



BLAC Liberal Democrats

Black Lives Action Committee

Lib Dems guide to being a strong White ally

Since BLAC Lib Dems published its Policy Document and ‘Members guide to Microaggressions,’ we have received a good deal of feedback during Black History Month. BLAC Lib Dems would like to express gratitude for all the supportive statements, particularly those who stated that we had mislabeled overt racism as micro-aggressions. While we tend to agree, we also realize we need to take small steps towards progress in the Party. Thankfully BLAC Lib Dems receive just a handful of defensive or passive-aggressive comments.

The most critical feedback we received challenged us with “What kind of active support does a strong White ally provide to Black and other ethnic minority members ?”. BLAC Lib Dems have attempted to answer the question with this 10 point guide to how to be an ally;

- 1. LISTEN when marginalized people are talking.** The first job of an ally is to listen actively, but that’s just a first step. Don’t just listen politely waiting for your turn to launch into an anti-hate monolog. Listen and learn from people’s experiences; start to understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other injustice forms.

It has been noticed that occasionally some Lib Dems members will, after a certain amount of listening, get very proud of themselves and smug about their understanding. White members often fall into the trap of wanting to explain their new epiphanies to anyone who will listen. On the surface, this is harmless and well-meaning, but at a certain point, it can wobble towards a bizarre dynamic where liberal White people think they have a free pass to explain blackness to actual Black people. The only person you need to be explaining anything Black to is uninformed White people.

2. **Notice when racism is denied** and minimized by Party members and correct them, describe how minorities feel there is a problem, even if many members can't see it. Discuss how racism can manifest itself in many subtle ways. Explain that behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable; it is not just about hate, it can be subtle and does not have to be intentional.

3. **Don't dismiss lived experiences that are unfamiliar to you.** Just as economics influences everything we do, just as gender and gender politics influence everything we do, racism affects daily life. You are probably unaware of the hundreds of daily micro-aggression that Black people face, you might find yourself thinking someone is oversensitive to one minor transgression. If you hear yourself saying things like, "Are you sure that Chair was being racist? Because they didn't allow me to speak either" then STOP. As a White person, you're so accustomed to people having reasonable reactions to you that when a Black person points out a microaggression, some members assume they are overreacting. Microaggressions are like the dripping of a tap; it's not one drop that causes the floor to fall through the ceiling but thousands.

4. **Acknowledge your own internal biases.** It is impossible to be a White person in Britain without ingesting some sort of racially biased messaging. Almost everyone on the planet receives racially-biased messaging by design. As a White person, the only difference is that bias is in your favour and so baked into your psyche that you have the luxury of taking it for granted. So, to be an HONEST ally means being candid with yourself. If you are one of those people who insist they've never had a racist thought in their life, you are in very, very deep denial, and you genuinely can't be an ally.

5. **Speak up when other White people act like buffoons.** For a White ally, coming face-to-face with an openly problematic White person is when you finally get to put all those arguments you learned to use. If you say you are a White ally but remain silent when people are being mischaracterized or subjected to microaggressions or race hate, you are a fraud.

Taking a stand against injustice and calling out racist microaggressions is scary, complicated, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy. Still, ultimately it is the only healthy and moral thing to do.

Telling Black people to ignore microaggressions and race hate is race hate itself.

6. **Support the leadership aspirations of Black and other ethnic minorities.** Do this consistently, but not uncritically.

7. **Learn to say my name;** don't change or abbreviate it! Many first-generation immigrants had to learn an entirely new language; the least you can do is learn to pronounce one word.

8. **Don't take it personally.** So what if some members think there is a problem of racism within our Party? This isn't an attack on the Party values. The Liberal Democrat's values are sound; it's why we are all members. Sometimes Party loyalty can lead to unchecked judgment about Black pain and defensiveness. It might even lead some White members to feel the need to tell Black members, "Well, not ALL White people in the Party are like that. Look at me; I went on the anti-racism demonstration". The minute you hear yourself saying something messed up like that, stop talking.

9. **Don't expect "ally privileges"** Sometimes, I wonder if Party members join the movement for racial equality to make the world a safer and more equitable place for minorities, OR are they just hoping to stick around long enough to get a photo opportunity. Real Black allies don't want to take anything from Black people; they seek to level the playing field so that Black people can finally get some of the same privileges they get to take for granted.

10. **Don't expect Black or ethnic minority people to explain racism to you.** Do your own research; there is plenty of information online or in books on how racism manifests itself. It's exhausting to deal with microaggressions day-in-day-out. The last thing a Black or ethnic minority person needs is the added burden of educating White people about racial inequality.

11. **Join BLAC Lib Dems.** Come to our house with an open mind, receptive to learning. All members are welcome; all we ask is that you are prepared to make mistakes and be gently called out for them in a friendly and constructive manner.