

Building White Resiliency

'RACIAL RESILIENCY' is the ability to recognize, talk about, and respond to racism, in all its many forms. Many Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color develop varying levels of racial resiliency simply to survive, and even to thrive, in a society where structural racism is deeply entrenched.

FOR MOST WHITE PEOPLE, developing racial resiliency is not a matter of survival. Rather, the opposite: we are encouraged not to think of being white as a racial identity; we are encouraged not to talk about racial privilege; we are encouraged not to see all-white spaces as racialized; we are encouraged not to reflect on how we participate in, and benefit from, structural racism. This silence helps maintain our racial privilege, by keeping it invisible and undiscussed, masquerading as simply 'normal.'

THESE HABITS OF SILENCE AND INVISIBILITY also help create 'white fragility,' which Robin DiAngelo describes as 'discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.' Since whiteness rarely gets questioned or challenged, many people who carry racial privilege have never developed the social and emotional stamina required to work across lines of racial difference, recognize racial injustice, or openly address racial power dynamics.

'WHITE RESILIENCY' is the flip side of white fragility: the ability to recognize, talk about, and respond to racism, for people who carry a racially privileged identity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE RESILIENCY INCLUDE:

- An ability to analyze and address systems of power, privilege and oppression
- An ability to discuss race, racism and racial injustice without defensiveness or denial
- An ability to see and name whiteness and white privilege
- An ability to center the voices, experiences and needs of Black / Indigenous / People of Color, engaging with and honoring their leadership and their power
- A willingness to do emotional processing in ways and times that don't disrupt or distract from racial justice efforts
- An ability to receive critical feedback around race without feeling personally attacked; to be accountable without being defensive; and to acknowledge and repair harm
- The skill to offer empathy, support, and accountability to other white people as they build their own racial resiliency

BUILDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCY, like building new muscles, always requires some stretching, some pain, and lots of repetitions. Any situation where white fragility may show up can also be an opportunity to build resiliency.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY, as white people, to build our racial resiliency. When we fail to do so, we are unprepared for moments when racial issues are discussed or addressed. We remain vulnerable to the manipulations and deceptions of those who are intentionally trying to maintain white supremacy. We can become obstacles or distractions to racial justice efforts.

RESILIENCY IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. Stretching your leg muscles is not the same thing as running a marathon! As we build our social and emotional stamina, and strengthen our ability to do hard work and engage in difficult conversations, we increase our potential to be effective partners and participants in the deep transformational work of achieving racial justice.

Developed by Craig White, 2020

Thanks to Robin DiAngelo and to the many people, past and present, who have spoken on race and resilience.