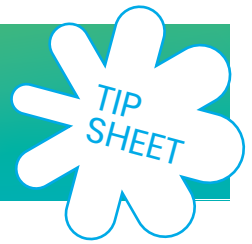


# How to Foster and Maintain Supportive Spaces for Black Youth



Being in a supportive space is crucial for developing a sense of comfort and well-being for Black youth. We must collectively acknowledge the existing anti-Black racism within our schools that continues to cause harm and commit to discontinue these practices to support healing. Having the space to discuss, heal and flourish makes life just a bit easier to navigate.

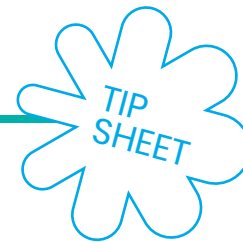
The impact of the lack of supportive spaces continues to similarly negatively affect Black and Indigenous youth in Ontario today. Both are systemically excluded from access to education and have been building and advocating for safer and supportive spaces for a long time. The most supportive work that could be done in collaboration, would be to amplify and echo the suggestions of Black and Indigenous youth for how to build a more supportive space that ensures both groups of students are given the space and opportunity to thrive. What we heard from Black students is captured below.

## Reminding ourselves

It is important that Black youth know that they are in a space free of judgement, anti-Blackness and all other forms of discrimination that might intersect with Blackness (e.g., ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, age).

**Note:** If we commit to a supportive space for Black youth, we must live up to our commitment and be prepared to acknowledge and rebuild trust when we fail to do so.





### Practice what you preach

Be intentional about the spaces you create for Black youth. Set expectations and commit to a more supportive space, while making sure that they are continually upheld.

#### Suggestions for setting group expectations:

- ▶ What does a judgment free space look and feel like to each of you?
- ▶ What do we all, myself included, need to keep in mind in this space?
- ▶ How do we ensure that everyone feels comfortable so we can open and participate in this space?

### Centre lived experience

Ensure that you are creating spaces that centre and amplify the lived experience of Black youth. Actively listen, support and believe Black youth when they speak about their experiences. Create space for Black youth to be themselves, to share their experiences and be validated in doing so.

### Recognize the intersections of Blackness

Many Black youth hold multiple identities. All of these identities inform the way Black youth move through the world\*. Oftentimes, the experience of anti-Black racism is intersecting with other forms of oppression. This can include homophobia, misogyny, transphobia, Islamophobia, ableism and other forms of oppression.

**\*When centering lived experience, create spaces for Black youth to be their *whole* selves. If Black youth feel like they need to “leave” parts of their identities when entering a space, that space is no longer supportive.**

### Create a culture of care

Anti-Blackness has traumatic effects on the mental health and well-being of Black youth. An example in schools that continue to perpetuate anti-Black racism is disciplinary measures that impact Black youth more significantly than any other students. Create a space for Black youth to heal, speak about their experiences and access supports within that space. Ensure Black youth know that they are seen and will be heard and believed.

### Additional resources:

[Creating Supportive Spaces and Communities with Indigenous Students](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)

[Listen, Believe & Act: Support for students who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)

