



ReachOut.com uses cookies to give you the best experience. Find out more about cookies and your privacy in our policy .



ReachOut are running a new wave of recruitment for research about our users and want to hear from you! Tell me more .



## What is racism and how to spot it

The first step in stopping racism is understanding what it actually is. But that's not always easy. If you're not sure what racism is and what it looks like, that's okay. We've put together this handy guide to help you spot and stop racism.

### Racism is more than just being mean

Have you ever wondered why a black person can say the n-word, or why Asian people can make jokes about their own race, but as soon as a white person joins in, it's seen as racist?

Well, the reason why some things are considered racist and others aren't comes down to three important ideas: history, institutions and power.

### Why is history important in understanding racism?

History gives us an explanation for why some races face discrimination and disadvantages. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to deal with a number of barriers that other Australians don't face. These include a shorter average life expectancy, a higher suicide rate and lower employment rates. The reasons for these go all the way back to Australia's colonial past, when Indigenous people were widely seen as inferior.



‘But the First Fleet was so long ago,’ you might say. ‘Can’t Aboriginal Australians just get over it?’ The short answer is ‘no’. The long answer is that you can’t just ‘get over’ a racist history, even if it was hundreds of years ago. Why? Because of the next important idea: institutions.

## Why are institutions important in understanding racism?

Institutions play an important role in perpetuating racism. They include schools, the court system, and organisations such as churches.

Institutions and history work together to give certain groups of people more of a say in how their country is built. For example, the history of British colonisation in Australia means that our laws, schools and other bodies were shaped by the dominant group, while Aboriginal people were excluded from this process.

This meant that racist government policies such as the White Australia policy (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/59.html>) and The Stolen Generations

(<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/anti-racism-activities/lesson-ideas/>)

happened without much resistance from the dominant, white group. The high rates of Aboriginal deaths in police custody and of imprisonment of Aboriginal young people are just two modern examples of how institutionalised racism can shape racist policies that have long-lasting effects.

## Power and racism

We’ve taken a look at how history and institutions add to racial disadvantages. But the most important way these two things work together is by creating an imbalance of power based on race. This is why a black person can use the n-word, or why Asians can make jokes about their own race. There is no imbalance of power in that exchange. But when a dominant race uses certain language or makes stereotypical jokes about another race that lacks the same historical and institutional power, this is called ‘racism’.

Remember that it's not just language that can be racist. Racist stereotypes can have a big impact on other aspects of a person's life. Certain races and cultures are the targets of stereotypes that paint them as lazy, dirty or untrustworthy. This can have a pretty big impact on things like their [job or housing opportunities](#) .

## Tips on how to fight racism

1. Understand what it is. Reading this guide is a great way to start, but there's lots more important info out there. [Racism. No Way \(http://www.racismnoway.com.au/\)](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/) has some handy fact sheets that can help you wrap your head around the different kinds of racial discrimination.
2. If you prefer to watch a video rather than read, take a look at some [different talks on racism](#) .
3. Have a look at ReachOut's [fact sheet](#) on standing up to racism.

## Tags

The big issues

Cultural identity

Everyday issues

Article

Learn more

