

SUPPORTING GRADUATE STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED INCIDENTS OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE

LISTEN

If the student independently shares their experience with you, listen. It can be difficult to share and doing so is likely a sign of trust and hope.

If you hear about the incident from someone else, reach out and offer to listen.

Students may worry that you will not be interested, and not want to burden you with the issues. They will likely appreciate your interest and reaching out.

OFFER SUPPORTS

Offer to help with finding supports and resources.

It's okay if you don't know the pathway right away. Learn or check in with someone who might know and follow up with the student. Try asking the EDI committee or Graduate Coordinator.

Student Wellness Services offers culturally competent and specific counselling support for students affected by social injustice, racism, and other experiences of trauma.

Four Directions offers a support group for people who have experienced racism. Though not advertised, non-Indigenous folks have been invited, and can inquire for more information.

Human Rights and Equity Office: Human Rights Advisor can assist in identifying, articulating and addressing concerns (such as discrimination, harassment, failure to accommodate)

REDUCE OTHER STRESSORS

Suggest changes to deadlines and/or work expectations, and encourage prioritization of self-care and well-being.

Check-in about well-being at your next meeting time. If you are unsure about timing of checking in, it's okay to ask for feedback.

While it may seem like a student should "get over" an issue within a few hours or days, events of social injustice do have an impact which can be hard to name and is often cumulative. Try to be supportive with students as they move through processing the event.

Avoid assuming the student is ready to go back to a regular workload at a particular point, and instead check-in with them in a supportive way.

Offer the student guidance regarding seeking formal accommodations if they will need to delay or miss academic work (e.g., course work)

VALIDATE

These experiences are not rare, though it may be rare for you to hear about them.

Know that it is hard to share such experiences.

Avoid judging their reaction, their behaviour, or the situation they were in.

Avoid arguing about their experience or trying to rationalize it as only their perception.

It is real and it is their experience.

CENTRE ON THE STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE

Avoid focusing on your own emotions or reactions no matter how uncomfortable or distressed you feel. You can discuss your reactions later with someone else.

If you have experienced social injustice, you may offer to share your experience. Be cautious not to minimize the student's experience by making comparisons.

Recognize that experiences of social injustice often cause emotional injury and can be traumatic.



MAKE TIME TO LEARN

Avoid expecting the student to educate you about why the incident was offensive and harmful.

Work on learning about systems of oppression and the experiences of others through books, online searches, discussions with trusted friends (avoid tokenizing those from marginalized groups), and/or the EDI committee.

As an opportunity for further action, reflect on how this incident might inform the social dynamics within your classroom and lab – who gets included, who gets excluded or marginalized, who holds social capital, etc. – and changes you might make to spaces you are in that will help prevent social injustice (even if the event did not occur there).

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