



Name It-Call it- Address it! Racism is never okay.

The senseless murder of George Floyd and the civil unrest going on in the USA and beyond has placed a spotlight on the unjust racism and discrimination the black community and other visible minorities face on a daily basis. I cannot fathom the profound hatred it would take to kill any living creature in such a manner, let alone a fellow human being. Although this is a very extreme example of racism and discrimination, it is but the tip of the iceberg that everybody can't help but see.

I would like to believe that here in Canada, we are a much more diverse, and tolerant society, but in reality we have a long way to go.

In the last 20 years, Canada has welcomed well over 200 000 newcomers into our country every year with many of them of African descent. For many, coming to Canada is seen as a dream, a place of safety and a better life. Many come bearing the scars of past trauma, which can be a long and arduous healing journey to work through. Can you imagine the shock someone might feel every time they hear about someone of their same skin colour or cultural background who is killed senselessly and unjustly? George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Regis korchinski-paquet; the list is as endless as the cycle of grief and trauma these killings inflict in our community and society.

No person or child should have to feel ashamed of their skin colour or have to fear that they are going to be treated differently, discriminated against by police, store owners, coworkers or any random person they may encounter in their daily life. It's okay to feel angry and all the emotions but it's as equally important to not to bottle that anger, the pain and to let it out, lest you be consumed by it. Take time to heal and take care of yourself before responding negatively. A cycle of anger and violence will not solve our problems.

Racism is not something Canada should be known for. So, what can we do to channel this emotion to inspire change to make our country a better place for everyone? Silence or inaction will only lead to further racism and violence. Rioting, looting and bloodshed is not the answer. Whether you identify as black, white, Indigenous, Asian, male, female, transgender, LGBT, straight or any other background or culture that makes you who you are, we all have a role to play in putting a stop to racism and discrimination.

We all carry within us a great capacity for good and a great capacity for bad. Use your capacity for good to end the cycle of violence and racism. Give people the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about who they are. Teach your family, your children and your friends to be tolerant of others and not to stereotype people based on their appearance. Use your voice to support others so that they don't have to stand up alone. Inspire change or encourage others to step forward in solidarity. Peaceful and respectful protests are hallmarks of a democratic society and protected in Canada's



constitution. Violence and racism is not.

We can push for reforms to our criminal justice system, school system, government and any structures we have in place that see minorities unfairly targeted or discriminated against. Be tolerant of others and treat them fairly. Better yet, be an ally for others; speak up if you notice an injustice. Build a support system of family and friends that you can talk to if you've experienced racism or discrimination and if you haven't but are in a position of power or privilege, use that voice in being a support to others.

It may seem daunting and overwhelming as one person standing up for change, but remember that we do not stand alone in this. Reflect on your own biases and how that may affect others. Look at those closest to you in your family and friends and what you can do to promote unity and respect for others.

My heart goes out to all of the families impacted by the horrific killing of George Floyd and our many other black brothers and sisters who have lost their lives through racist actions and to the millions more who are unfairly discriminated against. Over 50 years ago, Martin Luther King spoke of his dream of freedom and that one day people will not be judged based on the colour of their skin.

Please help us in keeping that dream alive so that one day our children and our grandchildren might live in a society where they are treated as equals. Change does not happen overnight, but working together as a community, we can dare to hope; we can dare to dream and we can make a difference.

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