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Addressing Racial Injustice and Inequality

Why do we choose this as a topic for the EAP newsletter? What does racial justice and racial equity have to do with the workplace and our wellbeing? More of us are becoming aware of the reality of racial injustice. Momentum for change is growing. This brings hope and tremendous opportunity. The EAP wants to support and build on this, especially in the workplace. For those who are white and work where the population is predominantly white, you might not think a lot about race. If you work somewhere with quite a bit of diversity, you might assume that everything is fine because the problems might not be visible to you. However, racial injustice and inequality exist on some level across society. This includes the places where we work. What are some signs? First, if there isn't diversity in our workplace, we may ask "why not?". For those in Vermont, it may seem obvious that it has to do with our overall population mix. But that is often only a part of the story. Our workplace might have some diversity but with few people of color in leadership or supervisory positions, or there might be unequal pay between white and BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) employees. If social groups self-segregate on the basis of skin color, or if people of color tell us they don't feel completely welcome or safe where we work, this too indicates a problem. For white people, not seeing or feeling the

impact of racial inequality and prejudice is a choice. People of color don't have this choice. Every waking moment of their lives is affected by the color of their skin and the way they are treated based on this. Those of us who are white can support our neighbors of color by

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listening to and being open to what they have to say, and we can work to better understand the pain caused by racial injustice. At work, BIPOC employees often experience resistance and backlash when they speak out. Yet, they must speak out if anything is to change. When white people are open, curious and listen deeply, this supports BIPOC voices. When we have relationships and connect with people from different racial backgrounds, this helps transform our views and deepen our commitment to change. The courage to participate in difficult conversations while showing respect and deep listening, is also important. Often this means sitting with and exploring our own discomfort. It can be painful to listen to accounts of injustice and to consider our own place with this in society. Likewise, it

is difficult to trust and be open when we feel angry about injustices we've experienced. We are learning that racial inequality is in part systemic. This means our policies and institutions can perpetuate differences in basic rights and opportunities between white people and people of color, regardless of individual attitudes. This can include access to voting, economic resources, fair treatment in the legal system, experiences in school, with social services agencies and access to healthcare. The injustices perpetuated by the system are often not obvious to those of us who are not people of color.

Systemic racial inequality also shapes the way our history is portrayed and how news is reported, and thus affects our beliefs and viewpoints. To challenge injustice may mean challenging the information and assumptions we have all inherited. In addition to listening, and caring to learn about others' experiences, and doing the hard work of confronting our own thoughts and beliefs, we can help by showing up, speaking up, accepting that we will make mistakes in this work, and being open to feedback from people whose backgrounds differ from ours. There is important work to the wellbeing of our society. The EAP is here and ready to support our members with his challenging work as individuals, in work groups, and at the organizational level.



EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

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