

10 Things White People Can Do to Work for Racial Justice

with Oren Jay Sofer

In my most recent email, I shared some reflections on making space to be with the range of difficult emotions surfacing in response to George Floyd's murder. The depth of pain, the magnitude of the violence, are hard to bear.

I opened my inbox this morning, and was dismayed to read this short message:

"This is exactly what I needed to hear right now. As a white man, I've been feeling so helpless and guilty this week and not knowing what to do. I will definitely hang on to your email and look to it when I need a little boost."

I'm glad my email was helpful; that was part of the intention.

But if all we do is read an uplifting email or article time to time when we feel bad, then I will have failed miserably in my attempt to encourage concrete action to address the continued, untenable, and horrific violence of racism.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail, called out the danger of white complacency and complicity, writing:

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens' Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

Dear white friends, let us not perpetuate the violence by standing idly by or wringing our hands in despair. Let us not freeze with fear, overwhelm, or shock.

There is a balance between making space to be with pain and discomfort, and action. It's essential to give ourselves time to grieve, to mourn, to grapple with the complex feelings surrounding the brutality and violence of racism. Particularly if we are white, there's a way we can allow our advocacy to protect us from processing the awful implications of our own implicit role in a societal system of racial violence and oppression.

There are no simple, easy answers. Part of the healing must include the kind of radical transformation that only comes from deep, soul-searching reflection and inner struggle.

At the same time, if all we do is reflect and tend to our emotions, we fail to act. It's equally important to show up right here and now, where and when it counts.

So if you're feeling stuck and helpless, here are ten things you can do to stand for justice, show solidarity, and take action to stop white- and state-sanctioned violence. (For more, see the resource list below.)

1. **Identify yourself as “anti-racist”.** Talk to friends, family, colleagues and neighbors about what this means and what steps you're taking to act in solidarity with communities of color. Vote in alignment with the value of being anti-racist.
2. **Educate yourself** (or continue to do so) about whiteness, white supremacy, racism, and what it means to be anti-racist. Below is a list of resources (articles, books, films, podcasts) to help you get started or continue your journey of learning, healing and transformation.
3. **Talk to your kids about racism.** The earlier we educate children about racism the less likely they are to perpetuate racist and white-supremacist ideology. [This post on Instagram](#) shares some important facts about racism and children. This [story from Ruth King's](#) book offers some inspiration.
4. **Talk to your faith leader.** If you are part of a faith community, talk to your faith leader(s) about the spiritual resources for peace and justice in your tradition. Get together with others and make a direct request that your church, synagogue, temple, or place of worship organize an explicitly anti-racist action plan.
5. **Get involved.** Find a local or national organization that is fighting for racial justice and reflects your values and policy views. Donate, volunteer or find other ways get involved, like working to get the vote out. If you have extra financial resources give to organizations working for change on the front lines. This movement needs support both in terms of our numbers and our dollars.
6. **Contact your elected officials.** Get in touch with local, county, state and federal officials to urge for systemic change. Many of the organizations targeting specific issues will have recommendations for whom to contact, when, and how. The ACLU, for example, [offers numbers and guidelines for calling Minnesota officials](#).
7. **Grieve with other white people.** Don't ask your Black friends for emotional support. Pouring our outrage and sadness onto Black friends places the burden of our feelings on top of theirs. Instead, grieve with other white folks so that you are available to offer support emotionally, physically, and in other ways.
8. **Speak out about racism** any and every time you hear a remark or witness an act with racist overtones. Silence is complicity and perpetuates violence. As Vanessa Daniel of Groundswell Fund put it: “Practice zero tolerance for anti-Blackness at any level. Say something not just sometimes but every time.”
9. **Take cues from Black people.** Listen to Black people and be willing to take your cues from people of color in leadership. Part of white supremacy culture (and patriarchy) is believing that we know best, that we can fix it. Instead, we can recognize that oppressed groups often have a unique and more accurate view of our society than those who benefit from the unjust, unequal structures of our society. (For more on this, see Sandra Harding's feminist [Standpoint Theory](#).)
10. **Take care of your heart and stay resourced.** Black people have been enslaved, murdered, and brutalized for over 400 years in this country. If you are white, or have white-skin privilege, it's our work to deal with the feelings of guilt and shame that arise in relation to this painful history. The more we take care of ourselves, the more available we are to be in this fight for justice, equity and healing for the long haul.

Anti-Racism Resources

Suggested Reading

- Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice, by Paul Kivel
- How to Be an Anti-Racist, by Ibram X. Kendi
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism, by Robin Diangelo
- Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- So You Want to Talk About Race, by Ijeoma Oluo
- Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-Blindness, by Michelle Alexander
- White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son, by Tim Wise
- Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race, by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- Witnessing Whiteness, by Shelly Tochluk
- Killing Rage: Ending Racism, by bell hooks
- The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin
- Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America, by Rev. Thandeka
- Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption, by Bryan Stevenson

Many, many more [here](#) or [here](#) or [here](#).

Film

- [White Like Me](#)
- [13th](#) (Netflix Documentary)
- Race: The Power of an Illusion
- I am Not Your Negroe
- [What Matters](#): #BLM Documentary series
- The Color of Fear (Documentary by Lee Mun Wah)

Audio

- [Seeing White](#): Scene on Radio (Podcast series on whiteness)
- [1619](#) (NY Times Podcast)
- [Code Switch](#) (NPR)

Articles and Essays

- [75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#)
- [5 Ways White People Can Take Action in Response to White and State-Sanctioned Violence](#), by SURJ
- [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#), by Peggy McIntosh
- [A Brief History of Slavery](#), NY Times
- [I'm not White, I'm Jewish: Standing as Jews in the Fight for Racial Justice](#), by Paul Kivel

- [Relinquishing the Patriarchy](#), by Adrienne Maree Brown
- [Calling In and Calling Out](#), by Roxy Manning

Organizations

- [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) (SURJ, local chapters nation-wide)
- [MDP105](#) (Local Minneapolis Org working towards police-free city)
- [Critical Resistance](#)
- [Black Lives Matter](#)
- [ACLU](#)
- [Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#)
- [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- [Organizing White Men for Collective Liberation](#)
- [Anti Police-Terror Project](#)
- [Transform Harm Resource Hub](#)

Places to Donate*

Immediate Legal Services for Protesters

- [National Bail Out](#)- “a Black-led and Black-centered collective of abolitionist organizers, lawyers and activists building a community-based movement to support our folks and end systems of pretrial detention and ultimately mass incarceration”
- [Minnesota Freedom Fund](#) - community-based nonprofit that pays criminal bail & immigration bonds for individuals who have been arrested while protesting police brutality
- [Louisville Community Bail Fund](#) - provides bail and post-release support for those demonstrating on behalf of Breonna Taylor

Cash Funds for Families

- [George Floyd Memorial Fund](#)
- [Ahmaud Arbery Fund](#)

Organizations Addressing Police Violence

- [Black Lives Matter - Donations](#)
- [Campaign Zero](#) - Focuses on “data-driven policy solutions to end this violence and hold police accountable”
- [Black Visions Collective](#) - Minnesota-based organization “dedicated to Black liberation and to collective liberation”
- [Reclaim the Block](#) - Minneapolis community organization aiming to divest from the “police department into other areas of the city’s budget that truly promote community health and safety”
- [Anti Police Terror Project](#) - “Black-led, multi-racial, intergenerational coalition that seeks to build a replicable and sustainable model to eradicate police terror in communities of color”

* Gratitude to Erin Anderson for compiling donation resources