

# Be of Service: Five do's and don't's for white people taking anti-racist action

I am a white woman who has been blogging about race for eight years. It all started out of my pressing need to explore why, ever since I was a child, I cared so much about cross-racial connection, racism and exclusion of black people in "white life." It was long before I would ever hear the term "white bubble." I didn't have the language for any of this yet.

When yet another innocent black person is killed by a white vigilante, or white police officer, I want to write about it as a way to show up, to be there in solidarity with black people. I also want my fellow white people to show up. To talk about what happened. To show their support. To take action. And, I am not perfect in this. None of us are. But what is most important is that we show up, and that we do something.

As I witness the pain and exhaustion of black people through conversation, and on social media, I see and hear them share about what they want and don't want from us white people. As part of learning how to care for one another and understand the harm of white supremacist culture, racist violence, and white individual words and action cause, and in an effort to undo our own racialized, colonized minds, I want to share what I am hearing, learning and putting into practice. Below are five DON'Ts and five DO's I am keeping in mind and sharing with other white people to practice as we work to be in solidarity with black people in this country, and to be a part of a new order in which we all are free. This will only happen when we white people acknowledge our history, apologize for it and make amends — reparations, for the centuries of slavery and oppression we have instituted and continue to preside over.

## **DON'T**

1. Don't go on and on about how sad and outraged YOU are about the killing of George Floyd, or other deaths of innocent black people at the hands of police officers and vigilantes. It is not our place to take up a whole lot of space centering our own pain about the death of yet another black person. Acknowledge, show up, share articles (see #2 for boundaries on this) and show that you care, but being extra about your emotional response to the death is not helpful. And what I am continuously hearing black people say, is this: Don't ask them for anything right now. They are exhausted from our racism, and are processing and need rest, away from us white folks asking them, "But what can we do?" I failed at this by recently messaging a black woman friend about an upcoming protest, realizing I seek her out too often to ask her opinion or gather information about a local event, when I can do the work of figuring it out myself, without making her my "go-to" black person, especially at a time like this.
2. Don't share images and videos that show the killing of black people. It is black pain porn that you

are sharing. Some white people have said they feel it is important that white people witness the horror so that we can see the terror of what we are inflicting on black people. Witness it privately if you must. But don't spread the violence and re-traumatize black people, or have other white people view these videos as some kind of sport, like white people who attended public lynchings and took photos of themselves at these events, and even made souvenir postcards out of them.

3. Don't ever question whether a black person should have, fill in the blank: run, not run, comply, be polite, have a record. Don't make a black person responsible for their own killing. Period.
4. Don't tell a black person how they, or others that look like them, should respond to a killing of a black person by a white police officer or vigilante. Don't say, "I understand being upset about the killing, but when they riot and loot, I don't condone that. They're only hurting themselves and destroying their own communities." Is a building worth more than a life? Martin Luther King said, "Riots are the language of the unheard." First of all, as we are finding out is the case with many of these so-called "riots," the majority of people doing the destruction and looting are from outside of the states where the incidents took place, and are carried out by many white people with links to white supremacist groups. Second, this country was built by slaves and everything white people have is because of first, stealing land that did not belong to them, using violence to kill the indigenous people whose land this belonged to, enslaving people first from Africa, and afterward through centuries of Jim Crow laws — discriminatory housing laws, discriminatory voting laws, discriminatory business loans and mortgages, segregation of schools, mass incarceration and looting of other countries' treasures that were placed in our museums.
5. Don't stay silent. If the pain and suffering of black people is not on your radar, or it is, but you feel like you can't or shouldn't say or do anything about it, that is a problem. If you are more afraid of being called racist for saying the wrong thing than you are about putting an end to racism, well, as they say: White Silence = Violence.

DO:

1. Do educate yourself on the history of systemic racism in this country. Read. Get into conversations with other white people. Get into conversations with black people. Get educated and converse without placing the labor on black people to do the work for you. Be resourceful. There are a lot of books and resources out there now for us white people to read and learn about racism and avenues to engage in the work of anti-racism.
2. Do something. We white people can be good at saying, "I feel awful about all this, but I feel helpless as to what I can do." My cousin, a life coach, has said, "When we say, 'I just don't know..I'm afraid to (fill in the blank—fall in love, ask for a raise)' when we get stuck in the 'I don't know,' we can stay there, and have the comfort of not having to make a decision, stay in the comfort of not taking action." And, so, I plead with all of us white people, to get unstuck, to not stay in the "but, I don't know what I can do," or "I don't want to make a mistake if I say something to a black person about race," We can see how damaging that is, right? There are concrete things we all can do. (See resource list at end of article)
3. Do Listen. We white people are so used to being the center of everything, thinking we need to have something to say. Please listen to black people share about their experience, let them speak at rallies, lead and center themselves in the conversation on the racism they have experienced. And do believe them.

4. Do accept the invitation to learn and grow. If a black person tells you something you said, or did, or posted on social media, caused them harm, listen. Believe them. Do not get defensive, and please, fellow white women, do this learning and growing without shedding tears.
5. Do the most every day to break down systems of oppression and racism. Every day. I hear and witness many black people saying what is happening right now is much bigger than George Floyd. This is centuries of enduring the racism and violence perpetrated by white people on black people in this country. This means it is going to require all we have, and all of us to tear down these systems, and start anew. It requires more than showing up at a protest. It requires vigilance and ownership and the will to make changes every single day. Beyond calling out blatant racist acts when you see them, it is about what we can do in our every day worlds. It's being in your workplace and looking around and seeing if your workplace is a white bubble where black people and people of color either don't exist or don't exist in an equal way to the white people there, especially if it is a white-led, non-profit organization "serving" people from marginalized communities. And, I don't mean having more black and brown people so you can say, "Hey, look at our diverse workforce!" Diversity does not equal equity. It means you have policies and a culture that is not surface level, but truly welcoming and inclusive. It means that positions at all levels are filled with black and brown people. It means there is equality and the de-centering of whiteness in carrying out your organization's or business's work. It means black and brown people are given the autonomy and support and resources to do their job and not be suspected of not producing quality work, or called aggressive, angry, or said to not fit in. It's about doing what needs to be done to make sure our public school systems have equal resources. It's about undoing racist laws within our judicial system. It's about being willing to connect with and get to know black people and have conversations, and be willing to take guidance on what you can do to help without asking the kinds of questions that feel like a burden.

There are more than five things we can do, and five things we should not do, but this is a start. We can start where we are, no matter where that starting point is. The critical thing is to do something, to begin.

Here are links to resources to help us learn, grow and give support to black people and black-led businesses and organizations in our community and nationally.

### **Resources:**

#### ***Rhode Island Solidarity Fund***

Donate to this newly created fund to support five historically marginalized, local community-led organizations: DARE, PrYSM, AMOR, George Wiley Center, and ARISE. Your funds will support: immediate Covid-19 relief, local and state advocacy for public health policies, economic recovery, and build local networks and resilient systems to sustain these communities for the long-term.

[risolidarityfund.org](http://risolidarityfund.org)

### ***Black Girl In Maine***

Become a patron of Shay Stewart Bouley's blog, Black Girl in Maine. Shay is an author, speaker, racial justice educator, and Executive Director of Boston-based civil rights organization, Community Change, Inc. [blackgirlinmaine.com](http://blackgirlinmaine.com)

**Google Document: Anti-Racism Resources for White People**, compiled by Sarah Sophie Flicker, Alyssa Klein, May 2020 [docs.google.com/document/d/1BRlF2\\_zhNe86SGgHa6-VlBO-QgirITwCTugSfKie5Fs/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR2CzV15\\_p02xyYyF1LXSzCyfDOtFqV28O-RdV\\_YCSHf1nkptb0-fX0-G4](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BRlF2_zhNe86SGgHa6-VlBO-QgirITwCTugSfKie5Fs/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR2CzV15_p02xyYyF1LXSzCyfDOtFqV28O-RdV_YCSHf1nkptb0-fX0-G4)

### ***Black Visions Collective***

**BVC**, a Minneapolis, MN based non-profit organization. Black Visions Collective envisions a world in which ALL Black Lives Matter. We use the guidance and brilliance of our ancestors as well as the teachings of our own experiences to pursue our commitment to dismantling systems of oppression and violence. We are determined in our pursuit of dignity and equity for all. [blackvisionsmn.org/about](http://blackvisionsmn.org/about)

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