. Whether the slight is unintentional or intentional, they can have a negative impact on the person or group being targeted. For those that experience microaggressions, the action itself can be harmful and leave a lasting impression. For that reason, those that have been targets should not be expected to continually respond to microaggressions leveled at them. If you witness someone experiencing a microaggression within an office, classroom, etc., there are several steps you can take to be an ally and support the person who is being targeted.

**Speak up:** if you feel safe and comfortable doing so, you can intervene and speak out against the action directed toward the person or group. Let the person who made the microaggression know that their behavior or words were harmful and are not acceptable.

**Validate:** show support for the person who was targeted by acknowledging their experiences and validating their feelings. Let them know what happened to them was wrong and that you are willing to support them in any way possible.

**Educate:** if the person who made the microaggression is open to it, you can use the opportunity to educate them about why their behavior or words were harmful. They may not understand the harm caused by their action.

**Document:** consider documenting the incident, including the date, time, what was said or done, and the emotional impact of the person who was targeted. This can be helpful for keeping track of patterns of behavior and for having a record if there is a need to escalate the situation.

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion has stressed moving from rhetoric to taking action in order to bring about significant change in our community. That means it is important to recognize that being an ally means taking action to support those who are being marginalized, speaking up and offering support to those who have been targeted, and educating yourself and others for understanding. In doing this, you can help create a safer and more inclusive environment for everyone.

Additional resources:

- [How to respond to microaggressions](#)
- [How bystanders can shut down microaggressions](#)
- [Microaggressions can strain professional relationships – here's what you can do when you hear one](#)

For more information, please contact [wmdiversity@wm.edu](mailto:wmdiversity@wm.edu).