

20 'Simple Things' to Centre Black Youth Wellbeing



Learning about anti-Black racism and understanding the historical roots and present-day manifestations is critical for anti-Black racism action.

Finding concrete ways to challenge, disrupt, and combat systematic anti-Black racism in our individual practices and organizational policies can be a challenge.

- How can we move from knowledge to practice – from anti-Black racism *learning* to anti-Black racism *action*?
- What is the **one simple thing**, in your personal practice, organization, or professional practice, that you will focus on implementing to improve outcomes for Black youth, starting today?

We asked participants who had completed [Centering Black Youth Wellbeing: A Certificate on Combatting Anti-Black Racism](#) to reflect on these questions and share with others on the [Community of Practice](#) on the Virtual Café.

Here are examples of their responses on **10 individual practices** and **10 organizational practices** that can be implemented to centre Black youth and improve Black youth wellbeing.

10 'SIMPLE THINGS': PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS TO COMBAT ANTI-BLACK RACISM

01. Continuously educate yourself on anti-Black racism and Black experiences.

“One simple thing I can do to centre Black youth wellbeing in my work is to continue to educate myself on anti-Black racism and Black experiences, and listen deeply to Black colleagues, staff, partners, and youth participants.” – Siobhan

02. Acknowledge the experiences of Black youth, listen to their stories, and support their goals.

“I think for me personally, it is listening to our Black youth and acknowledging their experiences and partnering with them to take action to help them achieve their goals and support their wellbeing and success. One of the other things that I can do personally is share my own experiences and be authentic and vulnerable with them in sharing how I was able to navigate through challenges posed by anti-Black racism and offer to be a mentor and part of the support system for those youth who may be facing similar challenges.” – Derrick

“Listen! I still find there are some in my sphere of influence who do not trust or believe the lived experience that Black youth and families share with us. One simple thing I can do is advocate for us to listen, engage, and earnestly respond to the stories and experiences that are vulnerably shared with us.” – Scott

03. Work with a trauma-informed lens.

“One simple thing to do is work with a trauma-informed lens, to believe Black youth, ask them how to support them, learn more about any barriers they might have, facilitate access to supports, be constant and dependable.” – Claire

“I agree that adopting a trauma-informed stance/approach is super important and I would add that (at least for myself) part of a trauma-informed approach is working to facilitate ‘braver’ spaces where service users can give honest and frank feedback about how I ‘show up’ and, specifically, where/how I may have mis-stepped or caused harm, whether intentional/conscious or not. I think this kind of relational accountability and relationship repair is a deeply important, if not under-acknowledged, aspect of trauma-informed work.” – Natalie

04. Schedule time for critical self-reflexivity.

“My start is scheduling time each week to engage in critical reflexivity and to partner with my colleague for accountability as I unlearn and relearn on an ongoing basis.” – Stephanie

“I really appreciated Dr. Wade’s presentation on critical self-reflection, especially the focus on the action portion of ongoing reflection. That is something I am going to be mindful of as I move forward with serving Black youth. Not just making time for reflection and examining my practice but also identifying what repairs, learnings, and changes I need to make in response to those inevitable missteps.” – Anastasia

“I, too, would like to include continuous self-reflexivity practices in my work while engaging with Black youth. This will ensure I am creating safe spaces for the youth to interact while also ensuring I am doing my due diligence in providing trauma-free, anti-oppressive social work.” – Kiaunna

05. Conduct a ‘diversity audit’ of materials shared with youth.

“Doing a ‘diversity audit’ of the books I share with students has been incredibly important in my own practice. For a year I tracked the types of books I was sharing with students. I tracked the racial background and gender of the authors, illustrators, main characters, representation within the story, antagonists, protagonists, etc. By the end I had a clear picture of any inherent biases I had when selecting books. Having that data has allowed me to more critically examine what I am selecting and be more proactive in my selections.” – J.

06. Prioritize sharing knowledge of Black/African contributions, historically and ongoing.

“One thing I find important in working with youth is to prioritize sharing the vast knowledge of African contributions to human advancement historically and to emphasize the various Black leaders of today in numerous fields who are actively changing the world. One of the youth who I work with has now found a strong interest in cosmology after being introduced to Star Talk hosted by scientist and educator Neil deGrasse Tyson. The simple act of seeing positive representation of your people is empowering, especially in a system designed to promote negative aspects constantly.” – Maxwell

07. Challenge language used to describe Black youth.

“One simple thing that I will continue to do in my work is to challenge the language used to describe students. Aggressive, violent, defiant – a question we were taught to always ask is, ‘According to who?’ I am going to push all educators I work with to use asset-based language when discussing students, and observations rather than judgements when focusing on behaviours teachers find difficult.” – Sarah



“For non-Black folks, it’s important to translate our knowledge into action. One of the things I am constantly working on is intervening on an interpersonal level when instances of anti-Blackness happen (between colleagues or with clients). This can look like correcting language, stereotypes, or assumptions, as well as being aware of non-verbal anti-Black behaviours that non-Black folks engage in (ex: continually cutting someone off/speaking over them/dismissing ideas, having less patience with Black folks, etc.). Being able to identify and speak up in the moment in a way that doesn’t escalate things or put the Black individual’s safety at risk is really important.” - Charissa

08. Speak up in uncomfortable situations; centre Black perspectives and experiences, and support Black colleagues openly.

“As a Black youth myself, I can start by speaking up in situations that make me uncomfortable and bringing Black issues to the forefront whenever possible, mainly by adapting mainstream conceptions of youth issues to centre Black youth perspectives and experiences. I can also make my Black colleagues at school and work feel seen by openly uniting with them in solidarity and upliftment, and making sure that they always have a seat at the table.” – Ijaabo

“I can create more space and make room for the diverse stories and experiences of Black youth. In the work I do around masculinities, a lot of care and intention is taken to prepare our space where participants’ authentic selves are welcome. It means being more intentional of naming and invoking the importance of Black experiences in our spaces, to elevate the voices, joys, and struggles.”

– Mitch

09. Advocate for Black youth voices to be incorporated into decision-making and honour their time and expertise with compensation/honoraria.

“One simple thing I can do is to pay Black youth to participate as leaders who review and critique our programming, and have their say on how to improve it. I can take that one step further and try to facilitate conversations between this leader group and the organization that I work for, so that the youth may have their say not only on one program, but on the organization as a whole, its mission, strategies, and programming” – Mike



10. Be receptive to criticism, learning, and unlearning based on your privilege and positionality.

“One simple thing is to be open to conversations about anti-Black racism and openly correct one another or allow oneself to be corrected. I find that sometimes in workplaces we push comments and our concerns under the rug rather than speaking out or taking criticisms as an educational experience. This can also relate to our privileges, and as a biracial Asian-Canadian, we don’t realize how rooted anti-Black racism can be in our own cultures until we take a step back and be open to these conversations.” – Samantha

10 ‘SIMPLE THINGS’: PRACTICES FOR COMBATTING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN ORGANIZATIONS

01. Centre Black youth voices and include Black youth in program design, development, and evaluation.

“For my organization, one simple yet impactful action would be to involve Black youth in the design and development of programs aimed at supporting their success. This means actively engaging them in the decision-making process, seeking their input, and co-creating initiatives that directly address their challenges and uplift their wellbeing.” – Trinez

“My practice adopts the disability rights rally of, ‘Nothing about us, without us,’ which also influences the way I work with youth. Listening and amplifying their voices, while continually checking myself and my own power and privileges. Who’s at the decision-making table? Why/why not are Black youth there, and how is racism and ageism (amongst other intersections) influencing this?” – Mica

“One thing that I am currently working on with my students is creating a Black Student Union. Where I live (and in the high school I teach), there is a very small percentage of Black students. In previous conversations with my Black students, they have told me how they don’t feel like a priority within the Board or connected to their school. By formally bringing our Black students together with the Union, it not only creates an opportunity for them to lend their voices and stories, but it creates a space for them within their school where they are represented. Also, it also allows our Board to work with these students when it comes to policies that impact them.” – Ms. Laura

02. Develop partnerships with, collaborate with, and refer to Black-led and Black-focused organizations.

“Rather than creating programs and services for Black youth and families in mainstream organizations, support Black-led and Black-focused organizations in their work. Learn about what they do – where the collaborative opportunities are – provide referrals – engage to ensure a spectrum of services and supports are available for Black youth and families – do what Black youth and families need – and not trying to fit them into what you are offering – be flexible – listen – advocate – evolve – be respectful – learn – be humble and use your privilege to support and recognize Black brilliance.” – Kelly

“One simple thing I can do to centre Black youth wellbeing in my work is to make sure that I always include the knowledge, the vision, and the experiences of Black youth in every step of delivering a program, from planning to implementation and evaluation. And in order to do that, I need to make sure that my organization nurtures relationships with other organizations that are youth-led and Black-led. I don’t think this process is necessarily simple. However, making sure that we keep that in mind in all our work is essential.” – Catherine

“One of the biggest problems projects run into, in my experience, is not properly engaging partners and stakeholders (whether that means that partners/stakeholders weren’t engaged at all, weren’t engaged at the right time, or weren’t engaged in a way that met their requirements/interests).” – Joe

03. Go beyond just listening; take action to demonstrate your accountability to Black youth.

“I agree that listening to Black youth is critical. At an organizational level, it is important to not only provide safe spaces for Black youth to share their voice, it is equally important to respond to what is heard. Listening that does not result in action/in a response can lead to mistrust – you heard a problem and/or a solution but nothing was done. Listening combined with action/response bolsters wellbeing and activates change.” – Kathy

“My organization would benefit from continued training opportunities and discussions that focus on cultural competence. These opportunities and discussions must be met with implementing action items, and not simply acknowledging concerns or issues.” – Sarah

04. Recognize the diversity of Black experiences and intersectional Black identities.

“Understanding that the experiences and perspectives within the Black community are diverse, this approach allows us to embrace the richness of their cultures while ensuring that our efforts are inclusive and genuinely meet the needs of Black youth. It’s about fostering spaces where their voices are not only heard but actively incorporated into the fabric of our programs and strategies.” – Trinez



“One simple way that I will centre Black youth wellbeing is to continuously view our practices and policies through an intersectional lens and encourage our organization to do the same. Additionally, seeking feedback from Black youth and their families to see how they want to engage in our services and ways that we can reduce barriers to service.” – Elizabeth

05. Develop an organization-wide anti-Black racism strategy.

“Developing an anti-Black racism strategy in my organization is very important in making sure we will address it in all aspects of our work.” – Amina Kay

“I think one thing I can do is review and restructure policy and procedures to be anti-racist. Updating policy is something I have wanted to do for a while, they are out of date, but I wasn’t sure where to start when it came to youth. This gives me a framework and resources to learn from.” – Catherine

06. Commit to and allocate resources to anti-racism work, and compensate Black people who support anti-racism work.

“As an organization, we can centre Black youth wellbeing by making a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This can involve allocating resources towards hiring and supporting Black staff, prioritizing Black-led initiatives and programs that serve Black youth, and actively working to address systemic barriers and biases that negatively impact Black youth. By taking these steps, we can create a culture and environment where Black youth feel supported, valued, and empowered to reach their full potential.” – Nadira

“I also agree that listening to Black youth voices is important. I also believe that we should compensate Black persons as they support our understanding of their experiences. We may employ HR specialists and managers to support the employees of an agency, and, in the same way, we should employ Black and Indigenous people to support our agencies.” – Andrea

07. Consider creating a Black youth advisory board.

“One thing my organization could do is to create a panel or board of Black youth to support and inform the program and services provided. I believe compensation should also be provided to Black youth for their work as well.” – Emily

“Creating an advisory committee that is made up of and run/led by Black youth from the community to ensure that the programs & services offered are taking a more balanced/holistic approach for the community.” – Sean

08. Hire, support, and listen to Black staff members.

“My organization can listen and respond with humility, action, and resources to the Black staff who are generously providing feedback on their experiences and sharing their ideas for how to make the organization a safe and empowering place for Black staff and young people.” – Sarah

“As for what my organization could do... simply put – hire more Black staff/clinicians. While a Black face isn't the only thing needed for Black youth to feel heard and supported, representation matters. If they come into a space and don't see anyone who looks like them, the expectation that their needs will be met in meaningful ways will be very low. The potential lack of engagement and follow through on recommendations would be a natural result of poor representation as a barrier to care.” – Aldith



09. Collect disaggregated data and share it with stakeholders.

“One thing my organization can do is to maintain strong disaggregated data collection and analysis practices so that we know clearly where Black folks are accessing our services and where there are barriers. I would like to insist that my organization make this data transparent to stakeholders, to keep us accountable.” – Briar Rose

“I think that it will be helpful to ensure that data collected on youth outcomes and experiences in programs should be disaggregated to look at the unique outcomes of Black youth. This course has really cemented the need for evaluation and research that highlights the specific experiences of Black youth, instead of lumping all youth outcomes together. This can then further inform how programs need to change and improve.” – Erika

10. Use visual cues to signal that your organization or practice is anti-racist and a safe space for Black youth.

“While there are deep layers to that (and that comes with the necessity of the staff to do the work to back up the message that it’s a safe space), a simpler component might be on the visual cues we are sending to youth in the space. There are more obvious (though of course, still very important) aspects such as the staff they see (on all levels) and the advertisements and signage for our agency. But on a simple level, this course has challenged me to consider what about my personal office/ intake space (signs, slogans, even sometimes attire) that sets a tone for youth from the get-go before they are even invited to begin sharing.” – Gabriella

Check out the more than 300 posts that have been contributed to the Discussion [What is the one simple thing, in your personal practice, organization, or professional practice, that you will focus on implementing to improve outcomes for Black youth, starting today?](#) on the Centering Black Youth Wellbeing Community of Practice on the Virtual Café.