



EMBRACING EQUITY

**MANAGING AND
PROCESSING
DISCOMFORT AS A
PERSON WITH PRIVILEGE**



Dufferin County committed to fostering a more equitable culture by making DEI a central part of how we operate. Equity was identified as one of the five priority areas of the County's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan with corresponding goals to align programs, services and infrastructure with changing community needs and ensure that the County is an inclusive, equitable, and supportive Employer of Choice.

Part of that commitment included conducting an Equity Audit that captured data on the inequities happening within our organization. While the results have been critical to our work to become more equity-informed, we have found that it has sometimes been difficult for people with privilege to process.



If you have also experienced discomfort around equity work, here are some important things you should know.

BEING UNCOMFORTABLE IS NORMAL

Discomfort is a common response to equity work for many people. If you are a member of a dominant or privileged group (e.g., white, male, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied, wealthy, or neurotypical), you may:

- Feel attacked or blamed for how inequities harm people from communities that have been marginalized
- Experience guilt about your own positive experiences
- Worry about how much DEI initiatives will change the world around you
- Fear that equity work will lead to “reverse discrimination” that harms you

DISCOMFORT IS ONLY A PROBLEM IF IT IMPEDES CHANGE

While it is not unusual to feel uncomfortable with equity work, it is important that we do not allow it to be an obstacle to our commitment.

Discomfort is **NOT**:

- ⊗ A justification for abandoning commitments to equity
- ⊗ A reason to disengage from equity trainings and conversations
- ⊗ An excuse to resist or sabotage DEI efforts and initiatives

Discomfort about equity **DOES** help us:

- ✓ Understand our relationship with privilege and oppression
- ✓ Acknowledge our feelings of fear, confusion, or resistance
- ✓ Recognize where we have opportunities to learn and grow

DISCOMFORT CAN BE ROOTED IN OPPRESSIVE BELIEFS

Our society is built on and steeped in systemic oppression of people who are marginalized. Whether we are conscious of it or not, those oppressive ideals shape our values and beliefs. Feelings of discomfort toward DEI initiatives designed to address inequities indicate that our worldviews are being challenged by equity work.

However, this is one of the most valuable opportunities to learn and grow. We can use our discomfort to think critically about the beliefs and biases that influence our response to equity work.





Consider these examples:

THESE WORLDVIEWS...

CONTRIBUTE TO...

White Supremacy, Racism,
Anti-Black Racism, and Anti-
Indigenous Racism



- Fear of being “replaced” by racialized people
- Doubts about the qualifications of Black and racialized professionals
- Beliefs that racialized people should just “pull themselves up by the bootstraps”
- Uncritical acceptance of disproportionately white leadership teams
- Resistance to talking about race and racism

Meritocracy
(the false belief that
people succeed or fail
based exclusively on their
efforts)



- Feelings that groups who are experiencing marginalization need to work harder
- Views of equity work as an injustice to people who have privileged identities (“reverse discrimination” and “diversity quotas”)
- Ideas that certain groups (e.g., white people and men) are naturally more inclined to leadership and success
- Beliefs that some groups (e.g. Black people, racialized women, LGBTQ+ people, and people with accessibility needs) struggle because they are less diligent or intelligent

Patriarchy (which
produces Sexism,
Heterosexism, and
Transphobia)



- Stereotypes of women and LGBTQ+ people as “too soft” or unqualified for leadership positions
- Beliefs that LGBTQ+ identities and issues (e.g., preferred pronouns and gender-neutral language) are private matters that don’t belong in public spaces, like the workplace
- Questions about why people (most often women) who are caregivers should be accommodated in workplace policies

Ableism
(Discrimination against
people with physical or
mental accessibility needs)



- Beliefs that people with accessibility needs, whether physical or mental, are not suited for roles or opportunities they cannot hold without accommodation
- Paternalizing or talking down to people with accessibility needs, especially those with physical disabilities
- Assumptions that people who do not have visible disabilities do not require or deserve accommodations
- Resistance to modifying spaces (e.g., wheelchair ramps) or experiences (e.g., closed captions in movie theatres) in ways that make them more accessible to people with disabilities

Acknowledging and understanding the societal beliefs that influence our discomfort can help us challenge those views and move toward more equitable outlooks and behaviours.



THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR DISCOMFORT

Once we can accept and embrace our discomfort about equity, we can begin to manage it. After all, the only way out of discomfort is through it.

If you are a person with privilege, you can process your discomfort with DEI by:

- Giving yourself time and space to feel uncomfortable
- Acknowledging that your discomfort does not make you a bad person
- Thinking about what parts of equity work make you most uncomfortable
- Reflecting critically on where your feelings of discomfort come from
- Challenging biases and oppressive beliefs that influence your discomfort
- Educating yourself about what equity work is and why it is important
- Listening to and respecting the voices of people living with inequities
- Exploring ways that you can leverage your privilege for equitable outcomes

LEADING FOR EQUITY

If people approach you to express their discomfort with equity work and DEI initiatives, this is an opportunity to take a leadership role in this work. To help them work through their feelings, you can:

- Have candid conversations without judgment to understand why they feel uncomfortable
- Name and acknowledge biases, stereotypes, and oppressive beliefs as they come up
- Point to learning resources to support their understanding of equity work
- Address and correct discriminatory and oppressive language and behaviour
- Recognize when discomfort becomes resistance and take the appropriate action when necessary