Do you feel overwhelmed by the destructive power of racism, but unsure of what to do about it? The good news is, while the scope of racism in the U.S. might be vast, progress is possible. Step-by-step and piece-by-piece, we can work to end racism, but to begin this work, we must truly understand what racism is. First, review how sociologists define racism, then consider ways that each of us can work to end it.

**What Is Racism?**

Sociologists see racism in the U.S. as systemic; it is embedded in every aspect of our social system. This systemic racism is characterized by unjust enrichment of white people, unjust impoverishment of people of color, and an overall unjust distribution of resources across racial lines (money, safe spaces, education, political power, and food, for example). Systemic racism is made up of racist ideologies and attitudes, including subconscious and implicit ones that might even seem well-meaning.

It is a system that grants privileges and benefits to whites at the expense of others. This system of social relations is perpetuated by racist world views from positions of power (in the police or news media, for example), and alienates people of color who are subordinated, oppressed, and marginalized by such forces. It is the unjust costs of racism born by people of color, like denial of education and employment, incarceration, mental and physical illness, and death. It is a racist ideology that rationalizes and justifies racist oppression, like the media narratives that criminalize victims of police and vigilante violence, like George Floyd, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Freddie Gray, as well as many others.

To end racism, we must combat it everywhere it lives and thrives. We must confront it in ourselves, in our communities, and in our nation. No one person can do it all or do it alone, but we can all do things to help, and in doing so, work collectively to end racism. This brief guide will help get you started.
At the Individual Level

These actions are mostly for white people, but not exclusively.

1. Listen to, validate, and ally with people who report personal and systemic racism. Most people of color report that whites do not take claims of racism seriously. It’s time to stop defending the idea of a post-racial society, and recognize instead that we live in a racist one. Listen to and trust those who report racism, because anti-racism begins with having basic respect for all people.

2. Have hard conversations with yourself about the racism that lives within you. When you find yourself making an assumption about people, places, or things, challenge yourself by asking whether you know the assumption to be true, or if it is something you have simply been taught to believe by a racist society. Consider facts and evidence, especially those found in academic books and articles about race and racism, rather than hearsay and “common sense.”

3. Be mindful of the commonalities that humans share, and practice empathy. Do not fixate on difference, though it is important to be aware of it and its implications, particularly in terms of power and privilege. Remember that if any kind of injustice is allowed to thrive in our society, all forms can. We owe it to each other to fight for an equal and just society for all.

At the Community Level

1. If you see something, say something. Step in when you see racism occurring, and disrupt it in a safe way. Have hard conversations with others when you hear or see racism, whether explicit or implicit. Challenge racist assumptions by asking about supporting facts and evidence (in general, they do not exist). Have conversations about what led you and/or others to have racist beliefs.

2. Cross the racial divide (and others) by offering friendly greetings to people, regardless of race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, class, or housing status. Think about who you make eye contact with, nod to, or say “Hello” to while you are out in the world. If you notice a pattern of preference and exclusion, shake it up. Respectful, friendly, everyday communication is the essence of community.

3. Learn about the racism that occurs where you live, and do something about it by participating in and supporting anti-racist community events, protests, rallies, and programs. For example, you could:

   • Support [voter registration](#) and polling in neighborhoods where people of color live because they have historically been marginalized from the political process.
• Donate time and/or money to community organizations that serve the youth of color.
• Mentor white kids on being anti-racist citizens who fight for justice.
• Support post-prison programs, because the inflated incarceration rates of Black and Latino people lead to their long-term economic and political disenfranchisement.
• Support community organizations that serve those bearing the mental, physical, and economic costs of racism.
• Communicate with your local and state government officials and institutions about how they can help end racism in the communities they represent.

At the National Level

1. Advocate for Affirmative Action practices in education and employment. Countless studies have found that qualifications being equal, people of color are rejected for employment and admission to educational institutions at far greater rates than white people. Affirmative Action initiatives help mediate this problem of racist exclusion.

2. Vote for candidates who make ending racism a priority and vote for candidates of color. In our federal government, people of color remain underrepresented. For a racially just democracy to exist, we must achieve accurate representation, and the governing representatives must actually represent the experiences and concerns of our diverse populace.

3. Combat racism through national-level political channels. For example, you could:

   • Write to senators and members of Congress and demand an end to racist practices in law enforcement, the judiciary, education, and the media.
   • Advocate for national legislation that would criminalize racist police practices and institute ways to monitor police behavior, like body cameras or independent investigations.
   • Join the movement for reparations for the descendants of African enslaved people and other historically oppressed populations within the U.S., because theft of land, labor, and denial of resources is the foundation of American racism, and it is on this foundation that contemporary inequalities thrive.

Keep in mind that you don't have to do all of these things in your fight against racism. What's important is that we all do something.