



# UNDERSTANDING RACE & RACISM

## Racism Toolbox Talk Series – Part 1

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Jobsite: \_\_\_\_\_ Discussion Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

### WHAT IS RACE/ETHNICITY?

Race is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, or facial structure. Examples of race include Asian, Black or African American, or White. Race has no scientific or genetic basis, and regrettably, it has been used throughout history as a basis to justify the oppression of a specific group of people.

Race is different from ethnicity. Ethnicity is linked with cultural expression and identification such as shared values, language, or religion. Examples of ethnicity include Hispanic or Latinx, Jewish, Arab or British.

Both race and ethnicity are social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations. Racism in the U.S. is strongly linked with skin color. Anyone considered non-White has also been considered a member of a minority or marginalized group. Even though we may classify people who identify as Hispanic as an ethnic group, we typically consider ethnic discrimination to be a form of racism.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

When was the last time you thought about your ethnicity or race? What provoked you to think about it?

What aspect of your racial or ethnic identity makes you the proudest?

### WHAT IS RACISM?

When people think about racism, they often evoke history's worst depictions, which include images of slavery, lynching's and people in white hoods with torches. These are examples of racism that are currently considered socially unacceptable. It's these types of images that cause many in society to think racism is a thing of the past. However, racism often appears in more subtle – but also harmful – forms.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do you think racism exists?

How have external factors influenced your thinking about race? Good or bad? People, things, media, etc.?

Is there anything that doesn't align with your personal understanding of racism, Why?

So, what exactly is racism then? Racism is a system of advantages and disadvantages based on skin color. Racism can operate at an individual level – such as a person using a racial slur, telling a racist joke, or believing individuals from one racial group are smarter than another. Racism can also operate at a structural level – such as depicting destructive racial stereotypes in media, providing unequal pay for equal work, and lacking access to community essentials such as grocery stores and public transportation.

Racism has affected the culture of our country since the beginning, which is why it can sometimes be hard to recognize. It has also affected our politics, laws, and economics since long before any of us

were born. And today, it continues to disproportionately disadvantage racial and ethnic minorities, leading to inequality in income, education, access and opportunity.

The construction industry is not immune to the effects of racism. The second toolbox talk in this series will address how racism can find its way into the construction workplace.