

HUFFINGTON POST- US

How to Fix a Microaggression You Didn't Mean to Commit

02/17/2017 11:37 am ET | Updated Feb 17, 2017



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Google defines a microaggression as “a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.”

Okay, we all make mistakes and have that “oops!” moment. We are all socialized and have implicit bias. Sometimes, it comes out in our language and it is offensive. When we look behind our words, we might realize that we don't actually believe the bias behind our words. When this “oops” moment happens, don't worry. You can fix it.

(For examples of microaggressions see [here](#)).

Here are some tips to keep in mind when trying to repair your relationship.

1. Know the difference between intent and impact.

Everyone knows you didn't mean to hurt their feelings. What is more important than saying, "I never meant to..." is to acknowledge that words have an impact that is separate from your intent. The purpose of your apology is to take responsibility for your impact. Your words should reflect that.

[Related: [Public Relations Expert Shares How to Communicate More Effectively](#)]

2. Throw away your defenses.

If you really are apologizing, you need to throw out your defensiveness. It is not about you. It is about the impact your words had on a colleague, parent, friend, spouse or stranger.

If the other person senses defensiveness then your apology will appear less genuine. This takes some practice and is worthwhile to be aware of when it comes up.

3. Put together your apology.

Depending on what you said, you may not even know if offense was taken. Or maybe you said something cringe-worthy that obviously necessitates an apology.

Below is a template you can work from:

"Hey there, I was wondering if I could talk to you for a second. The other day I said something that I think was offensive. I have thought about it and want to apologize to you. I know my words have an impact and I am sorry for the impact they made on you. I value our friendship/relationship/camaraderie and want you to know I am aware of what I said, I take responsibility for it and am working on it."

4. Move forward.

No need to go back and keep addressing it. Just work on improving that relationship whether it is at work or at home.

It is possible that your apology is not accepted. Take comfort that you tried and did the right thing by addressing the issue in the first place. Give it time. Your future actions will show your commitment to addressing your implicit bias.

[Related: [Improving Workplace Communication with Difficult People \(And Bosses\)](#)]

5. Find a friend.

In addressing our unconscious assumptions, mentorship is helpful. Find someone you feel "safe" with and who has a solid understanding of microaggressions and implicit bias. Have conversations with them on these topics to increase your knowledge, challenge yourself and check your bias. It is the best and most interactive way to grow.

6. A message from *The Berenstain Bears*.

Like Mama Bear said: "It's never too late, to correct a mistake."

You have the power of language! Move past your embarrassment or nervousness to repair that bridge.

This article previously appeared on [Boundless Awareness](#).

Pooja Kothari is the Founder of Boundless Awareness, providing a safe, structured space to explore the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and many other biases.