



CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE

A Guide to Talking About Racism

Sanjiv Lingayah and Nina Kelly

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**Contains Strong Language |
A Guide to Talking About Racism**

July 2023

About Reframing Race

Reframing Race exists to change the public conversation on racism in order to build an anti-racist future.

We generate big ideas, fresh resources and groundbreaking research for anyone advocating for race equity.

Our knowledge and data powerfully illuminate the problem, and measurably grow demand for the solutions we need to create a world in which we can all be safe and live well.

You can find Reframing Race [online](#).

If you want to keep up to date on our progress and/or help us to share the messages that emerge in our process, fill in your details [here](#).

The authors

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Reframing Race is hosted by [Voice4Change England](#), a charity and national advocate for the Black and Minoritised voluntary and community sector. Voice4Change speaks to policymakers on the issues that matter to the sector and supports better meeting of the needs of communities through sector development and convening to share good practice.

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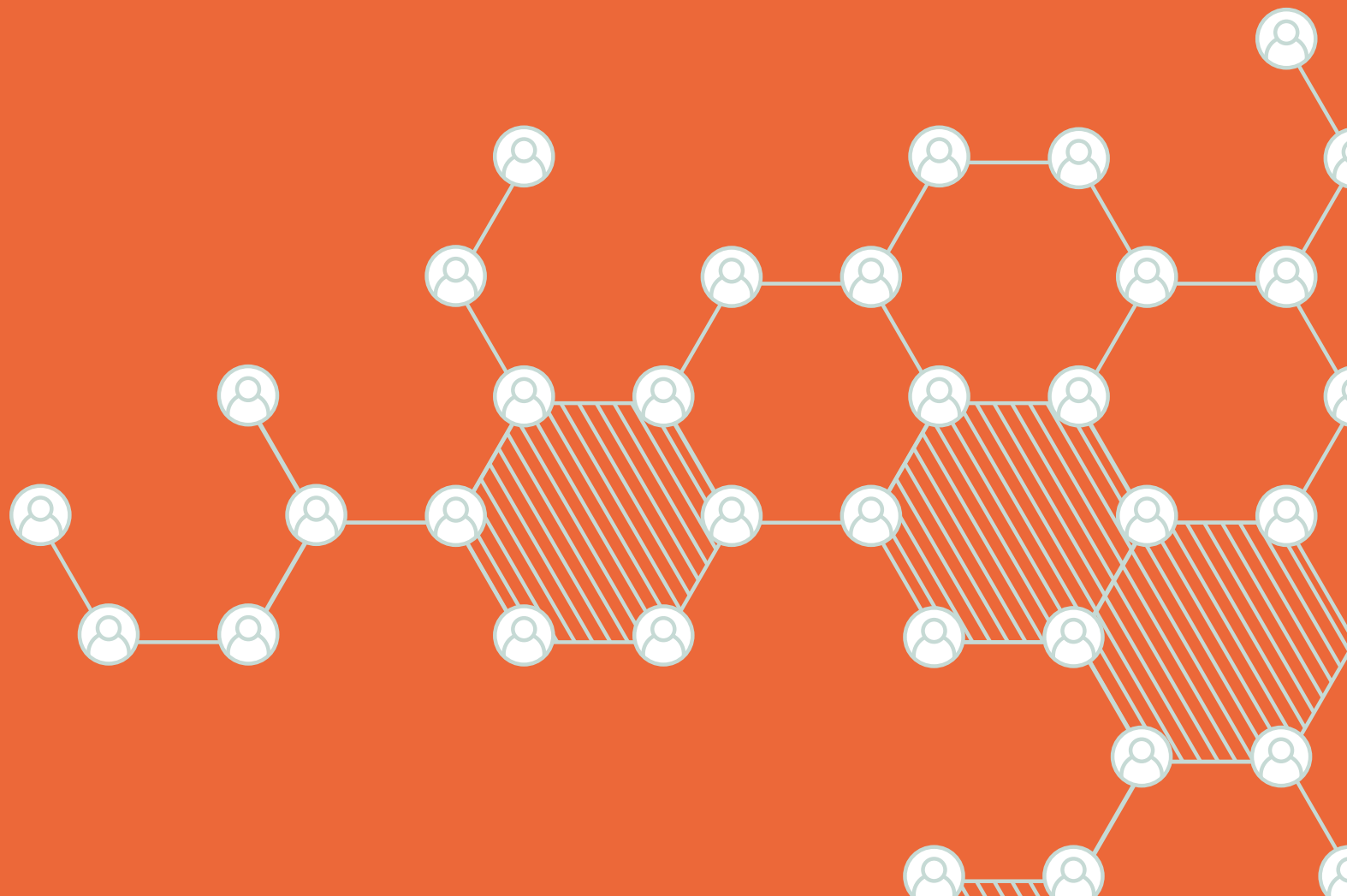
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New ways of
talking about racism
can lead to
new ways of listening



There are many ideas and concepts to engage with in changing the conversation on racism. Below is a list of definitions of key terms as used by Reframing Race.

Terminology	Definition
'Race'	<p>'Race' is a socially constructed concept used to group humans, often based on physical appearance. 'Race' was constructed as a hierarchal system of classification to identify and differentiate some groups, in order to elevate some and marginalise others.¹</p> <p>We use quote marks because 'race' has no basis in science and therefore it should not be used as if it is meaningful (e.g., 'her race is Black/white' is a meaningless statement in both instances). Sometimes it is necessary to use the term 'race' because this false category is vital to the practice of racism and differential treatment based on racial categorisation.</p> <p>A related concept to 'race' is ethnicity – used to describe people who share a common history, geography and culture. Ethnicity can be self-selected, whereas 'race' is more usually imposed by others to classify groups in a hierarchy. However, ethnic categories are also socially constructed. And they can be intertwined with or become racial categories, e.g., African-Caribbean, Indian and Muslim, and can also be a basis for racist discrimination.</p>
Racism	<p>Racism is the ideologically based practice of classifying humans into a racial hierarchy which informs, requires and justifies actions and inactions – e.g., by legislators, decision-makers or individuals – that tend to harm Black and Minoritised people and help white people.</p>
Institutional racism	<p>Institutional (or institutionalised) racism refers to unjust policies, procedures and prevailing social rules that tend to harm or work less well for Black and Minoritised people and to work in favour of white people.</p>
Structural racism	<p>Structural racism refers to the legacies of historical, cultural, economic, political, legal and psychological arrangements that still today normalise and legitimise racism and racial inequity. It manifests in multiple ways, for example in harmful and false depictions of 'Black criminality' in the news and popular culture.</p>

¹ This part of the definition is adapted from: www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Race

Systemic racism	Systemic racism describes the ways that individual (interpersonal), institutional and structural racism jointly produce relative harms to Black and Minoritised people and relative help to white people. These systems are so deeply set that to reset them requires fundamental, transformational change.
Anti-racism	Anti-racism is the practice of identifying and ending racism by changing the values, structures and behaviours that enable it. ²
Race equity	Race equity is the work of ending racial disparities and breaking the link between life outcomes and ‘race’ or ethnicity. Race equity builds on anti-racism because it focuses on treating people in an appropriate way – not necessarily in the same way – in order to overcome inequitable outcomes.
Racial justice	Racial justice is a vision for a world transformed beyond recognition. It marks a future beyond ‘race’, racial hierarchy, racism and racial inequities, where proactive measures, structures and systems to ensure racial equity are normalised to allow Black and Minoritised and all people to thrive.
Black and Minoritised people	<p>Different ethnic groups experience racist ideologies, practices, and impacts in distinct ways. Among the populations that are negatively affected are individuals of African, Caribbean, East Asian and South Asian backgrounds, as well as populations that ‘pass’ as white, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and Jewish people. In many instances it is most helpful to be specific about which populations are harmed by particular race inequities – for example, poverty rates in the UK are highest for people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani background.³ However, it is important to recognise that racism as a system of practice based on racial hierarchy has negative impacts across multiple populations, and sometimes it is important to collectively name this group.</p> <p>There is no consensus among the public⁴ or activists about how to describe such a heterogeneous group. The term that we use in this report is ‘Black and Minoritised’. This draws attention to ‘Blackness’, which today mostly refers to people with (sub-Saharan) African ancestry but historically in Britain was used to name a broader political alliance – including people with roots in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia. The term ‘Minoritised’ points to the active processes of marginalisation involved in racist practice, including the unequal allocation of power, resources and status.</p>

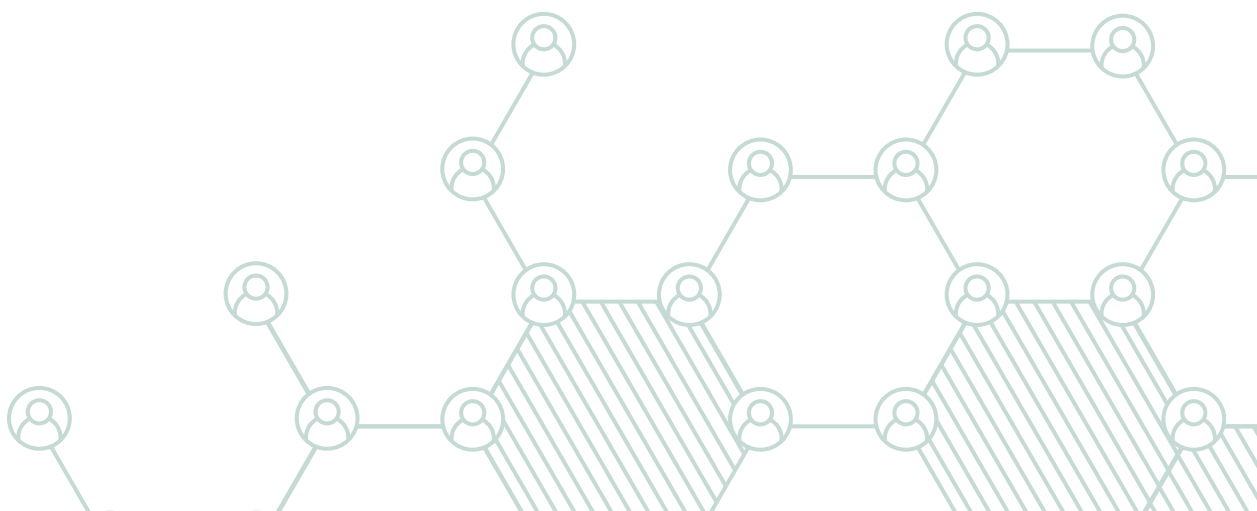
² Adapted from: www.aclrc.com/antiracism

³ See Joseph Rowntree Foundation (undated), ‘Poverty rates by ethnicity over time’: www.jrf.org.uk/data/poverty-rates-ethnicity-over-time

⁴ Our Testing Times survey asked the public about preferred terms for people who are visibly not white. In Scotland among ‘Black and Minoritised’ people the favoured term was ‘Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour’ (18%) and in England it was ‘Ethnic Minorities’ (19%), with various other terms coming close. White people had a different preference compared with Black and Minoritised counterparts in both Scotland and England. We take the results to mean that this is currently an unsettled question.

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Advocates and campaigners continue their work to shift the public conversation on racism and to build demand for serious action for anti-racism, race equity and racial justice.

This guidance, informed by a groundbreaking 20,000-person study of public thinking and feelings on 'race' and racism, supports this vital advocacy and campaigning effort.

'Framing' refers to the choices we make when communicating – including what to say, how to structure it, and what to leave out – that guide an audience to digest information or ideas in particular ways.

The framing or reframing 'race' does not magically end resistance to change. And it needs to work alongside other interventions for social change, like organising and movement-building, street protest, deep community-based work, and producing blueprints for redesigning institutions and systems. It is part of a broader effort to cultivate deeper and wider connection to a cause.

Effective reframing is based on three interconnected dimensions:

- 1 Underlying principles:** Advocates and campaigners should emphasise qualities like freedom, care and respect to counteract racist rhetoric and its denial of people's humanity and possibilities.
- 2 A central story:** We recommend that advocates and campaigners take audiences through a story cycle on racism and anti-racism, to highlight values that matter, the nature of problems, where responsibility lies, and what the solutions are.
- 3 Words to live by:** Advocates and campaigners should choose their phrases and words with care, emphasising the constructed nature of racist ideology, practice and outcomes and affirming life through language.

At the centre of the work

This guidance does not dictate what to say or think to advocates and campaigners, researchers, writers and others. Instead, it highlights the importance of informed and intentional framing to change the conversation on racism and to create space for meaningful change.

The words used by advocates and campaigners can bring audiences to understand and accept that the ideologies, practices and harms of racism are real and systemic – but also solvable. But beyond this, what advocates and campaigners say on the subject not only describes transformation but becomes part of the transformation.

Introduction

It is self-evidently not enough to be on the right side of the argument on racism. That alone does not ensure racial equity or justice.

The task is to take what advocates, campaigners and activists know and understand about the problems of racism and race inequity and to convert that into social change.

There is no single path to transformation. However, by definition, those who are marginalised and excluded as a result of racist practice do not have a hold on political power, so it is important to cultivate other means to drive forward change.

One way to do this is to connect the ideas of advocates and campaigners⁵ and the people prepared to back and develop them. But efforts to make this connection are hampered by a public conversation on racism that feels stuck on whether racism is an issue in the first place.

This conversation needs to be unstuck in order to build collective understanding of racism, as an ideology, a practice and a source of harm, and to move towards real change and solutions.

This is where reframing the conversation helps.

‘Framing’ refers to the choices we make when communicating – including what to say, how to structure it, and what to leave out - that guide an audience to digest information or ideas in a particular way.

Reframing

We all practice framing: in the stories we choose to tell, the way we tell them and who we tell them to.

Framing or reframing ‘race’ does not magically end resistance to change. And reframing does not replace all the other ways in which social change is advanced, like organising and movement-building, street protest, deep community-based work, and producing blueprints for redesigning institutions and systems. Instead, reframing works alongside these interventions, cultivating deeper and wider connection to the cause and processes of transformation.

The origins of this guide

This guidance is informed by a [research and development](#) programme conducted by Reframing Race since 2019. It is a collective effort with our network of around 40 ‘Reframers’ – anti-racist and race equity advocates, campaigners and activists from around the UK.

This guidance report is the third part in a trilogy in the Reframing Race programme.

⁵ We use the term ‘advocates and campaigners’ in a broad sense to mean anyone who is trying to say that the ideologies, practices and harms of racism are real, systemic and solvable. Advocates and campaigners vary from specialists with high profiles doing broadcast work to values-based generalists who may be working informally, for example inside an organisation, ‘narrowcasting’ and trying to influence small numbers of people with influence and power.

The first report in the trilogy, [Common Ground | Contested Space](#), shares insights from a qualitative study by ICM Unlimited⁶ to compare public thinking and feeling on ‘race’ and racism with that of campaigners.

The gaps and overlaps in thinking and feeling identified in this qualitative study informed the design of more than two dozen messages tested in a 20,000-person quantitative study in England and Scotland, carried out by Savanta. Key findings from the quantitative study are outlined in part two of the trilogy, [Testing Times](#). The message test confirmed that how we frame messages affects whether we can move audiences towards ideas and beliefs in line with anti-racism, race equity and racial justice, including the extent to which they support meaningful action.

The recommendations in this third report are informed by both previous studies and offer a response to the insight of the earlier work showing that the landscape of public thinking and beliefs in England and Scotland on ‘race’, racism and race equity is complicated, inconsistent and at times contradictory.

For example, there is evidence that the public is simultaneously significantly attached to myths about racial hierarchy alongside some understanding that systemic racism is real and a commitment to the idea that we are all part of a shared humanity.

Despite this complexity, the message test showed that advocates and campaigners can rally more of the public towards the desirable ideas and beliefs at the centre of Reframing Race – namely that:

- 1 racism is in the design of our institutions and can therefore be designed out;**
- 2 systemic racism is real and its effects tangible**
- 3 action on racism is a priority and that we need anti-racist policies/actions.**

In Part Two, we outline the types of messaging that can help to move audiences in these positive ways. Before moving on to this, it is worth saying more about the use of this guide.

Who this guide is for

This guidance is for advocates and campaigners trying to influence a mainstream audience – who are committed neither to anti-racism nor to upholding systemic racism.⁷ A general audience may include the general public, leaders of organisations and open-minded policymakers. The guidance can be used by campaigners to inform their media work, articles and blogs, as well as public speaking and in-person conversations.⁸

⁶ Now known as Walnut Social Research.

⁷ The message test that informs this guide was tested on 20,000 people in the ‘uncommitted’ category. The pre-screening for participation in the study excluded both people who were highly engaged in anti-racism and those holding strongly racist viewpoints.

⁸ The guide is less important when advocates and campaigners are delivering raw and unfiltered truths about racism, e.g., calling out state-sanctioned violence against Black and Minoritised people. In these moments, framing is more ‘organic’ and considerations about audience reception is of secondary importance. But, crucially, organic and more intentional forms of framing can complement each other. For example, in the United States, see how the ‘Defund the Police’ campaign developed into a proposed piece of legislation called the Breath Act: M4BL, ‘What is the Breath Act?’, <https://breatheact.org/learn-more>.

How ‘mainstream’ organisations can use this guide

This guide is for specialist advocates already active on racism and race equity. It is also for mainstream or white-led justice-focused organisations seeking to meaningfully contribute to race equity and to change the conversation on racism.

To effectively speak up about racism, mainstream organisations should complement rather than crowd out the voices of anti-racist and race equity advocates and campaigners. Mainstream organisations may be best placed to speak up on racism if it is part of a wider institutional framework, demonstrating a holistic commitment to becoming anti-racist and pro-race equity. To this end, we recommend a comprehensive approach that encompasses the following elements:

Calling it: Mainstream organisations acknowledge publicly how the practice of racism affects their field of endeavour – such as human rights, anti-poverty, health, climate crisis and beyond.

Commitment: Organisations make a long-term strategic commitment to becoming anti-racist and active in pursuit of race equity. This entails investing in transformative measures that encompass changes in work practices, who the organisation works with and which populations it serves.

Connection: Mainstream organisations establish genuine and equitable strategic partnerships with race equity specialists and individuals with direct experiences of the impacts of racist practices. They listen and learn from these specialists, paying them for their time, and acting in service of the goals of anti-racism and race equity.⁹

Communication (internal and external): Mainstream organisations use this guidance to shape internal conversations and strategic documents to ensure that race equity becomes a core part of the institution’s purpose. Over time, organisations focus more of their external messaging on anti-racism and race equity, emphasising connections between ‘race’ and poverty or race hierarchy and the climate crisis, and other relevant issues.

By approaching the issue of framing racism in a considered way, mainstream organisations can join forces with specialist advocates and campaigners, build collective power, and foster meaningful change.

Handle with care

Efforts to rally people behind anti-racist ideas should be handled with care by advocates and campaigners. For example, it is important that advocates and campaigners feel at ease with what they are saying.¹⁰

⁹ A powerful example of this is work on reducing serious youth violence, undertaken by Liberty and a variety of community-based partners: see Liberty et al. (2023), *Holding Our Own: A Guide to Non-Policing Solutions to Serious Youth Violence*, London: Liberty, co-authored by Liberty and nine other – mostly community-based – organisations working across human rights, youth services, racial justice, mental health and policing.

¹⁰ Lessons learned from an evaluation study by Joseph Rowntree Foundation on its anti-poverty framing found that the practical application of messages that had performed well in testing stage was greatly impacted by how comfortable campaigners and advocates felt in using them. See Regan, P. and Mortuza, H. (2023), *Talking about Poverty: Lessons Learnt*, York: JRF, www.jrf.org.uk/report/talking-about-poverty-lessons-learnt.

In addition, the temptation may be to seek to generate consensus among audiences and broad agreement on racism. However, this runs the risk, as described by Reni Eddo-Lodge, of trying to ‘prioritise white feelings’,¹¹ rather than shaping the collective conversation around the realities of racism and possibilities for racial justice.

The Reframing Race message test showed that messages generating high levels of overall agreement may have little or no positive impact on anti-racist thinking and beliefs.¹²

Therefore, the job of reframing is not to produce messages on racism that are easy to agree with. Rather than meeting audiences based on what they think and can agree with today, the goal is to use research insights and crafted communications to move the public towards what they are capable of thinking and supporting tomorrow.

Context matters

Every conversation on racism and race equity has its own context. Sometimes the context is heavily shaped by location. For example, control group data from the Reframing Race message test reveals that 17% in Scotland think racism is an extremely pressing problem, compared with 22% in England. This gap may be explained by Scotland’s relatively small Black and Minoritised population compared with England, as well as a national self-image in Scotland of being socially progressive – especially in relation to England.¹³

Whatever the reasons for these contextual differences, they affect the nature of the conversation and provide useful insights as advocates try to focus the dialogue on what needs to be discussed.

At other times, conversations on racism and anti-racism are largely shaped by events. One notable example is the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, which profoundly opened up the type of conversation possible on racism in the US, the UK and elsewhere.

Advocates and campaigners need to be mindful of their operating context and may need to adapt messages – especially when there are opportunities for bolder communications. However, we need to be strategic and steadfast in calling attention to the realities of racism that exist – no matter how helpful or unhelpful the particular circumstances.

However, advocates and campaigners need to be strategic and steadfast in calling attention to the realities of racism that exist – no matter how helpful or unhelpful the particular circumstances.

¹¹ Eddo-Lodge, R. (2017) *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, London: Bloomsbury, x.

¹² This is particularly illustrated in the message tested and reported in *Testing Times* that connected the causes of anti-poverty and race equity. It generated the highest level of public agreement of any of the messages tested but left other measures on thinking and feeling on ‘race’ and racism largely unchanged. See Lingayah, S. and Kelly, N. (2022), *Testing Times: Messages to Reframe Race*, London: Reframing Race, <https://reframingrace.org/data/testing-times>.

¹³ There is some evidence in Scotland of audience backlash when presented with messages on different dimensions of racism. Overall, 5 (out of 12) messages tested in Scotland resulted in a decrease in the percentage of people who think that racism is an extremely pressing problem in Scotland. This means that these five messages had the opposite of the desired effect. By comparison, only one (out of 24) test messages in England backfired in the same way when people were asked about the pressing nature (or otherwise) of racism in Britain.

Messaging that moves

Our background research and 20,000-person message test exercise unsurprisingly shows that there are no magic words or quick fixes to generate wholesale commitment to race equity.

However, our evidence also reveals that advocates and campaigners can effectively convey the realities of racism and meaningful solutions to a general audience in ways that promote deeper understanding, critical reflection, acceptance and action. By reframing our messages appropriately, we can create more conducive conditions for transformative change.

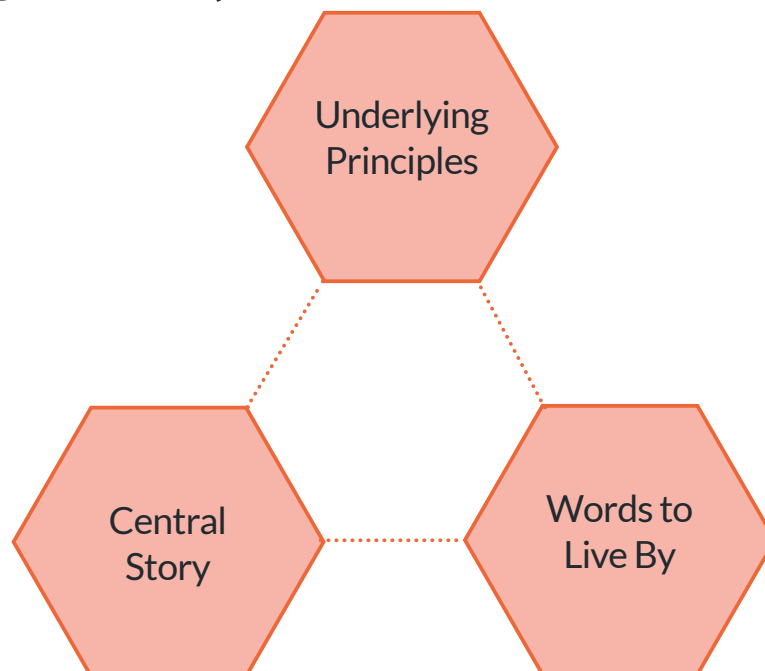
Guidance

This guidance focuses on underlying aspects of public thinking and feelings on 'race' and racism – as laid out in the Reframing Race framing goals (see ['The origins of this guide'](#) above). These include cultivating the belief that action on racism is a priority and that the practice of racism can be designed out of our institutions.

This focus on fundamental thinking and feelings means that the messaging guidance is more general than would be the case if it were working towards a specific campaigning goal, such as de-incarceration or reparations for the transatlantic slave trade.

Every campaign and advocacy effort is unique. Therefore, we encourage advocates and campaigners to take the guidance and ideas for its use and to adapt it to their own particular context, issues, target audiences and framing goals.

Framing three ways



There are three communication elements that are central to reframing. The first element is the underlying principles – important core ideas and values that underpin messaging. Second is a central story with different components that take audiences through an issue. And third is a set of words, phrasing and language to deploy, and another set to avoid.

Underlying principles

As mentioned in the introduction, the conversation on racism is stuck. Advocates and campaigners can help to get things moving by incorporating positive core beliefs into their interventions in the public conversation. Racist rhetoric denies people's humanity and potential, divides us from one another and positions racial inequities as somehow 'natural' and inevitable.

The following principles challenge these falsehoods.

1 Choose life

Messages on race equity should centre life-affirming universal values, such as freedom, care and respect. Additionally, advocates and campaigners should avoid depicting people harmed by the practice of racism as powerless victims and should instead show them as people who are actively remaking contexts and making life work.

This choice takes audiences towards humanity and openness and what they want for themselves and their loved ones – rather than setting different groups against one another.

2 Show your working

Explain, don't just assert, that a disparity is driven by racism. Audiences will not automatically see a disparity – for example the disparity in police stop-and-search rates for Black people compared with white people – as a manifestation of racist practice. Advocates need to show their working: in the stop-and-search example this could mean emphasising the over-policing of some areas and populations as part of a racialised approach to control and punishment.

3 Emphasise power and responsibility

Lay responsibility for problems at the door of those with relevant power, e.g., governments, employers and the 'powerful' few. Doing so helps to avoid different groups who are badly served by those in power from blaming each other. It also helps audiences to understand that the situation is created – and can be fixed – by powerful people and organisations. Call on these actors to make change and hold them accountable. When working on a particular issue, be specific about who is responsible and who needs to act – for example, the Prime Minister and the Health and Social Care Secretary in the case of addressing health disparities.

4 Today and tomorrow solutions

Talk about today and tomorrow solutions.¹⁴ Show audiences that there is an initial way out of the problem, through today responses – short-term practical changes to reduce harms. At the same time as outlining immediate actions, articulate long-term changes for tomorrow. These are major the reconfigurations needed in order to address the root causes of problems and put in place new systems and structures to secure very different life-affirming outcomes.¹⁵

5 Point to positive-sum solutions

Moving towards race equity and racial justice will require white people to give up (relative) positions of advantage. But deep change is ultimately not about taking from white people and giving to Black and Minoritised people. True transformation contains within it the possibility to lift the lives of all – including white people.

For instance, when addressing the disproportionately high maternal mortality rates among Black women (four times higher than white counterparts¹⁶), the goal should go beyond simply equalising maternal mortality rates across ethnicity. In reimagining healthcare services, the potential is to improve outcomes well beyond what white women experience today.

6 Be bold

Bring big ideas, bold and radical solutions, to the public conversation on racism and anti-racism. For example, discuss securing public safety through ways other than policing. The earlier Reframing Race message test shows that it is possible to normalise such ideas and build wider understanding and acceptance of policy and practical implications. Advocates and campaigners should rest assured that reframing does not mean being timid.

¹⁴ The idea of today and tomorrow changes is an one that we borrowed from NEON in their excellent work on communicating solutions: www.neweconomyorganisers.org.

¹⁵ See, for example, Imagination Infrastructure Initiatives (undated), 'Imagination infrastructure is ...', www.imaginationinfrastructuring.com/imagination-infrastructure-is-

¹⁶ See for details: MBRRACE-UK (2023), 'Maternal Mortality: Main Points', www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrrace-uk/data-brief/maternal-mortality-2019-2021.

A central story

We recommend a message architecture that takes audiences through a story cycle. The cycle helps audiences both to understand the importance of the problem and to envision a way out.

A typical story cycle contains the following – though the sequencing may vary:

- **Values:** Humane and life-affirming core beliefs at the centre of a cause, such as freedom, respect and an ethic of care.
- **Problem:** The specific workings and impacts of the practice of racism. For example, how judges disproportionately imprison Black people.¹⁷
- **Responsibility:** Expressly identifying who is culpable for the problem and who can/should act, e.g., national governments, a named politician or a specific corporation.
- **Solutions:** What (values-based) action should be taken – short and long-term (and by whom). For example, major investments in nurturing public services to target root causes of social problems.

Below are three examples of effective messages (see [Testing Times](#) for more examples of impactful messages) that productively move public thinking and feeling in the direction of anti-racism, race equity and racial justice.

Message 1: On systems

[Values] Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, believe that everyone should be able to live free and fulfilling lives. But racism still shuts out Black and Minoritised people from the rest of society.

[Problems] Underlying racism is a system of ideas, laws and customary ways of doing things. Together this system is like a birdcage. Each wire of the cage represents one way that society limits key opportunities and freedoms – such as whether someone can leave school hopeful about the future, live in a decent home or get a good job.

[Responsibility] To break free from racism, we need decisive action from government and other powerful institutions to change how we run our society.

[Solutions] We can act to deliver a labour market, schooling and public services that will provide freedoms to Black and Minoritised people and make it possible for all of us to live well.

¹⁷ For example, see Lammy, D. (2017), *The Lammy Review: An Independent Review into the Treatment of, and Outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Individuals in the Criminal Justice System*, London: Ministry of Justice, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/lammy-review.

Analysis

In both Scotland¹⁸ and England,¹⁹ this message made audiences more likely to agree than the control group (who received no message) that racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works.

In Scotland, audiences exposed to the message were more likely to think that compensation should be paid to those who have been victims of racism, such as people recently wrongfully deported from Britain to the Caribbean.²⁰

And, in England it made audiences more likely to think that all 'races' and ethnic groups have equal worth.²¹

This message should be deployed sensitively so as to not make Black and Minoritised people seem like passive victims whose lives are understood only in terms of their experiences of racism. It can be balanced out by emphasising that people subject to racist practice are constrained but at the same time also actively resist being held back.

Message 2: Evidencing racist practice and harms

[Problem] We have hard evidence that racism remains a significant issue today.

We still see racism in the job market. In a UK-wide Oxford University study, researchers applied to more than 3,000 real job openings as fictitious applicants. White British candidates had to make four applications to receive one positive response. Meanwhile, equally well-qualified British Black and Minoritised applicants had to make an average of seven applications to receive one interested response.

And this type of discrimination doesn't happen just in hiring. We also see racism in healthcare. For example, another report published by Oxford University shows that Black women are four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth in the UK than white women.

The evidence shows us that old, discriminatory habits persist.

[Solutions] We need decisive action from **[Responsibility]** government and institutions to treat Black and Minoritised people with **[Values]** proper care and consideration.

Analysis

This message focuses largely on the problem of racist practice, with values, responsibility and solutions closing the message. In both Scotland²² and England,²³ recipients of the message were more likely to agree than the control group that racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works.

¹⁸ 25% vs 18% control. Q5a_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 25% vs 18% control and odds ratio: 1.8. Q5a_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

¹⁹ Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5a_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

²⁰ 68% vs 62% control. Q11_2 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

²¹ 94% vs 91% control. Q8_5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

²² Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5a_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

²³ Odds ratio: 1.3. Q5a_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

In Scotland, audiences receiving the message were more likely to agree that addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations.²⁴ And in England, audiences were more likely to think that racism is a problem in Britain.²⁵

The strength of the message lies in the fact that the fake CVs were identical apart from specific ethnic markers such as applicant names. The experiment was carried out by a widely respected academic institution and provides indisputable evidence that racist practice is real and harmful.

The CV element of the message is powerful and undeniable. The message then builds on this to help audiences to positively engage with disparities in maternal health outcomes for Black women. Advocates and campaigners on other aspects of racism and anti-racism should see the CV story as a useful means to increase audience understanding and acceptance that racist ideology, practice and harms extend well beyond the labour market.

Message 3: On solutions

[Values] Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, believe that everyone should be treated with care and respect, but, today, racism is still common in society.

[Problem] We see it in how **[Responsibility]** judges disproportionately imprison Black people compared with other groups. We see it in education, where school leaders are more likely to exclude Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

[Solutions] Ending racism is a big task, but many people and institutions are already working towards it. Schools across the UK, from South London to Glasgow, are reducing school exclusions, understanding that when a child acts out, they may be trying to communicate rather than deliberately being bad. And communities are finding ways to come together to keep each other safe. For example, when immigration officers attempted to remove two men from Kenmure Street, Glasgow, during Eid, they were prevented by hundreds of locals chanting 'let our neighbours go'.

Through people like us demanding change, and people in power making the right decisions, we can make progress across all levels of society – because change is inevitable, racism is not.

Analysis

This message – perhaps because it refers to a high-profile action in Glasgow – tested successfully in Scotland but not England. It made the Scottish audience more likely to think that addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations, including potentially transforming what they do, how they are run and who they serve.²⁶ It also made Scottish recipients of the message more likely to agree that it is possible to end racism²⁷ – perhaps because it foregrounds solutions that are already being applied, which in turn may combat fatalistic notions that racism is inevitable.

²⁴ Odds ratio: 1.6. Q5b_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

²⁵ Odds ratio: 1.3. Q6+S1 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain?

²⁶ Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5b_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

²⁷ 55% vs 43% control. Q7_1 To what extent do you think it is possible to end racism in our society?

Words to live by

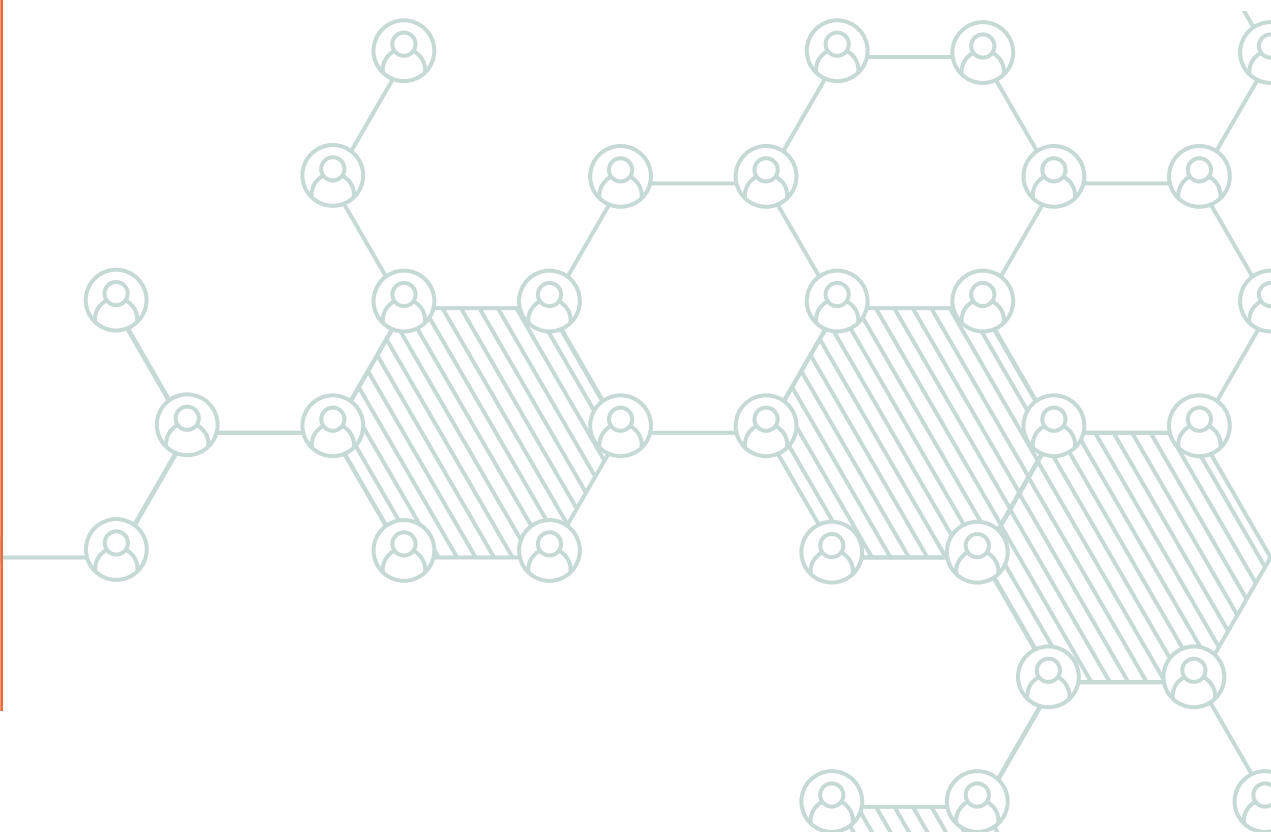
This section contains explanations and examples of specific phrasing, language, metaphors and ideas to move audiences towards central anti-racist ideas and beliefs.

Phrasing

The value of values	
Goal	Moving audiences to identify with anti-racist aims
Embrace ²⁸	<p>Positive, values-based phrasing that does not sound like jargon. Use language such as ‘dignity’, ‘care’ and ‘freedom’, e.g.: ‘In a world with racial equity, we would all have the opportunity to live well.’ <u>Or</u> ‘We should all, regardless of race or ethnicity, be able to live free and fulfilling lives.’</p>
Replace	<p>Too much focus on the terminology of equality and inclusion, as this can feel somewhat empty, e.g.:</p> <p>‘To achieve racial equality, we must work against institutional racism. We want an inclusive society in which we all feel valued and enjoy equal opportunities.’</p>
Reflections	<p>We tested equality-focused messaging (distilled from what many advocates and campaigners have been saying for decades) in what we called our status quo message. While there were generally high levels of ‘agreement’ with it, this language largely fell flat (in England) in terms of moving people towards anti-racist ideas and actions. Phrases such as ‘equal opportunities’ are overused and may have lost meaning as they have become seen as jargon.</p> <p>In a separate part of the message-testing study, participants were able to highlight words and phrases with which they felt the most keen agreement/disagreement. The language we suggest embracing fared significantly better than many other words and phrases.</p> <p>Note: While the ‘embrace’ phrases were also well received in Scotland, the status quo message performed better than in England and was effective. There could be a number of explanations for this. Scottish demographics and politics are rather different to those in England. And it may be that the status quo language is more consistent with Scotland’s self-image as a progressive and open nation.</p>

²⁸ This ‘embrace’/‘replace’ terminology is drawn from the excellent work of ASO Communications: www.asocommunications.com.

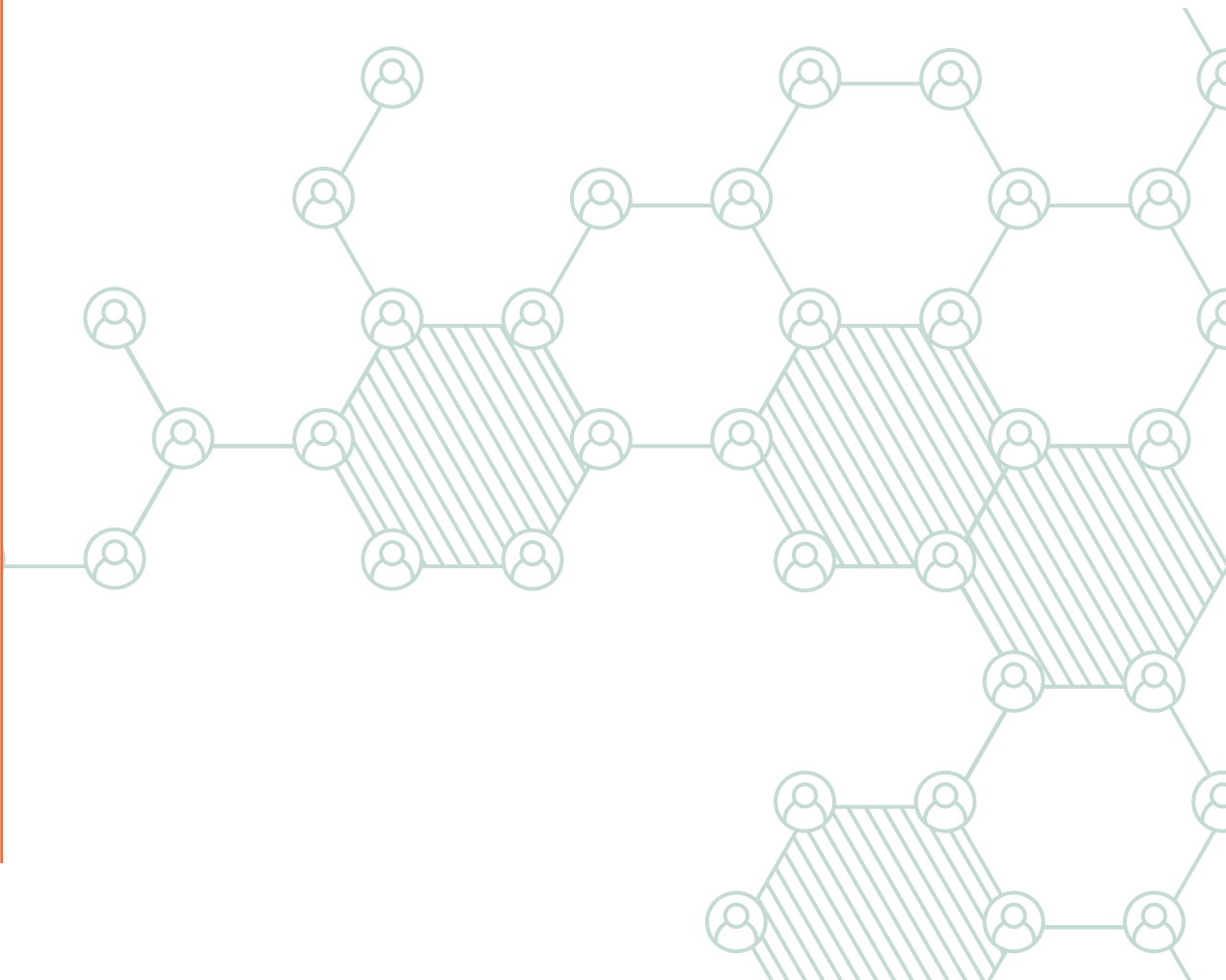
Systems state of mind	
Goal	Moving audiences to understand and accept the systemic nature of racism.
Embrace	Using a metaphor, such as: 'Underlying racism is a system of ideas, laws and customary ways of doing things. Together this system is like a birdcage. Each wire of the cage represents one aspect of how society limits key opportunities and freedoms – such as whether someone can leave school hopeful about the future, live in a decent home, or get a good job.'
Replace	Explaining the overarching impact of systemic racism, e.g.: 'Systemic racism means that, collectively, racialised groups are held back from achieving their cultural, political and economic potential, and are kept distant from power, representation and resources.'
Reflections	'Systemic racism' is a frequently used but poorly understood phrase. Here, a metaphor can create an image that works as visceral shorthand to aid understanding. Audiences can immediately grasp the idea of a birdcage, and as well as helping them understand the concept of systemic racism, it implicitly associates the value of freedom with anti-racism. The birdcage metaphor was one of our best-performing messages in Scotland and England.



In pursuit of policy change	
Goal	Building support for an anti-racist policy proposal.
Embrace	<p>Foregrounding the objective (that affects people’s lives) behind the policy, e.g.:</p> <p>‘Most of us want our children to have an excellent education that helps them to learn from the past so that they can build a better future.’</p> <p><u>Or</u> ‘We need to move on from depending on the police to solve all the problems people face. We wouldn’t call an ambulance to put out a fire, so why do we call the police when people are experiencing a mental health crisis?’</p>
Replace	<p>If the aim is to engage wider audiences (rather than already-supportive core audiences and activists) then some language may be hard to understand and counterproductive, even when audiences agree with the substance of the demand. Examples are:</p> <p>‘Decolonise the curriculum’</p> <p>‘Defund the police’</p>
Reflections	<p>Certain phrases have been so attacked and misrepresented that on hearing them, certain audiences immediately close down. By using terms like ‘decolonise the curriculum’ advocates and campaigners may cause audiences to disengage.</p> <p>In addition, the meanings of terms such as ‘decolonise’ and ‘defund’ are not self-explanatory and may work against general understanding.</p> <p>The education message we suggest embracing achieved the second-highest level of ‘agreement’ (around 40%) among both Scottish and English audiences. It also performed relatively well in terms of encouraging people to think in new ways about race and racism.</p> <p>While the policing message did not elicit such high levels of agreement (30% – England only), it was still supported by one in three study participants.</p> <p>Note: The policing message was not tested in Scotland.</p>



Belief in big change	
Goal	Audiences support far-reaching systemic change to end racist practice.
Embrace	Focus on design and agency, e.g.: ‘Those in power have designed racism into our laws and policies. This is a choice, and we can design it out. If we demand that people in power make the right decisions, we cut racism out of the whole system.’
Replace	Focus on change and necessity, e.g.: ‘We must hold institutions to account and improve the systems and support needed to protect us regardless of ethnicity.’
Reflections	The recommended message helps audiences to understand that systemic racism exists by design, and it made people in Scotland more likely to think that it is possible to end racism. In England, it made people more likely to think that the UK government has a responsibility to end racism. Such beliefs are vital in combatting fatalism and a sense that racism is inevitable. As one of the messages in the test stated, ‘change is inevitable, racism is not’.

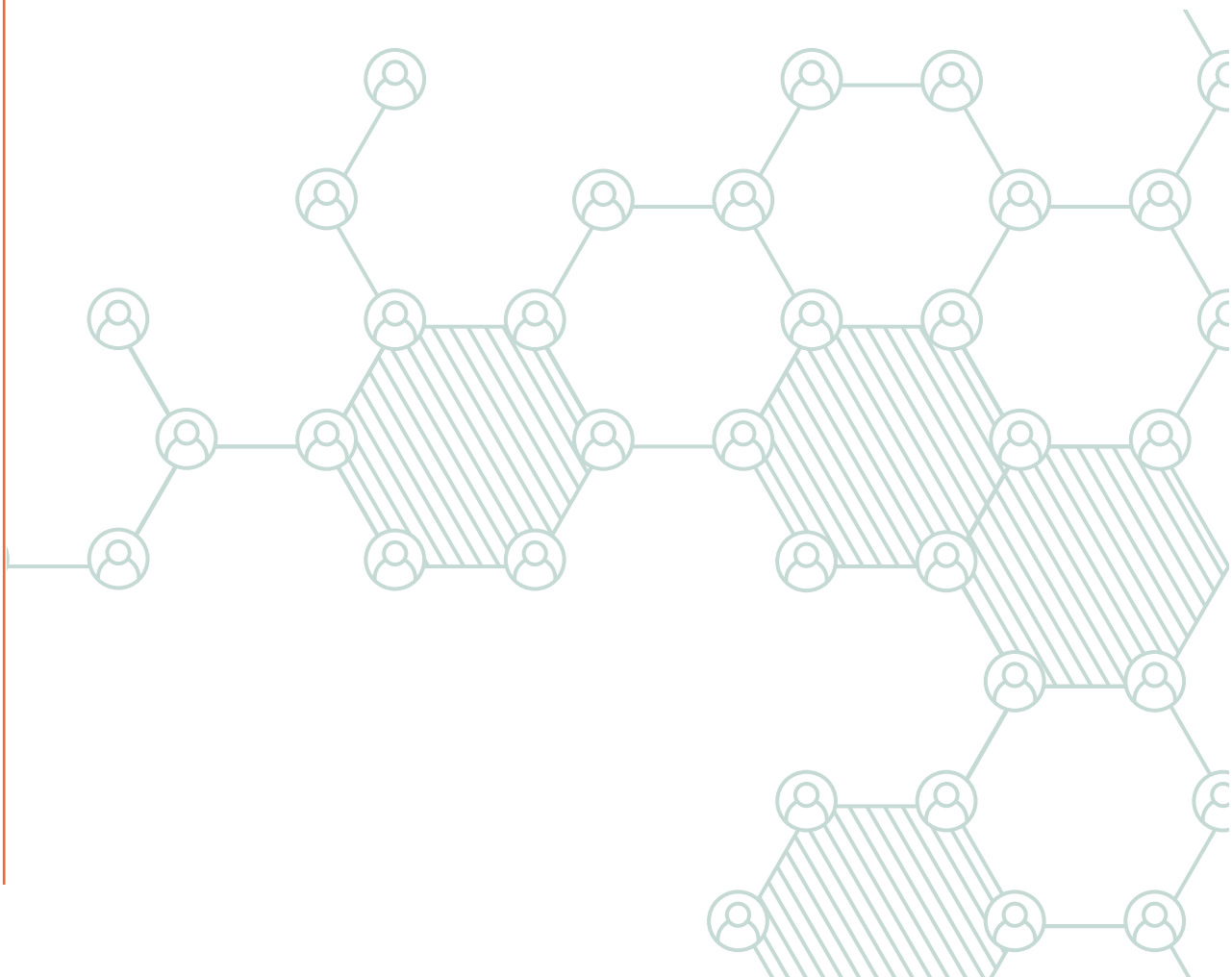


Wording

Finally, below are some recommendations on specific words and phrases to deploy and avoid. They will help to ensure that messaging is inclusive and life-enhancing, and that it does not inadvertently reinforce harmful ideas contained in racialised rhetoric.

Embrace	Replace	Reflections
Talk about people, e.g., 'ethnic minority people' rather than ...	'Ethnic minorities'	'Ethnic minorities' and other whole-population descriptors (e.g., 'Blacks') can dehumanise people who experience racism.
Talk about the 'multi-ethnic working class' or 'working-class people of all ethnicities. If a specific point needs to be made about white people say, 'working-class people who are white' rather than ...	'The white working class'	The political discussion that wrongly excludes Black and Minoritised people from this class group falsely divides the interests of all working-class people along racial lines.
When naming the vested interests in maintaining the status quo talk about the 'powerful few' whose interests are served rather than ...	'The wealthy elite'	The phrase 'the wealthy elite' can trigger antisemitism and feed the conspiracy theories of far-right white nationalists.
Talk about the 'ideology of racism' or the 'practice of racism' and about where the harms caused by racist ideology and practice manifest, e.g., in schools, hospitals and the workplace, rather than ...	Overuse of the standalone term 'racism' (without additional information or context)	The blanket term 'racism' can obscure its different aspects and meanings and make it seem like an unavoidable 'fog'.
Talk about 'race' only in the context of racism, e.g. 'We all deserve equitable treatment, regardless of "race"', rather than ...	Use of 'race' to describe a person or people.	'Race' as a concept is entirely socially constructed and only meaningful in relation to racism. Therefore, phrases such as 'the Black race' or 'her race was Asian' have no meaning.
Resist reinforcing the racist connotations attached to whiteness versus blackness in language.	Use of phrases like 'denigrated', 'black mood', 'dark times', or 'whiter than white'.	Associating whiteness with purity, cleanliness and goodness and blackness with evil and destruction serve to reinforce harmful tropes and the constructed racial hierarchy in which Black and Minoritised people are pushed to the bottom.

Embrace	Replace	Reflections
Using the adjective 'ethnic' correctly to mean 'related to ethnicity', rather than ...	Incorrectly using 'ethnic' to mean minority ethnic or non-white.	Terms like 'ethnic clothing' in fact have no meaning. Further, using 'ethnic' as a misguided and unnecessary euphemism e.g., for 'Asian' or 'African', contributes to the 'othering' of these identities.
Normalise dark skin and blackness as a human standard, rather than ...	Using 'nude' or 'skin colour', when in fact you mean only white skin. Using images or visual descriptions (e.g., blushing red, ashen faces or lips turning blue) that apply only to white people.	Applying something that relates only to white-skinned people as a universal standard for all humans contributes to the 'othering' of Black and Minoritised people.
Not defining people only by their experiences of racism, rather than ...	Referring to 'victims of racism'.	It is not helpful or desirable to centre the victimhood of those who experience racism, as it can unwittingly strip away dignity, personhood and agency.



Conclusion - Walking the talk

The work of social change is unpredictable, and results are not guaranteed. There is no certain way of transforming to a new paradigm and set of accompanying practices. However, bringing a broader, critical mass of people to anti-racism, race equity and racial justice offers one way to progress.

But the work does not stop at producing written guidance. Guidance needs to be taken out to advocates and campaigners to support them to put new ways of talking into practice in their own specific contexts. Renewing how we talk about racism and anti-racism also means generating and talking about new content and solutions rather than rehashing old contested ground.

At Reframing Race, we see three elements as crucial to our future strategic contribution to changing the conversation on 'race', racism and what should be done.

One aspect is to further support advocates and campaigners – through continued training, convening and community building. This effort will be aimed both at race equity specialists and mainstream advocates and campaigners seeking to speak up on racism, race equity and racial justice. This will help to build a critical mass among advocates and campaigners helping to productively move the dialogue forward.

A second focus is to further imagine the future and talk it into being.

The background research that informed the Reframing Race message test revealed a large body of messaging work by advocates and campaigners on the negative impacts of racism. Yet, there was relatively little talk about what to build in its place. In other words, we are 'ultra-high definition' on the problems of racism but relatively 'low resolution' when it comes to solutions.

This is, in part, because advocates and campaigners are often responding to urgent and damaging harms associated with racist practice. It is hard to find the time, energy and headspace to design the healing and restorative systems and structures that we need. It may also be because community-led initiatives that are solving problems and putting in new arrangements are busy prioritising their 'doing work'.

The result is that we have a lopsided public conversation on 'race' and racism which, in our collective imagination, can reinforce the idea that there is no alternative.

Reframing Race will shine a light on existing and possible future solutions-focused working, including on decolonising, curriculum change, and healing and restorative work. We will work with others to paint a picture of what change looks like and help to shift the existing conversation.

A third area for Reframing Race revolves around deeper narrative and culture change work to create more fertile ground for anti-racism. For example, the message test in Scotland and England showed that around 40% of people believe that some 'races' or ethnic groups are naturally harder-working than others. Such 'race thinking', in the face of all serious science, shows that the concept of 'race' is still deeply held and resilient, acting as a brake on real change.

It is of course important to think about how to reframe messages to loosen the grip of such feeling and thinking.²⁹ However, deep-seated racist ideology is resilient. It will not easily be reasoned with.

We will therefore be devising further responses to race thinking through reframing.³⁰ We will also engage with cultural and news producers to explore how popular culture and journalism can help to end attachment to the construction of 'race'.

A final word

The aim of Reframing Race is not to tell campaigners, researchers, writers and others what to say or to think. This is an invitation. Progress does not require that advocates and campaigners all say the same things. And advocates and campaigners should speak up on racism, anti-racism and race equity only in ways that feel right to them.

But there is real benefit in informed and concerted effort to unstick the public conversation on racism, and to repeatedly and consistently say that the ideologies, practices and harms of racism are real, systemic and solvable.

And the work of reframing is not simply about finding the words to win people over, even though that is important.

Just as words can oppress and degrade life, what we say as advocates and campaigners can affirm life and illuminate the path ahead. The words and language that we use on anti-racism, race equity and racial justice are not simply a way to describe transformation; they are in themselves part of that transformation.

²⁹ It should be noted that none of the messages in the message test were explicitly designed to move the public away from 'race thinking'.

³⁰ The FrameWorks Institute is leading broader work on mindsets – for example, see FrameWorks (undated), 'Changing Narratives and Moving Mindsets', www.frameworksinstitute.org/mindset-shifts-what-are-they-why-do-they-matter-how-do-they-happen.