



EMBRACING EQUITY

# NAVIGATING HARM, TRIGGERS, AND TRAUMA AS A MARGINALIZED PERSON

Dufferin County has made a long overdue commitment to addressing the inequities occurring within our organization. Our Equity Audit allowed us to understand and acknowledge what those inequities were and shaped an Equity Strategic Plan that guides our ongoing equity efforts.

However, we have recognized that though this work is well-intentioned it has sometimes been triggering and traumatizing for staff from communities that are marginalized, especially those identified by the Audit.

This concern is not unique to our organization. Equity work often puts a spotlight on issues of discrimination and oppression. These conversations can bring up difficult feelings for people from communities that are marginalized who experience these issues directly.

## FEELING TRIGGERED IS NORMAL

Having a negative response to equity work is common for many people from groups that are marginalized. If you are a person who is experiencing inequities and marginalization, you might:

- Feel triggered by the experiences and data shared in reports, studies, and articles
- Fear that people will blame you for how much things are changing
- Question if this is just another initiative that won't change anything
- Be weary of confronting the same issues repeatedly
- Feel that other people who are marginalized should learn to manage like you did



## YOUR FEELINGS AND FRUSTRATIONS ARE VALID

If you are feeling triggered, fearful, weary, or frustrated, those emotions are valid. We know that data about inequity is more than just information but a reflection of the lived experiences and challenges you've been made to navigate. We understand that this carries a significant mental, physical, and emotional toll.

If you have been in workplaces or community spaces that have...

- Failed to provide a safe and equitable environment
- Created and maintained inequitable policies and practices
- Made commitments in the past that were not fruitful
- Caused harm to people with identities that are marginalized

...it is understandable that these realities may impact your confidence in and comfort with equity work.

## YOU DESERVE EQUITABLE SPACES

Many people who are marginalized cope with inequity by accepting it. Some people experiencing marginalization:

- Accept inequity as an inevitability
- Learn to ignore oppression and discrimination
- Find ways to thrive in spite of barriers

These people may sometimes feel uncomfortable with equity work because they succeeded without it. They may internalize oppressive beliefs about themselves and other people who are marginalized (e.g., "we just need to work harder," "equity work is just charity" etc.).

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "COMMUNITY SPACES"?

By "community spaces," we are referring to spaces governed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission's anti-discrimination policies. This includes:

- Stores, restaurants, and bars
- Hospitals and healthcare centres
- Schools, universities, and colleges
- Religious and faith-based spaces
- Public spaces like recreation centres, malls, and parks
- Public transportation
- Government offices and service centres



However:

- No one should be expected to work or live under inequitable conditions (even if they manage to succeed)
- Inequity is not inevitable in organizations and communities that commit to addressing it through policies, practice, and culture

People experiencing marginalization should not have to thrive despite inequities but flourish in workplaces, communities, and spaces that value their humanity and support their success.

## HOW TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

While we stand firmly in our belief that you deserve equitable spaces, we acknowledge that people who experience marginalization are often made to exist in spaces where inequity occurs, often unchecked. Whether you are experiencing challenging feelings because of unaddressed inequities or because of equity work that is bringing issues to the forefront, you should not have to navigate your trauma or triggers alone. Here are some ways you can find support:



- Seek out community with others who understand your experience; this can include employee resource groups (ERGs) at work or support groups hosted by community organizations
- If you feel comfortable, share your concerns with managers in your workplace or other leaders in your community who may be able to point you to support resources, like trauma-informed mental health professionals
- Exercise your right to withdraw from conversations that are triggering or traumatizing for you; know that you are not required to share your opinions or thoughts or lead difficult discussions if it does not feel healthy or safe from you.



## TIPS FOR ALLIES

Those who are not from communities that are marginalized also have an important role to play in supporting colleagues, peers, and community members who are feeling triggered or traumatized by equity work.

- Listen to people from communities that have been marginalized without judgment and avoid centering your own feelings or experiences
- Enter conversations with the goal to understand why people from communities that have been marginalized feel uncomfortable with equity work
- Avoid asking or volunteering people from communities that have been marginalized to lead DEI conversations or equity initiatives simply because of their identities
- Commit to educating yourself about the realities of inequity and the experiences of people who are marginalized through books, films, courses, and other resources