

Ideas paraphrased and adapted from
"Ten Simple Things You Can Do to Improve Race Relations"
by Charles A. Gallagher

Do you want to improve race relations in the world? If the answer is "YES!" here are 10 simple things you can do:

1. **Talk to your friends and family.** Especially if someone is overtly racist or uses stereotypes, politely and without judgment, ask them questions and share your thoughts about why they have such animosity towards a whole group of people. Did they have a bad experience with someone from that group? Have they (or their parents or grandparents) ever been the target of animosity because of their background, religion, or nationality? How did that encounter make them feel?
2. **Avoid Stereotypical Language** - Be mindful of words like "all" or "always". These types of words should cause a red flag to go up. Ask them if they really believe that all people in that group actually share the same behaviors and attitudes.
3. **Racism is NOT funny.** Don't tolerate racist jokes. Saying, "I don't think putting other people down is funny," or "I have gay friends and I don't want to hear you trashing them" or "My brother-in-law is black (or Jewish or Asian, etc.) and I think he's great" are all good strategies. If you don't speak up, you're condoning their beliefs and behavior. Inaction is a form of action.
4. **Be Introspective.** How can we live our lives so that social or peer pressure do not push us toward racist, prejudiced, or bigoted beliefs or actions? If you find yourself being prejudiced, ask yourself why you acted or behaved that way. If you are a bystander and did nothing, ask yourself why. If you let a racist joke be told, ask yourself why. What stopped you from speaking up? Be willing to change how you think about groups different from your own.
5. **Be a Good Citizen** - Vote in every election. Take time to find out candidates' positions on policies that have implications for race relations. Don't support politicians who are racially divisive or manipulate people's fears. [The website <http://www.splcenter.org> has a lot of information about politicians and hate groups]
6. **Be a Critical Reader, Viewer, and Listener** - When you watch TV and movies or while you read books, magazines, internet sites, or listen to music, be critical. What stereotypical images or messages are you getting about ethnic and racial groups and/or gender? How are racial and ethnic groups and/or the different genders being represented? Are they in a wide range of roles or only certain ones? The mass media provides the images, symbols, and narratives that shape the way we understand society. How is mass media trying to manipulate you?

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7. Learn Your Family's and Community's History. Learn about race relations in your community. How has it changed? How has race influenced your family members and how have things changed since they were children? Your elders are resources. Talk to them about events in the past and the present.

8. Teach Through Example. Be a positive role model to your friends and all the younger people in your life. You probably have a number of children and young adults who look up to you for guidance. Explain to those who view you as a role model what it means to live in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic society. You have something to offer older generations, too -- oftentimes children and grandchildren can influence the thinking of their parents and grandparents.

9. Step Out of Your Comfort Zone. Involve yourself in activities that place you in an environment where you are exposed to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Think about attending museums, music events, ethnic festivals, restaurants, and stores to expand your appreciation of different ethnicities and nationalities. Who do you hang out with? Are there some students in your classes or your workplace who seem as if they'd be interesting people to get to know? Is it time to reach out and make new friends?

10. Know Thyself. Consider the following questions:

- Do you live in a community that is racially homogeneous?
- Outside of school, is your life composed of people who look like you?
- Are your best friends all the same race?
- In what ways is your school segregated?
- How have your upbringing and environment influenced your racial attitude?
- How might being in the minority shape a person's point of view or self-esteem?
- Have your ideas of race ever changed? What happened to change them?

Passage from Guardian by Julius Lester:

"...this is a novel about identity. Whom and what we identify ourselves with determines our characters, determines who we are, and what we do. Whose opinion matters to you most? When you know that, when you know whom it is you most care about pleasing, you know who you are. We make choices every day that shape the content of our characters (p 127)."

"If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."