

A close-up photograph of magnolia flowers in shades of pink and white, with a dark purple circular graphic element on the right side of the image.

Allyship in Nursing Education

Empowered Nurses Save Lives



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May 11, 2026 | RNAO Nurses Week

Hi, I'm Vanessa Cavalieri!

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Preferred Pronouns: she/her/hers

Positionality Statement:

I am a cis-gendered White woman.
This talk is from the perspective of
privilege and allyship, not lived
experience.



Agenda

- **Land Acknowledgement**
- **Allyship**
 - Definition, Tools, and Responsibilities
- **Allyship and Nursing Education**
 - Safe and Brave Spaces
 - Microaggressions
 - Language Matters
- **Application**
 - Mistakes
 - Visual Allyship
- **Discussion: Questions, Comments, Concerns**





Land Acknowledgement

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement. As an ally, I would like to take this opportunity to commit myself to push back against the oppression that has dispossessed Indigenous People of their lands.



Land Acknowledgement

Moving Away from Superficial and Performative

I acknowledge that I am a guest on this land and am privileged to live and work here.

Some reflections:

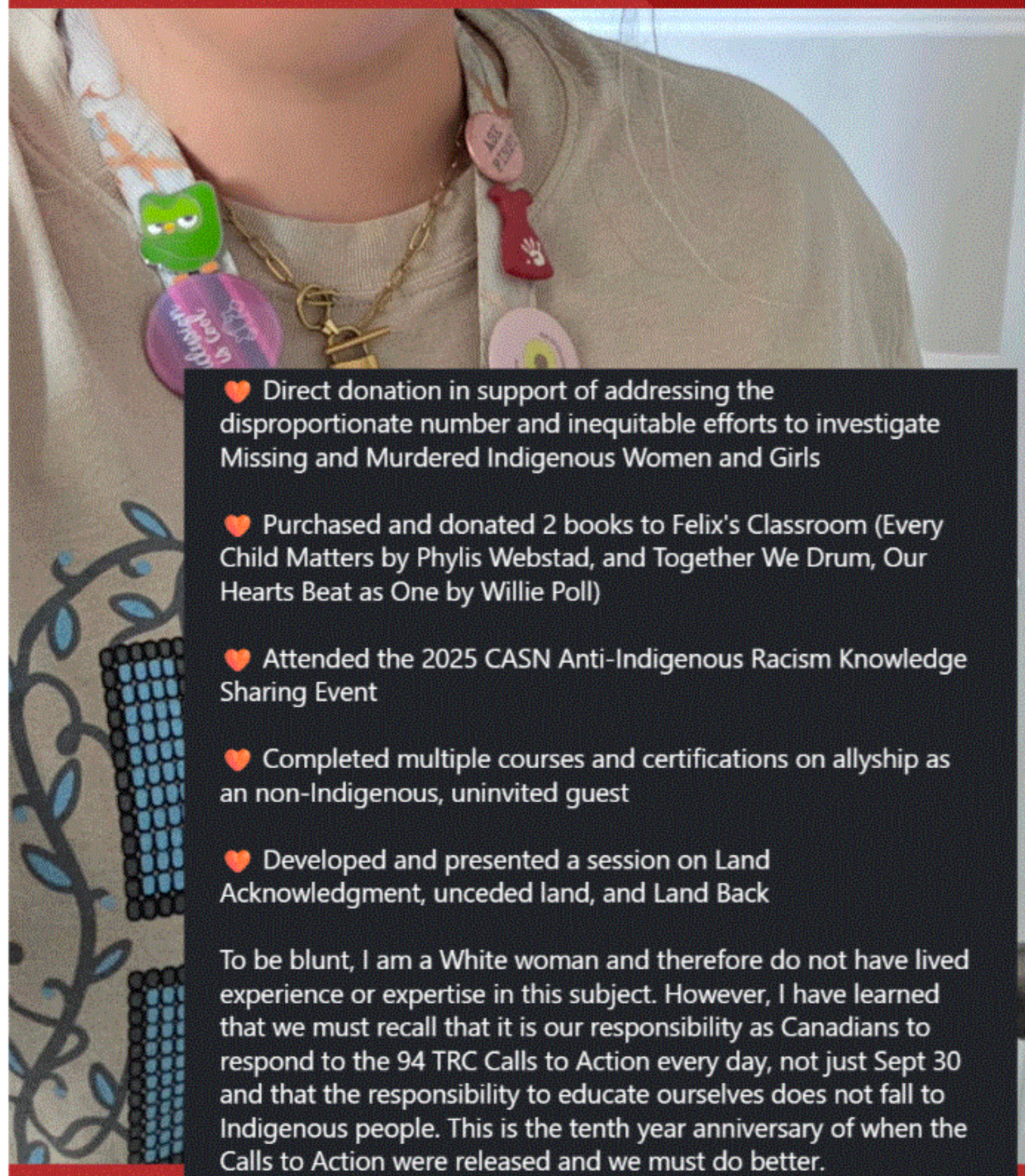
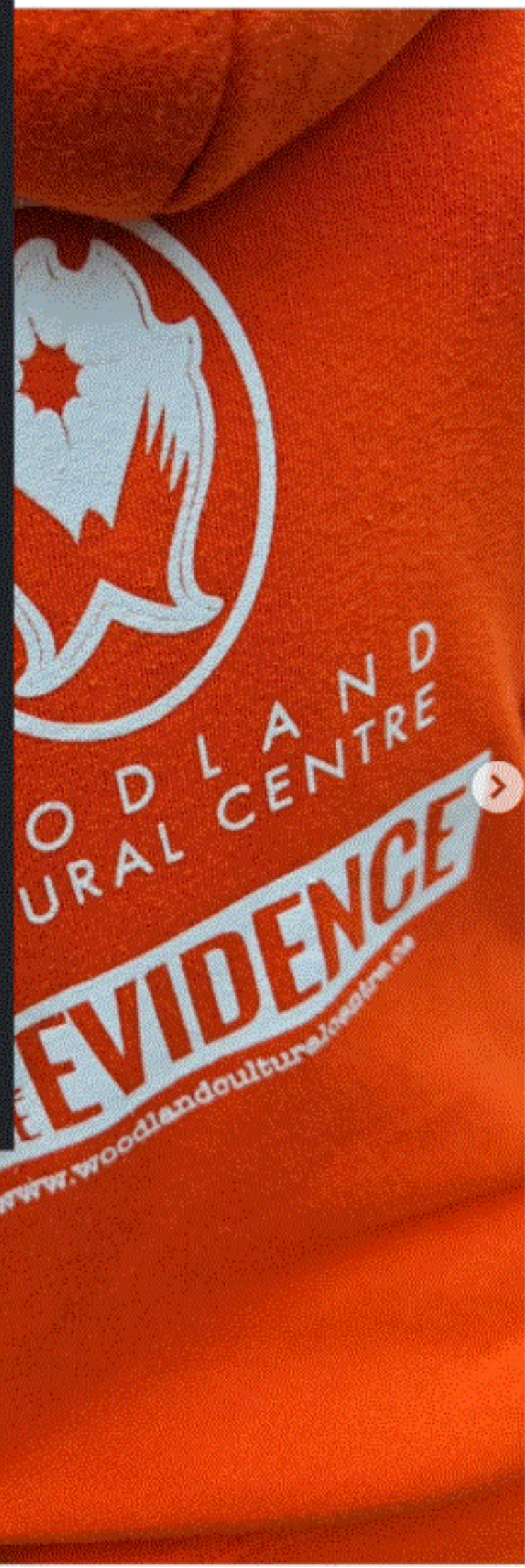
- The impact of colonization **does not exist in the past**
- Acknowledgement should be accompanied by **action and reflection**
- Ask yourself – how am I responding to the TRC Calls to Action? Am I clear on what is being communicated and asked? Have I listened to Indigenous People?



Today is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Today we wear our Orange Shirts to honour residential school survivors and in honour of all the children who did not come home. I also reflect and hold space for the Indigenous people who continue to speak their truths and who continue to feel the ongoing, traumatic impact of colonization, racism, and the residential school system.

If participation in Orange Shirt Day feels more performative and less like allyship, please allow me to share the steps I have taken over the past year to demonstrate commitment to the TRC Calls to Action:

- ♥ Felix's clothing (Orange Shirt & Save the Evidence) purchased directly from Woodland Cultural Centre
- ♥ Both Andrew and I wear Orange Shirts created by an Indigenous creator through the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge
- ♥ Donated directly to IRSSS
- ♥ Donated directly to Woodland Cultural Centre
- ♥ Purchased clothing directly from [@decolonialclothing](#) (Land Back and Varsity Turtle Island Decolonization pictured)



- ♥ Direct donation in support of addressing the disproportionate number and inequitable efforts to investigate Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- ♥ Purchased and donated 2 books to Felix's Classroom (Every Child Matters by Phylis Webstad, and Together We Drum, Our Hearts Beat as One by Willie Poll)
- ♥ Attended the 2025 CASN Anti-Indigenous Racism Knowledge Sharing Event
- ♥ Completed multiple courses and certifications on allyship as a non-Indigenous, uninvited guest
- ♥ Developed and presented a session on Land Acknowledgment, unceded land, and Land Back

To be blunt, I am a White woman and therefore do not have lived experience or expertise in this subject. However, I have learned that we must recall that it is our responsibility as Canadians to respond to the 94 TRC Calls to Action every day, not just Sept 30 and that the responsibility to educate ourselves does not fall to Indigenous people. This is the tenth year anniversary of when the Calls to Action were released and we must do better.

Allyship

Definition

Tools

Responsibilities



What Is An Ally?

Allyship is a verb

- Acknowledges positionality
- Disrupts oppressive spaces through direct challenge, education, lifelong learning, and deep reflection
- Actively plays a role in anti-oppressive work
- Does not self-appoint or identify

Conditional allyship is not allyship



Pathway to Allyship

Mobilizing Allyship As A Verb

This is not a linear process. At any given time, you will be at the start in one aspect of your allyship and further along in another.

Start

You are part of the problem. You have learned to **stereotype**, **harm**, or **oppress** groups of people. There can be indifference to issues that do not directly impact you, or ignorance about your privilege and/or the lived experience of others.

A lack of action = a part of oppression.

Growing and Learning

You have an ‘ah ha’ moment.

You begin to delve into learning and leaning into uncomfortable truths about yourself. You begin to educate yourself to learn/unlearn. Here is when you begin to mobilize allyship into action by **confronting harm**, **oppression**, **violence**, and **bias**.

Being an ally is not an identity, but an ongoing **practice**.

Minimum: Regularly challenge, advocate, and update.



Allyship Toolkit

Steps

(Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network, 2019)

Stand Up.

Actively acknowledge the oppression of equity-deserving groups

Speak Up.

See something, say something.

Power Up.

Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who have less

Sit Down.

Never centre yourself. This conversation is not about you.



Allyship Toolkit

Steps

(Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network, 2019)

Step 1

Be Critical of Motivations

- From where does your interest stem? Ego, popular, hot topic?
- Are you focused on your opinion on the topic rather than those you are trying to support?

Step 2

Start Learning

- You will never be an expert on the lived experiences of other people
- Privilege is protective → What can I do to use my privilege?
- Listen and amplify voices that are ignored or dismissed

Step 3

Act Accordingly

- Change
- Change again
- Allyship is an ongoing process
- Allyship is not an identity



What Should An Ally Say?

Some Takeaways

- “I don’t think that joke is funny – it reinforces negative stereotypes.”
- “I believe ___ was speaking.”
- “Hey, those kind of assumptions can be hurtful to _____. Did you mean to say _____?”
- “That’s not a cool thing to say/do.”
- “I am sorry that happened to you.”
- “How can I help?”
- “I believe you.”



(Hospital for Sick Children, 2024)

What Shouldn't An Ally Say?

Some Takeaways

- Nothing.
- Anything performative.
- “Hey, I know that was wrong, but I just couldn’t say anything because _____”
- “That doesn’t really impact me, so I didn’t need to get involved.”
- “I don’t know enough about it to say anything.”
- “I don’t care that you are _____”
- “I’m sure they didn’t mean it that way.”





Opportunity for Reflection

1. Think of a situation where you could have been an ally
2. Brainstorm a few responses that align with the Allyship Toolkit



Allyship and Nursing Education

Safe and Brave Spaces

Microaggressions

Language Matters



Allyship in Nursing Education

Why Do Nursing Students Need Allies?

- Nursing education is academically, physically, and emotionally challenging
- Nursing students in Ontario are exposed to spaces steeped in colonized, Eurocentric history. They witness in real time the prevalent and biased assumptions that pervade health care
- Harmful stereotypes, White privilege, racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, anti-Indigenous rhetoric, ableism and the patriarchy are a constant undercurrent in most spaces
- Spaces are less safe for nursing students who identify as Black, Racialized, Indigenous, and as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- Any nurse who works with nursing students has a responsibility to act as an ally in all spaces





What Makes a Safe Space?

Nursing Education

- **Environmental Safety**
 - Physical space and people in it are welcoming, inclusive, accessible, diverse, and equitable
- **Physical Safety**
- **Psychological Safety**
 - Free to discuss thoughts and feelings without judgment
- **Learning Safety**
 - Vulnerability and uncertainty are accepted and encouraged



Safe and Brave Spaces

How Are They Different?



Safe Space

- Basic human right, minimum expectation of educators
- Safety can lead to avoidance

Brave Space

- Environment is safe enough to acknowledge that challenges can arise when discussing race, power, privilege, or any other forms of oppression
- Learning can occur with the expectation that people are accountable for their words and actions



Brave Spaces Set-Up

Some Takeaways

- **Group Norms:**
 - Everyone is free to ask questions and expect compassionate responses
 - We are free to educate and call in when language or views are no longer best practice
 - We will accept new information and experiences from equity-deserving groups as valid
 - We will all be held accountable for our language and behaviour in this space
 - We acknowledge that there can never be a perfectly safe space



Microaggressions

A microaggression is an everyday statement or action that is:

Rooted in bias

Targeted based on someone's membership in an equity-deserving group

Intentional, or not intentional (still harmful)

Subtle and powerful

Micro does not mean small

Mosquito Bite Analogy

Just as some people are more prone to mosquito bites, some groups are much more likely to experience microaggressions compared to others. People who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour; members of the disabled community, 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and women are some examples.

“...makes you want to go ballistic on those mosquitoes, which seems like a huge overreaction to those people who only get bit every once in awhile...beyond just being annoying, **some mosquitoes carry truly threatening diseases that can mess up your life for years. And other mosquitoes carry strains that can even kill you.**”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450>



Examples of Common Microaggressions

A Short List of Many

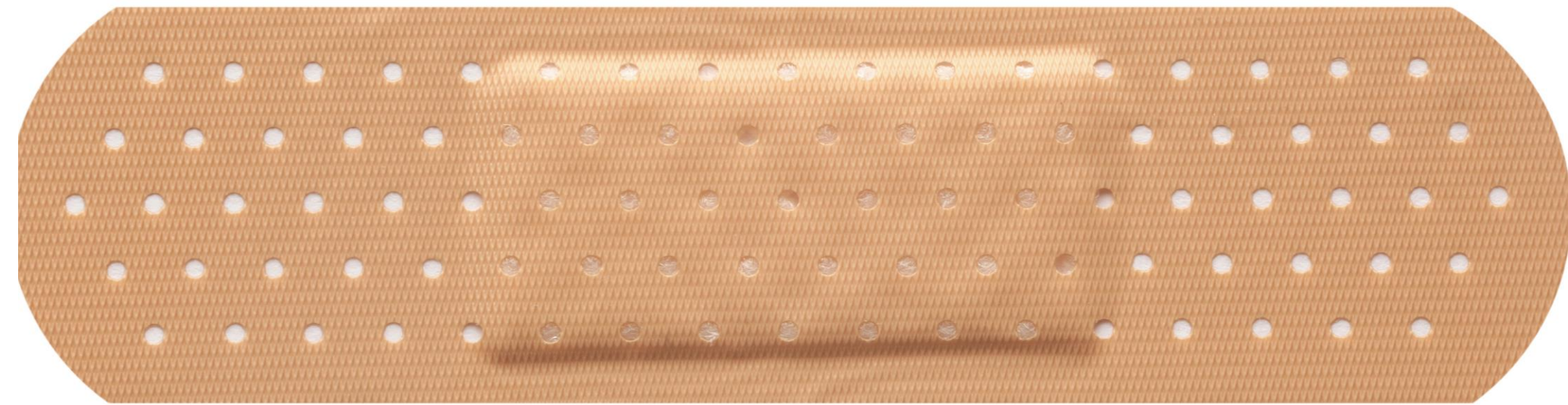
- “Wow, your English is so good!”
- “Where are you from? No, where are you actually from?”
- “Oh really, I didn’t get gay from you!”
- “Why are you still wearing a mask? You are young and healthy!”
- “I don’t see colour.”
- “The most important role a woman can have is being a wife and mother.”
- Touching hair or bodies without consent
- Physical or vocal imitation of accents, gestures, movements



Microaggressions Nursing Students Hear

A Short List of Many

- “Students these days are so anxious.”
- “All of my Asian students look the same to me.”
- “Oh, I never learned to say their name.”
- “I don’t care if they’re fasting, they need to be alert in class.”
- “Your scrubs make you look like a sexy nurse.”
- “My one student might have issues; she is the typical aggressive Black woman.”
- ‘I don’t do pronouns.’
- Any example where a student is singled out in a class or clinical expecting them to represent the perspectives of others in a particular group



Microaggression Triangle

Application of Allyship

(Ackerman-Barger & Jacobs, 2020)

Recipient

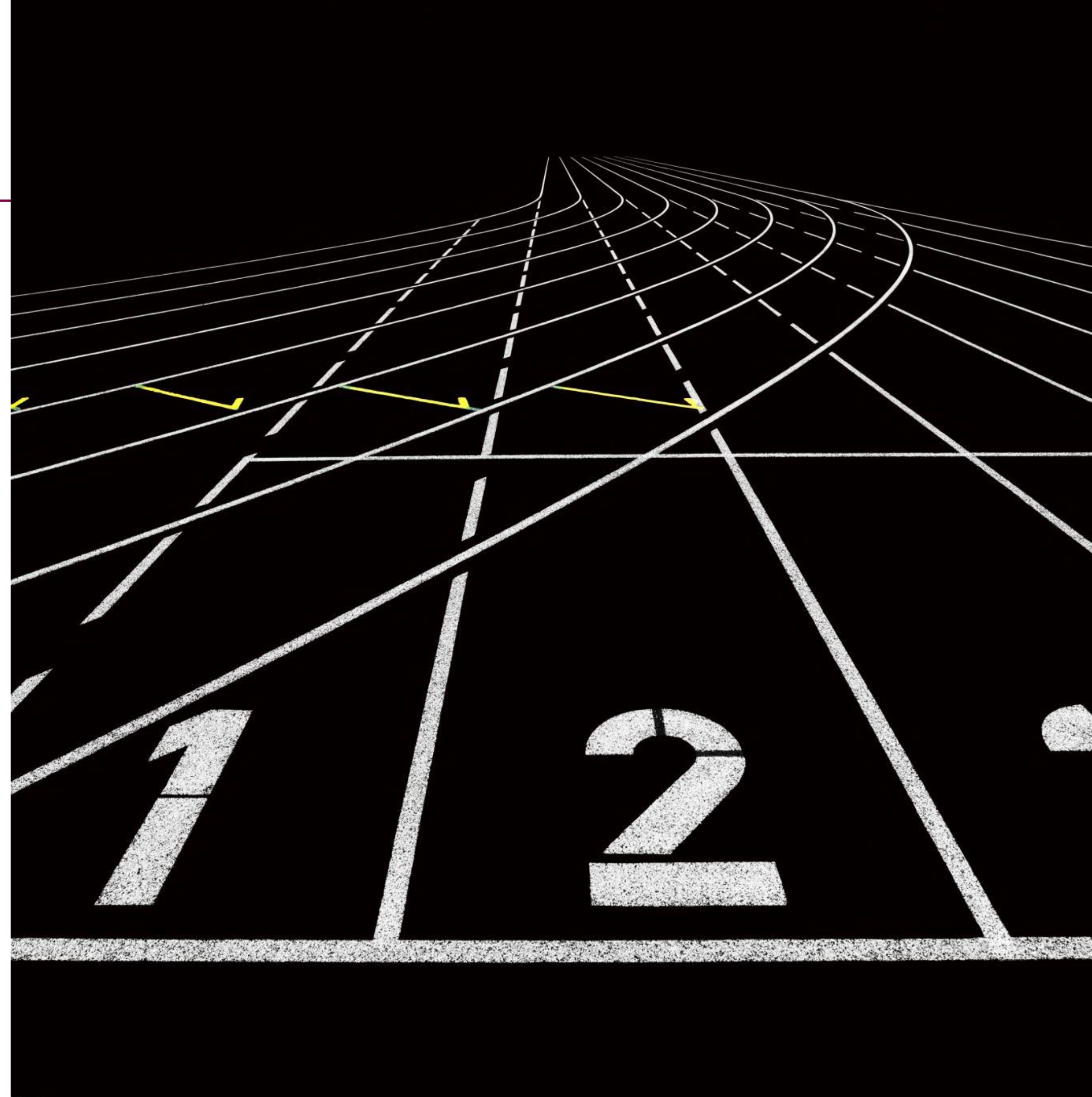
- The person who is the target of the microaggression
 - This person is not responsible for educating the source but can respond however they wish

Source

- The person who is responsible for the microaggression
 - This person is responsible for listening to feedback and committing to do better

Bystander

- The person who witnesses a microaggression
 - This person is responsible for showing allyship



Language Matters



Word Choice

Thoughtful, intentional.
Mean what you say.

Intention and Impact

If you cause harm with
your language (impact),
your intention is irrelevant.

Person-First

Person-centredness is a
core value within the
nursing profession, and
should be evident
through speech.

Honour the Invisible

Inclusive language for all
makes spaces safe and
brave.



Category	Common Phrases	Consider Instead
Word Choice	<p>‘This course is lame’</p> <p>‘This generation’; ‘Ok boomer’</p> <p>‘Be a man and get it together’</p> <p>‘That was tone deaf’</p>	<p>‘This course is hard for me’</p> <p>‘Let’s talk about different ways different people might approach this’</p> <p>‘I don’t think they understood the context’</p>
Person First	<p>‘I have a student who is mental’</p> <p>‘She’s the only one in a mask’</p>	<p>‘A student living with mental illness’</p> <p>‘She’s a faculty member who chooses to wear a mask’</p>
Honour the Invisible	<p>‘Hey guys’</p> <p>‘Do you have a [cis-het]?’</p> <p>‘Have you spoken to your parents?’</p> <p>‘Everyone does well on this assignment’</p> <p>‘Did I stutter?’</p> <p>‘Long Covid isn’t even real’</p> <p>‘Boys take the blue paper, girls take the pink’</p>	<p>‘Hey everyone, folks, class’</p> <p>‘Do you have a partner or an important person?’</p> <p>‘Have you spoken with your important people?’</p> <p>‘This assignment requires strong critical thinking.’</p> <p>‘Was I clear?’</p>
Good Intentions	<p>‘I tolerate gay/trans/etc. people’</p> <p>‘BIPOC students...’</p> <p>Wow, you’ve lost weight – you look great!’</p> <p>‘My spirit animal is a ____’ ; ‘my tribe’</p>	<p>‘I would like to learn how to be an active ally for the 2SLGBTQ+ community’</p> <p>‘I understand that we can’t generalize life experiences’</p> <p>‘You look strong’</p>

Application

Addressing Mistakes

Visual Allyship

Mistakes

Accountability & Allyship – Call Me Out, Call Me In



Step 1: Take Stock

Remember that your intentions are to stop harm to others and that you are not being attacked.

Step 2: Listen. Hear.

Don't be defensive. Listen to what was harmful and how to do better next time.

Step 3: Apologize

Remember that impact is much more important than intent. Apologize for the harm you caused, even if it was unintentional.

Step 4: Learn

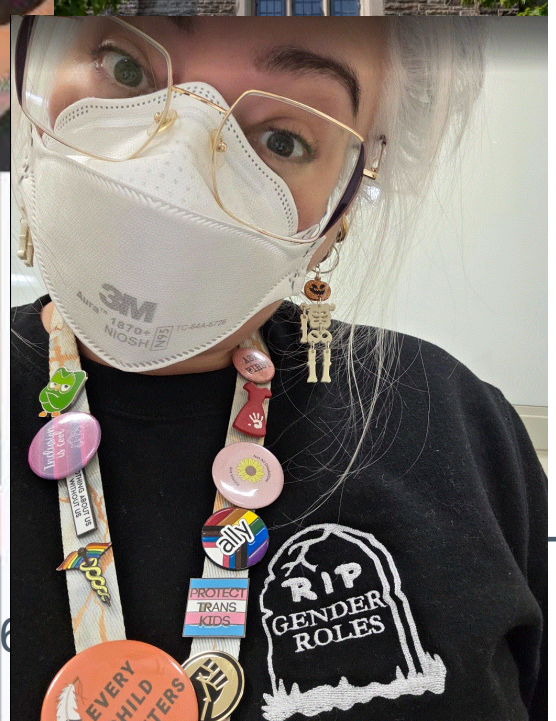
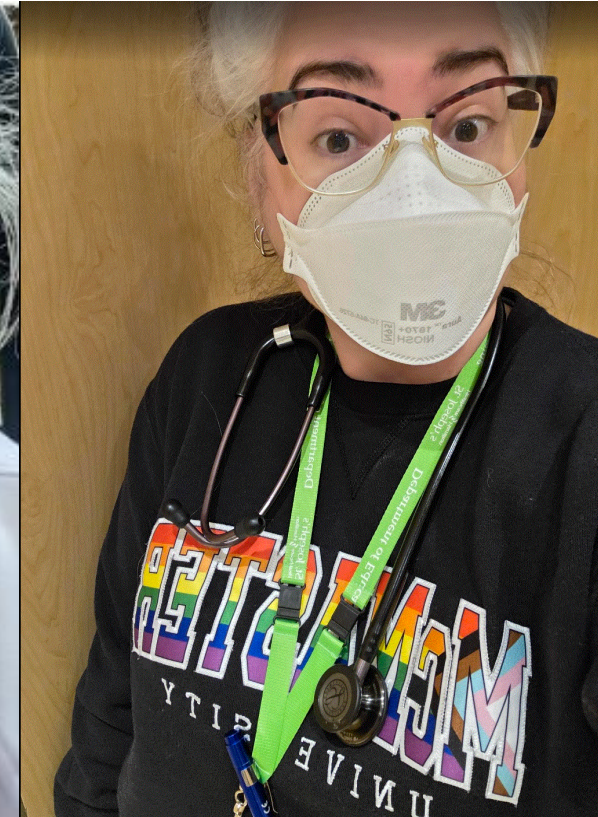
Dedicate your time and available resources to learn what to do differently moving forward.

Know Better, Do Better. Practice Makes Permanent.



Visual Allyship

No One Can Read Your Mind or Intentions



Conclusion

Q&A

Questions

Comments

Debrief



Thank you!

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References

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