

On Showing Up, Staying in our Lane, and Doing the Work that is Ours: 8 Guideposts for White People Supporting Black Lives Matter

“...Solidarity is not meant to be comfortable. It is not shining light on yourself as ally at the expense of the oppressed who are demanding their counter-narratives be centralized. It is understanding that your whiteness protects you from certain things which in turn prohibits you from participation in others, because at the end of the day, when you get tired of marching and chanting, you can put your hands down and go home...

Some of us simply don't have that luxury.” - www.frequency.strikingly.com

1. Remember, you are good and you are racist: We were handed racism, and didn't choose it. White supremacy is foundational to our society and from a young age, we are all socialized by it as individuals; no amount of analysis makes us immune. Sitting with, and moving through the defensiveness, guilt and shame that arises when we talk about racism is part of our important work of unlearning and growing.

2. Listen, follow the lead, and elevate the voices of those who are most affected: As white people, it is not our place to decide what a community response should be to the murder of a black person. We should be lifting up voices of those who are directly affected by state violence in our social media, newsletters and events, rather than centering our own voices. This is a movement led by Black folks, and our actions should support this leadership. White people shouldn't be running the all meetings, grabbing the megaphones, or being spokespeople for the movement.

3. Learn about your areas of unawareness: Just as a fish has a hard time discerning and explaining water, white people have a hard time noticing white privilege and white supremacy. It is our responsibility as individuals and communities to learn about these areas of unawareness. A big one is our tendency to dictate and take over, and then wonder why no people of color are involved. The personal work of undoing our racism is essential to working with other people.

4. Be accountable and build relationships: Take criticism. Getting called out is uncomfortable, but it is how we grow. Be okay with making mistakes (rather than defensively focusing on how you were called out) and then make up for them. Since part of socialization for white folks is avoiding conflict, normalizing discomfort can be liberating. Build relationships with other white people where you are giving and receiving feedback about your white privilege and cross racial relationships to connect across difference.

5. Stay focused: By focusing their attention on vandalism, white folks are silencing a more important narrative: the state has taken yet another Black life. White people critiquing how people of color respond to oppression continues a pattern of marginalization and control. Keep the conversation focused on why we protest, not how we do it.

6. Work to better understand your white privilege: White privilege means that you are not targeted by systems of racial oppression; it is white privilege in action to deplore violence on both sides and to remain silent or neutral. For people of color, being silent, remaining calm or staying out of it means that the next person to be murdered may be their loved one. On the streets and in groups, we can feel entitled to take on leadership roles (another illustration of white privilege). We need to stay in our lane, let go of control, take support roles, and be flexible. We can use our access to other white people to talk about to friends, family members and co-workers.

7. Make the connections: The systemic state violence towards people of color includes the disproportionate imprisoning of people of color, the militarization of police, and racial profiling (and much more). The militarization of the police is directly related to our war-making abroad. Anti-immigrant legislation, policies targeting Muslims, and hate crimes towards other targeted groups all keep the status quo in place. Making these connections is essential.

8. Acknowledge that you are not “better” than other white people: A common distancing behavior for white folks, especially in progressive circles, is to applaud themselves for “getting it” and disparaging those who don't. This pattern is part of our socialization in a capitalist system that encourages rugged individualism and competition. Instead, we need to draw near other white people, embracing the idea of collective liberation, personal responsibility and accountability.