

When describing criminal suspects, be as specific as possible about their appearance and behavior. Avoid identifying people by race or ethnicity because these descriptions victimize all people of that background, including visitors, residents or people just passing through.

For example, “a male, short hair, about 40 years old, no facial hair, with dark complexion, tall and thin, wearing jeans, a yellow T-shirt, and a baseball cap, peering into parked cars in driveways” would be more helpful to residents looking for a particular individual than simply an “African American or black man.”

Use this test to help decide if behavior witnessed in a neighborhood is suspicious. Ask, “Would this behavior be suspicious if a white person was acting in this way?” For, instance, a white person riding a bike through a white neighborhood would not be suspicious, but one who was trying to open doors on several cars would be.

One current case is the Trayvon Martin killing. Studies have found that research participants are more likely to mistake a cellphone for a gun when it is held by a black man than by a white one. What the Trayvon Martin shooting tells us is that the stereotypes that we have of people can have deadly consequences. Martin was nothing more than a young man wearing athletic shoes, jeans and a hoodie, carrying an ice tea and some candy.

Another prominent example is when Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the nation’s pre-eminent black scholars, was arrested at his home by Cambridge police. They were investigating a report from a neighbor about a possible break-in by a black male. Gates showed his driver’s license and Harvard identification card, both with his photos – and repeatedly asked for the name and badge number of the officer, who refused. He was handcuffed and taken into custody.



About the Authors

The Racial Social and Economic Justice committee of New England Yearly meeting modeled this brochure after one produced by a group of the Atlanta Friends Meeting, most of whom are white. Atlanta Friends produced their brochure in response to a growing concern about racist behavior witnessed in predominantly white neighborhoods.



Many people live in multi-ethnic communities, yet very few are equipped with the experience and background necessary to live without racism in such a community. This is especially true for white people in the US who frequently have not lived, worked or worshiped with those of another racial or ethnic heritage.

We hope you and your community will find these ideas helpful. This IS a work in progress and we are interested in your responses.



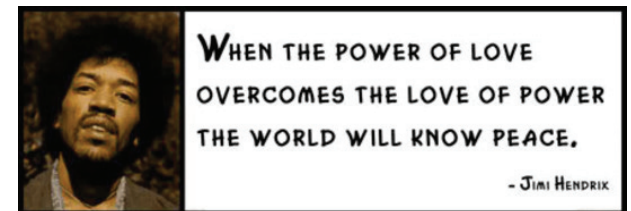
Read more about stereotypes at the following sites:
<http://www.racematters.org/>
<http://www.tolerance.org>
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/takeatest.html>

For further information on NEYM Committee of Racial, Social and Economic Justice:
<http://www.neymppeace.org/racial-social-economic-justice/>
or the clerk at rch@cape.com

Neighborhood Safety and Stereotypes



How can a community be safe for ALL neighbors, friends and visitors?



Imagine that you are reading a report in your neighborhood newsletter about a suspected car thief. As the words jump off the page, you realize, with horror, that the description fits you:

“African American male.”

That’s all the information provided. Not only does it describe you, but also your sons, father and some of your neighbors.

You feel imprisoned now in your own neighborhood.



How can you feel safe working in your yard? Walking the dog? Jogging for exercise? Getting into your car to go to work?

You remember the beating of Rodney King and the killing of Amadou Diallo while police considered them “suspects.”

You are now considered a suspect in your own yard, on your own street, in your neighborhood business.

Your African-American friends and relatives who may come to visit are also suspects and so are the African Americans who may walk through the neighborhood to get to school, work or the store.



Stereotype Danger

The previous section describes a situation from the perspective of an African American male. African American women also fear for the safety of their husbands, sons, daughters and themselves. The rest of this brochure will describe ways in which whites can make a difference.



In a neighborhood, residents often mistrust someone they don’t know, especially if the person looks different from themselves.

In neighborhoods where most of the residents look the same, there is a strong tendency to make assumptions about who is and isn’t a neighbor. Yet, neighborhoods are becoming increasingly pluralistic.

Neighbors can take steps to be inclusive of all, and most importantly, can acknowledge and undo personal racism that often sets neighbors apart.

Historically, the fear of black men and exploitation of black women has led to the reality of racism in our neighborhoods today. These behaviors continue despite decades of laws meant to extend equality to all.



What can white people DO? What can a neighborhood DO?



White people can do a lot to eliminate these stereotypes.

- Acknowledge that people of many racial and ethnic backgrounds live in the neighborhood.
- Acknowledge that white skin color is not the norm.
- Examine your own racial prejudices and stereotypes. Work intentionally to change your racial biases.
- Begin a conversation with neighbors about racial stereotyping.
- Share community leadership with your neighbors from differing ethnicity and backgrounds.
- Plan diverse social gatherings for the neighborhood. Extend invitations to all members of the community, following up by speaking personally to everyone. Plan activities that are inclusive of people of different backgrounds, for instance, a welcoming dinner for new residents, a potluck with foods from each individual’s heritage, a multi-cultural festival or a book discussion featuring multi-cultural authors.

