

Navigating Microaggressions



Addressing challenging behaviour and supporting trainees
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Today's session

- House rules
- Overview of microaggressions
- Examples of microaggressions
- Breakout discussion
- Impact vs Intention
- Tools to support trainees

Session rules

- Listen to learn, don't talk over each other
- Everyone's experiences are valid, even if they're different from our own.
- Make a note of anything you have questions about or that resonates with you
- I'll give you a chance to ask questions throughout the presentation, just raise your hand and I'll come back to you.

What are microaggressions?

Quote from **Sailing through rough waters**

- “Microaggressions are small things that hurt in everyday life. Something which, by itself, would be minor, but pile up over time and cause real harm. Like a paper-cut. If you had one paper-cut, it would be no big deal.”
- “But ten paper-cuts every day, would really start to hurt. By the tenth paper-cut that day, you might react a little strongly. Others might say “wow, they’re overreacting to that paper-cut. It’s just one little cut.”
- “They don’t realise you’re covered in them.”



Dr Chester Pierce, 1927-2016

3 types of microaggressions

Microassaults

- Consciously and mostly often deliberate offensive and avoidant behaviour.
- Looks like outright discrimination.
- Easier to identify and address.

Microinsults

- Intentionally and unintentionally communicates discriminatory messages based on stereotypes.
- Most common and regularly experienced type of microaggression.
- Often harder to identify than microassaults.

Microinvalidations

- Activity that implies an individuals experience of discrimination isn't real.
- Diminishes an individuals experience and identity.
- Most difficult kind of microaggression to identify.

3 forms of microaggressions



VERBAL

Most common and easiest to identify and challenge.

BEHAVIOURAL

Most insidious, more difficult to challenge

ENVIRONMENTAL

Easier to identify, can usually be supported by evidence

Judgements or characteristics attributed to specific groups of people – races, genders, age groups, etc. – that may or may not be true for any one specific individual within that group.

STEREOTYPES

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Subtle verbal or nonverbal insults, indignities, or denigrating messages directed toward an individual due to their marginalized identity. Often committed by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the hidden messages conveyed or the impact of their statements.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Subconscious attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes that influence our understanding, actions, and behavior when interacting with various identities.



Examples of microaggressions



Lived experience

“I walked into the consultation room and the patient was sat there with their son.

She looked at me and then looked at her son and said:

“Get me a doctor who speaks English.”



Lived experience



“There’s a members lift that MPs use, to get places quickly. I was in the lift and some other MP said:

“This lift really isn’t for cleaners”

Lived experience

“Throughout my life, I’ve had people underestimate me because I’m a wheelchair user. I should have expected that would be the case when I was training.

During an event our department held, one of the clinicians said to me,

“Gregory, I really admire you. You don’t allow your disability to hold you back from doing anything, you’ve really exceeded my expectations.”

“I guess he meant it as a compliment, but as a doctor, I didn’t think he’d have such a limited view of disability. Maybe I overestimated him.”



Lived experience

“I have worked in this hospital for 7 years and I can probably count on my fingers and toes twice, how many times people have ‘mistaken’ me for a nurse or cleaning staff.”

“One time stands out in my mind particularly. A child had spilled his juice on the ground. I wasn’t even on shift that day, I had come in grab my yoga mat from a friends office. I stopped closer to spill to answer my phone and the adult with the kid says, “Can you call someone to clean this up?”

“Without thinking too much into it, I told him that I’m not on shift and he asked me to get one of the other cleaners. I just kept walking. It’s almost as though he couldn’t conceive that I was anything besides a cleaner.”



Lived experience

“My supervisor and I went for a coffee to catch up.

I told her that I was finding it difficult to work with another clinician because it felt like he was always singling me out. And he even makes sexist jokes in my presence. I made a mistake on some paperwork and asked for his help and he said, “This is why my wife doesn’t work.”

He laughed, but I didn’t find it funny.



Discussion time

Activity

- In groups of 4 or 5, have a discussion about any of the previous examples given, or any personal examples you can draw on.

Discuss in your group:

- What the underlying message was in the statements made?
- What advice you might give a trainee
- What else might you do to support them.
- How can you create an environment that trainees feel comfortable to bring these challenges to you?



Impact: Individual and Organisational

Individual

- Internal dilemma for the individual experiencing microaggression.
- Loss of confidence and motivation in the workplace.
- Damaged professional trajectory and relationships.
- Lack of engagement in workplace activities (including meetings, social activities).
- Withdrawal from friends and family in social or other settings.
- Internalised imposter syndrome and damaged self-esteem.
- Minority stress: psychological and physical impact—see final slide for further reading

Organisational

- **Losing out on productivity.** if individuals experiencing microaggressions feel excluded and isolated, they will not perform at an optimum level.
- **Losing out on better decision making.** Individual may be afraid to share their ideas openly, therefore the organisation do not benefit from a broad, diverse range of thoughts.
- **Gaining a bad reputation.** A positive employer brand is key to keeping current and prospective employees engaged and productive. If microaggressions in conversations are seen as the norm in how people communicate with one another, this will seriously damage the reputation of the organisation, internally and externally.
- **Financial implication** as Microaggressions **CAN** be classed as harassment under the Equality Act 2010 depending on how the behaviour impacted the person and whether the behaviour was repetitive or escalates.

Approaches to challenging inappropriate behaviour

Clarify

- “Can you explain what you meant by....”
“You’ll have to explain that one to me.”

Separate

- “It might not be your intention, but it could be perceived badly when you say things like that.”

“I think you're trying to support me, but when you say things like that, it feels a bit invalidating.”

Share

- I used to say/think that too, but then I learned....

Direct

- “That’s not appropriate conversation for work.”

“What I’m hearing you say is That doesn’t seem like an appropriate discussion”

Supporting your trainees

Validate

- Assure them that they are not imagining problems.

Offer advice

- Ask them if they want your advice, or if they want to vent.
- Ask them if they want you to follow up with the person in question.

Signpost

- Freedom to Speak Up Guardians
- HR
- Trainee networks

Further reading

Hatch, S. L., Gazard, B., Williams, D. R., Frissa, S., Goodwin, L., & Hotopf, M. (2016) *'Discrimination and common mental disorder among migrant and ethnic groups: Findings from a South East London Community sample.* Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology.

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Thank you

