

WAYS TO TALK ABOUT RACE IN THE WORKPLACE



Talking about race at work with colleagues or an employer can be uncomfortable for some. In many instances the topic can be avoided altogether so that potential offence or awkwardness is avoided. However, in doing this we can exclude others and create a working environment where Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) colleagues feel ignored, with their voices and opinions unheard.

NHS finance is constantly striving to be an inclusive and supportive workplace for everyone, regardless of background or experience. And so, in order to improve, learn and progress, we have shared some ideas and ways to help you get involved in conversations around race.

- **Educating yourself** is a good starting point. There are so many books, articles, blogs, podcasts, videos and pieces of academic research that you can access online or from your local library that will undoubtedly help you to understand different races, opinions, and experiences from your own. A big worry for some is using the wrong terminology or pronouns and this can be felt to be a barrier to addressing the subject of race (and diversity-related issues). It is more than likely that if you take up further reading and develop your knowledge, you will learn how to address people correctly and educate yourself about the issues that people face every day in terms of racism and other types of bias.
- **Make a conscious effort to chat with colleagues of a different race to you.** Why not ask them about their experiences in work? Are they positive? Do you both enjoy the same aspects of work? Or are they facing challenges or barriers that you may not be facing? By opening up the conversation in relation to work, you will have common ground to start from and may even identify areas of your own working environment that you can help change for the better for everyone, together.
- **Networking** within NHS finance is a fantastic benefit and resource that many already take advantage of. A great example is when internal networks have been set up for BAME colleagues or colleagues that identify as LGBTQ+ (and other protected groups) in organisations. This is something you could actively get involved in to better understand the colleagues that you work with. By attending different networks and meetings like this, you will most likely be exposed to conversations around the different characteristics people identify with and ways in which they address each other. Also, if you are not Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group, that does not necessarily mean you will not be welcome at BAME network meetings or events. Why not get involved in your own organisation's internal network meetings / events? It is an easy way to build on your professional networks and to learn from others.
- **Understand that talking about race can be uncomfortable for everyone**, including BAME colleagues. However, having a conversation should bring out the feeling of what it is like to be in someone else's shoes – widening your perspective and understanding of someone different to you.
- **You may come across someone being inappropriate or offensive when talking about race.** If you do so in your own workplace then you should call this out to keep others accountable. It is not good enough to just know that it is not appropriate, it must be stopped right away, and you can help educate others and raise awareness by doing this.
- **Try not to over-worry about saying the wrong thing.** Have confidence and stop avoiding the conversation. We can all make mistakes and we should recognise that this is a learning process. If you do make a mistake on your journey to learn more, most people are willing to help you understand this issue better rather than calling you out for making the mistake.
- **There is no perfect way** to navigate through the world of what some might dismissively refer to as 'political correctness'; however, it is the right thing to do to act in ways that are inclusive, and to be kind to one another. If you feel that a conversation is being avoided and that it may end up causing more harm in doing so, then why not be the person to approach the topic first and open up the conversation?