

SILENCE IS VIOLENCE

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Tear gas. Rubber bullets. Curfews. Police standoffs. Over 7,000 demonstrations occurred this summer in support of the Black Liberation Movement. But for allies, the work is just beginning. One of the most important things non-POC allies can do is talk to family members and friends who hold harmful assumptions about people of color and address the racial injustices they perpetuate. The holidays are rapidly approaching, and those uncomfortable conversations are following closely behind. Here is some advice on how to have difficult conversations about race with those who do not agree with you.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

“What does change really mean? What would change actually look like? Sometimes just having the conversations is a change. Allowing others to hear what you’re saying is a change,” counselor Ryan Bracken said.

You may not be able to change the core ideas held by your family members or friends through a single conversation, and that is okay. Setting a goal for the conversation is an important way to measure progress. You do not have to have a brawling debate over Christmas dinner to speak up against racial injustice.

“My older family members, a lot of them are pretty racist. Usually I just ignore them, but every once in a while, I’m like ‘hey just because someone speaks a different language doesn’t mean they’re illegal, not only that, if they were born here or have citizenship they’re just as American as anyone else.’ Still, it’s like running into a brick wall with them. Even when they

agree with me, the next day they’ll post some stupid stuff on their Facebook,” senior Dominic Morris said.

Morris suggests challenging the ideas and beliefs of others with evidence and facts. That way your point is much stronger and therefore it is more likely that your family member or friend will be receptive.

DO YOUR RESEARCH AND STAY INFORMED

“That close family unit is generally where we, as young people, start to identify with and form our own thoughts and opinions. As you become older you may start to be exposed to different information. When you are around your family, you’re starting to compare ‘what do I think and what does my family think,’” Bracken said.

Having knowledge about what you are talking about is important. The information you use in conversations about race can come from a variety of sources: the news, personal stories from people of color, statistics, historical events, and more.

“In my free time I do a lot of research. I try to go beyond the news. I’ll go on the DSM BLM twitter to see what they post, and I also try to listen to people on both sides, that way I get a feel for both sides,” Morris said.

Having multiple sources for your beliefs is a way to strengthen your position for conversations with those who do not agree with you. Engaging in these conversations is an important for allies to do, but it is important not to make yourself the center of the story.

The experiences of Black people and people of color belong to them alone. “Don’t

claim things you don’t know of or haven’t happened to you personally. It’s okay to talk about race, but make sure you’re not talking over people who have actually experienced it,” Morris said.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

“When you learn something new, it is going to require a certain change and sometimes those changes can feel uncomfortable and new. I think one way we can help take care of ourselves is to feel it. You’ve got to let yourself feel frustrated or uncomfortable and be curious as to where that comes from” Bracken said.

Talking about your beliefs with your family members is an important way to solidify your position and show your support for people of color. The more you talk about race, the easier it becomes to start those conversations.

“My advice to someone who has a racist family member is to stand firm in your beliefs. You can always try and find ways to continue educating them and expressing your feelings, but if someone disagrees with you for advocating for the human rights of people of color then they’re honestly just a big ignorant hater. You have a community of people that support your beliefs even if your family does not, and within those people you’ll find a family beyond blood” junior Lyric Sellers said.

For someone who has different views about race inequality and white privilege than their parents or close family members, it can be hard to speak up, let alone speak out. There is a far-too-well-known phe-

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nomenon that progressive teenagers and young adults will inevitably face a racist grandparent or uncle and be forced to stay silent about their injustice or cause an argument to break out over Christmas dinner.

DE-ESCALATING THE SITUATION WHEN THINGS GET AGGRESSIVE

“Sometimes when we are hearing someone start to disagree with us it can put us on the defense. A lot of what we see around these topics has a framework of either ‘you’re with me or against me,’” Bracken said.

The prospect of tension is a large part of what makes these conversations undesirable or scary. It is important to remember that these conversations are not aggressive in nature.

“I think white people can be hesitant or afraid to talk about race because they don’t feel it’s their place or because it’s really just an uncomfortable conversation to have. Which is understandable, but not excusable. BIPOC people are LIVING uncomfortably, to only have to talk about it is a privilege. Having the choice to avoid the conversation is a privilege. I think instead being hesitant or afraid, white people need to constantly seek ways to uplift and amplify the voices of people of color” Sellers said.

When conversations about race take a turn for the worse, remember that the discomfort you are feeling is nothing compared to the systemic disadvantages that the people of color you are speaking up for have experienced. If a family member has a negative reaction, it is likely

a result of their beliefs being challenged. Do not allow their negative reaction to shake your belief in racial justice.

“I diffuse the battle. I’m like ‘hey, I’m not going to insult you.’ I just chose to be passive. People start to wind down when you act passive because you don’t stoop to their level,” Morris said.

KEEP THOSE CONVERSATIONS GOING

“Any conversation that requires us to be out of our comfort zone and requires us to share in our vulnerability, that’s going to be a difficult place to be for students or adults or anybody,” Bracken said.

It is hard to have conversations that feel like they are doing

nothing to persuade people to take action from racial justice, but it is important to look at the bigger picture.

“It’s important that allies are willing to talk about race because being silent about issues concerning race is ultimately compliance towards those issues” Sellers said.

One conversation is not going to change the world, but a continuous effort will yield changes in the stereotypical or negative attitudes held by many about people of color.

“These conversations are necessary and worth doing with compassion and intentionality,” Bracken said.

