

Combating Discrimination and Fear

Asian Americans have been the victims of a spate of violent attacks recently. While some theorize that these attacks stem from discriminatory statements, especially in the media, about the origin of the COVID-19 outbreak, no conclusive pattern for the attacks has been identified.

Given the random nature of these attacks, there is little that can be done by individuals in the Asian American community to prevent them. What's important is to be calm, remain vigilant of your surroundings when out in public and heed sound advice on safety. Another important step is to understand the fear you may be feeling and to learn how to address it. For those who are not Asian, this is also an important time to stand up against discrimination in any form.

Consider the following tips for how to cope with fear and to confront racism in any form:

- **Validate it.** Fear is normal. Everyone experiences fear. By understanding that you are not alone in your feelings, you may be able to better accept it and move on.
- **Share your fear.** Confronting your fears is difficult enough; doing it alone can be overwhelming. Build a support system by telling those close to you how you feel. They may be able to help you get through rough situations.
- **Create a safe environment.** Certain tasks, events or settings may be triggering your fear. Stick to familiar, safe places and faces until you are ready to face fear-provoking situations.
- **Do research.** Do you fear needles? Find others who feel the same way and find out how they overcame their fears. Understand what if any danger exists; this can help to keep fear within an acceptable range.
- **Understand your level of control.** No one has control over every aspect of his or her life. Focus on what you do have control over and the strengths you possess. Then, use some of that strength when confronting your fears.
- **Be patient.** Fear does not leave as suddenly as it appears. Give yourself time to cope, and work on overcoming your fear every day, little by little.

Preventing Fear

While you cannot totally avoid fear, you can take steps to keep your body and mind healthy and balanced. Because stress can aggravate fear, the key is to keep your stress levels low by:

- Getting enough rest
- Exercising regularly
- Eating healthy meals on a regular schedule
- Avoiding stimulants, such as caffeine and nicotine
- Avoiding depressants, such as alcohol or tranquilizers
- Staying organized
- Avoiding taking on too many projects, commitments and engagements
- Doing relaxing exercises, such as breathing, yoga, meditation and muscle-relaxation techniques

Helping Others Cope with Fear

If a loved one is experiencing fear, here are a few simple steps you can take to help lessen his or her stress and anxiety levels:

- **Be aware of typical fear reactions.** Sleep disturbances or nightmares, social withdrawal, reverting to childlike behaviors and a lack of focus on work or school can be indicators of fear. If these symptoms are present, you may want to talk with your loved one.
- **Listen.** Be available when he or she wants to talk. Refrain from offering too much advice; instead, try to be understanding.
- **Be patient.** Fear can be limiting; it can be especially difficult to understand if you cannot comprehend the basis of the fear. Try to remember that everyone has different fears and levels of fear.
- **Suggest that your loved one seek professional help.** Patience and understanding can only go so far. A therapist can help your loved one identify the root of the problem and determine how to best deal with the fear.

Confronting Bias and Racism

Teaching Tolerance, an education resource from the Southern Poverty Law Center, recommends a four-step process for speaking up against bias, whatever the cause:

1. Interrupt

Interrupting means taking a time out. It shows the person that what they've said is important enough to pause your conversation to address it.

2. Question

We're all familiar with questions that are really warnings: "What did you just say to me?" or "Are you really going to do that?" But in this context, the goal of questioning is to better understand why the person said what they did.

3. Educate

The key to educating is to continue the conversation. The goal isn't to just provide facts about the topic generally to the person you're talking to with, but to explain why what they've said needs rethinking.

That means that to educate people about racism, we need to understand the root of that racism. If someone doesn't understand why a comment they made was racist, you can educate them about the long history of stereotyping and attacking immigrants—and Asian people, specifically—during times of war, pandemic and natural disaster. You can explain how this stereotype is wrong and harmful.

4. Echo

It takes an effort to speak up against racist ideas and language. This is particularly true of people who are targeted by that language. When someone else speaks out against racist language, echo them. Thank them, and emphasize or amplify their message any way you can. This not only encourages more speaking up—it also ensures that no one thinks silence in response to biased ideas or language means you're OK with it.

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