We are in a moment of reckoning. The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing and heightening separation, fear, discrimination, and inequality between groups of people. We are also experiencing a groundswell of awareness and activism around systemic racism due to the recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and George Floyd. Of course, we know we did not get to this point overnight. There have been countless acts throughout history, from overt to subtle, from systemic violence to microaggressions, that have brought us here. Our interpersonal interactions have been shaped by this history, and also have the power to shape our future.

That is why The Mosaic Project created this Action Guide for navigating interpersonal interactions to create a more just, inclusive world. Since 2000, The Mosaic Project has provided over 51,000 children and 14,000 adults from diverse backgrounds with immersive, experiential education programs in equity, empathy, and effective conflict resolution. We hope our tools, tips, and guiding questions provide some much needed support for those committed to creating a society where all kids and their families can thrive!
Mosaic’s core principle of conflict resolution is that, “It’s not you and me against each other, but the two of us against the problem.” Each of us has a different history with, perspective on, and connection to the problem of systemic oppression, and many of us share a common goal to create a more inclusive, just society.

In what ways can you bring your unique knowledge and experience to work together with others to create more justice in the world?

Not only do we have the power to change the future, we will change it, because we are all interconnected. Our actions do affect the world around us. And so does our inaction. Our feeling peaceful, happy and healthy is tied to everyone else feeling peaceful, happy, and healthy. Therefore, we all benefit from a more equitable, just, and inclusive world.

How do your actions — and inactions — affect those around you?


Understanding the following terms helps us recognize them in our communities and in our own interactions. This is the first step to helping stop them.

- **Stereotype**: A label. A generalization about a whole group of people applied to one person, without regard for individuality. When we stereotype others, we dehumanize them and this makes it impossible to empathize with them.
- **Prejudice**: A judgment made about someone without knowing the person.
- **Discrimination**: An action based on stereotypes and prejudice.
- **Isms**: Discrimination + institutional power.
- **Racism**: Discrimination based on race + institutional power.

What is a time you experienced, witnessed, or acted on discrimination?
What can we do when we find ourselves stereotyping others and prejudging them? **We can re-spect. We can look again.**

We can work to overcome our tendency to see what we expect to see and not see what we don’t expect to see.

If we are truly respecting others, we are constantly looking again and doing our best to see beneath the surface through to the depth of who they really are.

**There are 3 attitudes** — whether towards individuals or towards groups — that block our ability to make peaceful change. These are easy traps to fall into, but they will NOT help solve the problem!

1. **Blame.** To say or think that a person is responsible for something bad that has happened. “This is all your fault!” When we blame others, we give our power away and often the others can’t hear what we’re saying. They just get defensive.

2. **Guilt.** A painful feeling of regret caused by thinking that you have done something bad or wrong, sometimes caused by blame: “I’m such a bad friend/parent/person!” “It’s all my fault!” While it is sometimes appropriate to feel guilt so you can take responsibility and move on, if we dwell on it, guilt can lead to inaction.

3. **Defensiveness.** A high sensitivity to criticism or blame. “I didn’t do anything! Not true, you’re lying! I’m not being defensive!” When we jump to defend our actions before listening to the other person’s perspective, we are unable to empathize and solve the problem.

Do you ever notice yourself falling into these traps?
There are 3 Keys to Peace.

1. **Listening.** Just by listening to others, we can make them feel so good.

2. **Empathy.** If we’re truly empathizing with others, it’s impossible to treat them badly.

3. **Assertiveness.** This stops the spread of hurt so we can spread peace instead.

What situations can you imagine in which you might use these keys?

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Listening is the 1st Key to Peace.

Tips for listening:

- Give full attention with your ears, mind, and heart.

- Make not just eye contact, but eye connection.

- Listen for understanding, rather than for an opening to comment or attack.

Can you think of a time when all you really needed was for someone to listen?

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Empathy is the 2nd Key to Peace.

When we empathize, we try to put ourselves in another person’s shoes and understand what it might feel like to be them. We’ll never know exactly how it feels, but it helps to try.

When we are truly empathizing with others, it’s impossible to treat them badly. It is especially important to empathize if you are in a position of power or privilege.

How does it feel when someone empathizes with you? How does it feel when they don’t?
Assertiveness is the 3rd Key to Peace. In order to be assertive, you must also use the first 2 Keys — Listening and Empathy.

Assertiveness is a superpower. It stops the spread of hurt so you can spread peace instead.

Assertiveness allows you to stand up for yourself and others in a way that is respectful of yourself and everyone around you. It helps you make your voice heard.

Assertiveness is communicated through your
1. Body Language
2. What you say (the words you use)
3. How you say it (tone of voice)

These 3 components must all align to show that you are calm, cool, collected, confident and clear.

Assertive allies help others in times of need by standing with them so they do not have to stand alone.

Can you think of a time when you have been an assertive ally or when you were supported by an assertive ally?

Understanding what assertiveness is not can help us understand what it is.

Passive: Allowing someone to invade your space, thereby taking in the poison of hurt, hatred, or violence. Giving your power away.

Aggressive: Invading someone else’s space. Throwing the poison at others. Trying to have power over others rather than sharing it with them.

Assertive: Protecting your own space, thereby blocking the spread of poison. Not taking it in, or throwing it out. Asserting your power with rather than over the other person.

Passive vs. Aggressive

Hurt people hurt other people. That is why aggression spreads and escalates so easily. It takes a lot of strength to stop spreading it and to be assertive.

Can you think of a time when you were passive or aggressive? How might things have gone differently if you had been assertive instead?
When calling for support and action in times of conflict, I-Statements help us state our needs assertively.

I-Statements are easier to hear than “You” or Blame Statements, because they don’t put us on the defensive. When we use I-Statements, we are inviting the other person to empathize with us. We are talking for understanding, rather than trying to convince others that we are right.

Example:

I feel... sad and angry

When I... see non-Black people with power and privilege limiting their support to social media while the Black community is deeply hurting.

Because I need... support, respect, and peace

And can you... make signs of support to put in your windows, join me in a peaceful protest, and ask your friends and family to donate to Black causes?

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1. **Stop**, cool off, and take a deep breath. Take a moment, and do whatever you need to do to feel calm, cool, collected, confident and clear.

2. **Listen**. Listen to how the other person feels and what they need. Learn about their perspective. We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen at least twice as much as we talk.

3. **Talk**. Talk assertively, being strong without being mean and kind without being weak, using I-Statements (see above).

4. **Empathize**. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes, and try to understand how they feel. Let them know you heard what they said.

5. **Plan**. Brainstorm solutions and work towards a Purple Plan (e.g. Red + Blue = Purple) — one in which everyone may not get everything they want, but their most important needs get met.

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Have you used any of these tools in working through a recent conflict? Is there a current conflict you are facing in which it might be helpful to try using them?
The Pyramids of Violence and Peace: The Theory Behind Our Work

The Mosaic Project works to dismantle the Pyramid of Violence and build the Pyramid of Peace in all we do. These pyramids are a visual summary of our curriculum. We feel it is essential to frame social emotional learning (SEL) in this context because our individual interactions do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are shaped by the societal systems in which we live, and also have the power to shift them.

Whenever possible, we begin our work at the foundation of the pyramids by bringing people together to build connection. Research¹ shows, however, that if we are to address the prejudice and violence that stem from segregation, it is not enough simply to bring diverse individuals together. The systems that are set up to make us feel we are separate are very powerful. If we are truly to unite to build equitable, just, inclusive communities, we must be extremely intentional about it. When we come together, we must work toward common goals, address issues of prejudice head-on, and learn skills for authentic interaction and assertive conflict resolution.

That is what we do in Mosaic’s primary program, our Outdoor Project. This immersive program brings together 4th and 5th grade classes from schools that differ racially, ethnically, and socio-economically for a week in nature. Our experiential curriculum directly addresses issues of difference while building self-esteem and community. Students learn tips and tools, like the ones in this Action Guide, through shared challenges, exciting “gametivities,” honest discussions, and the power of song.

We are grateful to be with you on the path towards social change. We hope that these tools and tips will support you and your family as you work to build a more just, peaceful world.

¹ https://mosaicproject.org/about/approach/theory/research/

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LINKS FOR FURTHER LEARNING

MUSIC
Original, award-winning children’s music featuring our lessons

MOTV (MOSAIC TV)
Video summaries of our lessons for children

OUTDOOR PROJECT
5-min video of our principal experiential program in action

CURRICULUM GUIDE
Expanded curriculum for teachers