

Talking Race, Taking Action

A guide to talking about race from Action for Race Equality

What is this?

This is a framework to prompt clear, honest, robust, and culturally sensitive conversations around racial terminology, to help organisations understand and address race in their communities. This is not a solution or a communications guide to what terminology organisations *should* use. Many organisations are anxious about sounding racist, but addressing racism is not just about language - it might be about policies, structures, and people. **We hope you will use our Six Actions to open up honest conversations around race, identity, and the impacts of racism in your community.**

Content and Safeguarding Note

Discussing race can be difficult, especially for people with lived experience of discrimination and racism. Facilitators of conversations should be sensitive to this and provide a safe environment for discussions, where language is treated with respect and care.

Who is this for?

Any organisation working to tackle racism and racial disparities will find this toolkit useful. This toolkit is designed primarily for organisations and groups who work with young Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage people, and for those young people themselves. It can be used in schools, colleges, workplaces, youth clubs, and community hubs to enhance conversations around racism.

Why is this important?

Language around race has always been constructed to oppress certain people and privilege others, and it is important for communities to actively decide what kind of language they want to use to describe themselves; what parts of their identities are important, salient, and measurable. There is no correct answer, and different people, and communities will develop their own terms.

In our survey, we found that 89% of respondents had heard terms that made them feel uncomfortable; in public spaces, at work, in the media, in school. Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage young people continue to experience racial disproportionality in school exclusions, employment opportunities, and contact with the criminal justice system.

Addressing racism requires us to have the language to identify and discuss it. Many people felt they had to minimise their language, their heritage, their culture, and even

their names to become more palatable to people who had control over education, employment, and justice.

Though race is a social construct with no scientific basis, racism is real and its effects are felt for young people throughout society. [Black Caribbean students face exclusion rates up to six times higher](#) than their white peers in some local authorities, [39% of ethnic minority 16- to 24-year-old are employed compared to 58% of white people](#) and [51% of children in prison are ethnic minorities](#). Having explicit conversations about racial terminology can help address the material effects of racism.

Why take action?

Conversations around identity and racism in the UK have become increasingly polarised. Racism is becoming more commonplace, marking an increasing need for everybody to take action to address inequality. Terminology can open the door to discussing racism, and identifying and addressing its effects at school, in the workplace, and in communities.

Importantly, language can give young people a sense of identity, and support everyone to have robust conversations about race that help address racism, and feel respected, and have their needs met in schools and workplaces.

Action for Race Equality (ARE) uses 'Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage' to be specific about the communities we work with and are affected by the racial disparities across education, employment, and criminal justice, which we are focused on addressing. We have developed this language to reflect the community of minority-led organisations we are part of, whilst also allowing us to speak to government equality data. Being a Black and Asian led organisations allow us to position ourselves firmly as part of the communities we are endeavouring to support.

Six Actions

1. Define Your Purposes
2. Consider Power
3. Build Shared Language
4. Be Specific
5. Be Explicit
6. Be Flexible

1. **Define Your Purposes** – why are you having these discussions and what issues are important to your community? You might consider; underrepresentation, diversity in leadership, disparities in recruitment, promotions and pay at work, or punitive measures and attainment at school. If you want to categorise and collect data about certain groups, what will that data be used for, and how will

you address what is uncovered. For example, will you be collecting and addressing evidence of ethnicity pay gaps? Make clear separations between terminology used for representation and internal networks from official recording of ONS category data for Right to Work, or other statutory uses.

2. **Consider Power** – Ensure that ethnic minority people are given the power to self-define and shape these conversations. Positionality is key - who is using terminology and in what contexts? ‘Nothing about us without us’, but also, don’t absolve those in leadership positions of responsibility. Avoid the trend of junior ethnic minority members of an organisation bearing the brunt of the work to raise and address racism as an issue.
3. **Build Shared Language** - There is always a gap between how terms are intended, and how terms are received by different audiences. Fear of this gap, and causing ‘offence’, can often be paralytic for organisations who do not invest in developing shared language. Shared understanding and collective agreement on accepted terms need to be built. Organisations might conduct surveys for employees to vote on shared language.
4. **Be Specific** - There are rich and varied terms people like to use for their complex and multi-layered identities. Individual identity terms are different from umbrella categories that help identify trends and build solidarity between racialised and minoritised groups. What collective terms work for the experiences your community wants to capture or represent? Consider why you might be drawn to euphemistic terms like ‘Talent’, ‘Difference’, or ‘Diversity’; it might feel more sensitive to avoid explicitly naming racism as a problem, but not doing so often allows it to continue unopposed.
5. **Be Explicit** - acknowledge your terminology choices; and outline the reasons and contexts for using them. You may choose to use different terms when speaking to different groups, including community groups, and employers, as well as for public communications or government data collection. Don’t expect terms to be universal; instead check in with the communities you wish to represent and ensure what you use resonates with them.
6. **Be Flexible**: commit to relearning and adapting and accept that there is no evergreen terminology. We cannot imagine that there will be a single authoritative and perpetual answer to what racial terminology is best. Communities will continue to break new ground about how they want to be defined, and existing language will take on new meanings over time.

What's Next?

We have a few suggestions to help get the ball rolling to discuss racial terminology and address racism in your community.

- Use our Terms to encourage discussion (more below!)
- Read our research report

Support in Addressing Disparities

Inquire with Action For Race Equality about [our training and development offer](#)

Once you've started these conversations, you might need other resources/support

- For Employers:
 - [Positive Action Guide for London's Chief Executives](#)
 - [Let's Talk About Race - Business in the Community](#)
- For schools
 - [Lit in Colour | Supporting inclusive reading in schools](#)
 - [The Black Curriculum](#)

For other organisations: [Reframing Race](#)

Use our terms to encourage discussion

The racial terminology discussed in our project used markers that were cultural, geographical, political, and colour based. Explore the terms we researched and use our Six Actions to facilitate conversations and take action in your community.

You might use our blog series to host weekly discussions and ask people to reflect on the topics:

- Terminology as a tool
- Diversity is a euphemism
- A Hostile Media Landscape
- On Britishness
- A Question of Colour
- "White Assumed": The Scales of Colourism
- The Numbers Game: Minorities and Majorities
- A Connected Collective

You might use Glossaries such as those created by ARE ([ARE Glossary of Terms: A spotlight on commonly used race terms](#)) or Reframing Race ([Contains Strong Language](#)) to help you introduce and understand these terms. Don't be constrained by definitions, instead

construct meaning as a community - 'when we say this, this is what **we** mean', whilst being aware that language can have history, nuance, and different interpretations. Be aware of negative stereotypes and language about certain ethnic groups and faith communities. Explain why a word or term is considered problematic.

When asked what racial terms respondents preferred to **use for themselves and their communities**, the top answers were:

- Black communities (16%)
- Global Majority (16%)
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) (11%)
- People of Colour (9%)
- Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage (6%)

When asked what terms people use when talking about race, approximately 40% of respondents reported never using the following terms, 'GRT', 'Romani (Gypsy)', 'Racially minoritised', 'Non-white', 'Black and minoritised', 'BME', 'Racially minoritised'.

Read our report to find out more about attitudes to these, and some of their advantages and shortcomings.

Appendix of Terms (Our Survey Terms):

- Black Communities
- Global Majority
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)
- People of Colour
- Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage
- Minoritised communities
- Black and Minoritised
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)
- Non White
- Racially Minoritised
- Irish Traveller
- Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller (GRT)
- Romani (Gypsy)
- White British
- Race
- Ethnicity