

# WHAT IS RACISM?

*"Why do people think that something as permanent as race, something we have no choice in, can make us better than another person?"*

— Sarah, 16

There are no reasons or excuses for racism. It's just wrong.

Racism is ugly. It divides people into "us" and "them", based on where we come from or the colour of our skin. And it happens when people feel that it's okay to treat others badly as they go about their daily lives.

Racism is never okay. But it still happens in Australia. Every day.

Racism happens in lots of different ways. You hear it when people:

- make "jokes" or negative comments about a particular ethnic group
- call others racist names or verbally abuse them
- bully, hassle or intimidate others because of their race.

You see it when people:

- write racist graffiti in public places
- make offensive comments online
- are excluded from groups because they're "different" or "don't belong"
- are physically abused because of their race.

Around one in five Australians say they have experienced verbal abuse or name-calling.

More than one in 20 Australians say they have been physically attacked because of their race.

And sometimes, you don't see it at all.

## "INVISIBLE" RACISM

*"I think the hardest thing about being discriminated (against) is when you are really not sure that you are being discriminated against. I go through this talk in my head that says I should stand up against it, but then I start to feel unsure — maybe it's me and then I just get angry that I even have to go through this."*

— Peter, 18

Not all racism is obvious. An employer might look through a list of job applicants and decide not to interview people with Arabic sounding surnames. Or a young guy from an African background might be followed around by security guards who assume he's going to steal something.

These kinds of racism can be much harder to address, because they involve the prejudices that we often don't talk or think about.



For more information about What You Say Matters and the Racism. It Stops With Me campaign go to [itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au](http://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au)

**RACISM.  
IT STOPS  
WITH ME**



Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission

  
Australian Government  
Department of Families,  
Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs

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### SYSTEMIC RACISM



Sometimes groups and organisations can have rules that seem to be fair to everyone — but they actually make things more difficult for people from particular cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

This is also known as structural or systemic racism.

For example, a bank might ask everyone to fill out a lot of forms in English before you can open an account. That makes it hard for people who don't speak English as their first language.

It might also happen when an employer has a policy of not hiring people who have been educated at an overseas school or university.

Racism is more than just words or actions. It also includes the invisible barriers, big and small, that can prevent people from doing as well in life as others simply because of their cultural background.

In many cases, racism is against the law. For more information, see the “What does the law say” factsheet.

If racism happens to you, find out what you can do in the “What can you do?” factsheet.

If you see racism happening at school, in public or online, stand up to it. There's lots of safe ways that you can help. Find out more in the “What you can do?” factsheet.

You can also get support or advice to deal with a difficult situation from organisations like **Kids Helpline** ([www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)) and **ReachOut.com** ([au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)).

The quotes above were obtained through the Commission's consultations with the Australian community. Some names and ages have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.



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