

Hello,
my race is...

white

**The
first step
is admitting
you have
a race.**

“But I’m white. What can I do about racism?”

The 12 White Steps helps white people answer this nagging question.

It works if you work it. The 12 White Steps is a life-long endeavor. Any life-changing program is a daily process. It requires diligent awareness to launch a true awakening. Your program inhabits every corner of your life, even when you are not around people of color. In fact, it’s the little moments that you have been taking for granted that will add up to huge successes.

Sponsorship. Find a sponsor. It is much easier to find success in the program if you have advice and support. No one expects you to do this alone. It’s perfectly normal to feel scared, nervous, unsure, angry, and confused. Don’t give up. Call your sponsor. Have a good long talk and get back on track. The road might feel hard, but it has rewards. After you complete your program, you will be a part of a growing white community with a fresh new approach to life!

The 12 White Steps

Step 1. Admit that you have a race.

Whiteness comes with advantages. You know it. So why not admit it? If you have a jar full of cookies, you can spend your whole life denying you have them, you can hoard them or you can share them. The thing is, everyone already knows you have the cookies. We can smell the sugar and see the crumbs on your chin. Yep, the secret is out, so maybe it’s time to offer some of the sweet dessert to others.

Step 2. Accept that there is a higher understanding that can restore you to sanity.

It has been said that insanity is defined as “repeating the same behavior and expecting different results” and “a relatively permanent disorder of the mind.” This means there is hope on two accounts. First, realize that your actions so far have resulted in the same ol’ same ol’. It’s time for a change. Second, racism may be only “relatively permanent.” That’s great news! This means that with your effort, it can be changed. Once you embrace a higher understanding of race, you’ll breathe easier, have less stress, and find effective ways to create a healthy, productive, enjoyable society for all.

Step 3. Realize you don’t know it all.

People of color know a whole lot about racism. Listening to them is a great idea. But hold on cowboy, they aren’t a library or your elementary school teacher. Your tax dollars don’t pay for their expertise. Refrain from interrogating, contesting, and demanding explanations. Turn off the part of your brain that wants to prove how smart you are and fire up the part that is hungry for learning. Say “thank you.” Seek out further information by going to the library, bookstore, or internet. Take notes. Next time you have a question about race you’ll have several places to find answers.

Step 4. 'Fess up.

Open the cookie jar and take inventory of its many fun-flavored cookies. Can't find any? Try, try again. When you get caught with cookie crumbs on your fingers, it's natural to wipe them off and deny their existence even when the delicious aftertaste remains. Keep a tally of the many times a day that jar is opened and you benefit from your whiteness. Inventory is a hard step in the program. Try keeping a photo of a favorite friend, hero, or personality of color. When you can't do it for yourself, do it for them.

Step 5. Own your legacy.

"But I didn't own slaves." That may be true, but was the black person who was passed over for your promotion a slave? Probably not. Like any family recipe, this one has been passed down for generations. It might have changed some through the years, but it's still based on the original formula.

**God, grant me
the courage
to change the
things I can.**

Step 6. Move beyond your ABCs.

Would you allow your children to grow up with only a first grade level of reading? Of course not. You want to see them become happy functioning members of society. Many white people are "functioning" with the same racial language and ideas they had as a child. Don't accept skating by with a grade-school understanding of racism. Strive to challenge yourself and your peers on ever maturing levels.

Step 7. Make racism a white issue.

Truth be told, if white people really wanted to end racism, they would. White people are very smart. You've come up with some of the world's most notable inventions. Racism is only one of these. No one is better qualified to dismantle it. Unless, of course, you decide you'd rather keep it.

Step 8. Bite the bullet.

Make a list of all the ways white people have harmed, slighted, oppressed and repressed others. This will take a while. Stick with it. You've come this far. Become willing to make prompt amends for it all.

Step 9. Share the cookies.

Making amends is more than stating an apology. It means concrete offerings that will compensate or correct everything you listed in step 8. Amends can take many forms including governmental policies, sharing access, labor, behavioral changes, even good old American cash. Bolster individual amends with systemic amends by combining your efforts with other white people. Remember, the more people who have the recipe, the more cookies we'll all get to eat.

Step 10. Go the distance.

The program is a life-long commitment, not a fad, fashion, or temporary experiment. Many white people find themselves enamored of the 12 White Steps for a day, week, month or year. This is as ineffective as never starting the program at all. Truly working this program means working the twelve steps every day for the rest of your life.

Step 11. Teach your children well.

"Now I know my ABCs, next time won't you sing with me?" Think of all the basic life skills you teach your children without a second thought. Children need to learn how to eat, walk, talk, play...and eliminate racism. Be creative. You find ways to make eating vegetables fun, right? Start early. Teach your kids about ending racism so kids of color don't have to teach them for you.

Step 12. Recruit, recruit, recruit!

Take the pledge: "Having gained a higher understanding of race as a result of these 12 White Steps, I carry this message to other white people to help them practice these principles daily, in all aspects of our lives."

You can do it. Start now.

This public service brought to you by damali ayo, author of *How to Rent a Negro*