

Shared Agreements

Shared agreements help us create a space in which transformation can occur. Developing group norms together is a powerful thing for people to do when engaging in sensitive work. While we encourage your group to create the “codes of conduct” that will work best for you, these are the shared agreements White Awake defines as essential for white anti-racist work:

1) Create a nonjudgmental space.

- Judgment can shut people down, distort the truth, and even serve as an escape from uncomfortable realities. We commit ourselves to refraining from judgment and turn instead to descriptive language when speaking about our personal experience, the effects of particular actions, and our personal or collective values. It is amazing how powerful simply speaking the truth can be.
- Taking a nonjudgmental attitude also means “not judging ourselves for judging”. When we notice judgment, we commit ourselves to simply acknowledging it and turning back to descriptive language.

2) Share from personal experience.

- While some cross talk and discussion can be helpful, White Awake encourages people engaged in anti-racist group work to prioritize speaking from personal experience. This means refraining from offering unsolicited advice or criticism and instead speaking directly about our own emotions, experiences, and values.

3) Respect time limitations.

- Anytime we come together to work as a group there is a limit to the time we have. Beginning and ending on time is an important way to show respect for one another’s commitments, and it helps participants relax and show up for the work at hand. During the process of group sharing, it is important for each individual to respect the amount of time they have to speak. Talking longer than is allowed for takes away from other participants’ ability to share and decreases the diversity of voices heard in a group space.

4) Acknowledge that “we are all learning.”

- When coming together as a group, there will always be some people with more racial experience or awareness than others. Furthermore, your group may turn to White Awake for consulting or bring in a trainer or some other “expert” to supplement your work. It is important to acknowledge, from the very beginning, that regardless of experience or expertise, everybody is learning. No one has a monopoly on the truth. Everyone has valuable experience and wisdom to share.

5) Acknowledge that “our experience is complex” without denying the reality of racism or its effects on our lives.

- Our identities and our experiences are complex. We have come together to look at how we relate to race as white people, but we can never completely separate our racial experience from other pieces of our identity (such as gender, sexual orientation, educational background, and economic class). While working together at this time, we will attempt to honor this complexity without being distracted from the fact that race is a social phenomena that has very specific implications for us as members of the racial category defined as “white”. (See “*Questions of power, privilege, inclusion and exclusion*” on the [Waking up to Race](#) page for more context.)