



## Tools for Ending Racism in the Environmental Movement

Racism\* damages everyone and separates all of us from each other. It shapes and perpetuates the inequities of our societies and has become a part of our societal institutions. It limits the access of the majority of the world's population to the resources of society. Racism is maintained by violence, threats of violence, misinformation, lies, isolation, and greed. In the form of slavery, apartheid, and racial discrimination of many kinds, it has damaged or destroyed the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Because of European-centric racism, the human-caused climate emergency and environmental destruction disproportionately impact Africans or African descendants, Indigenous people, Asians or Asian descendants,

\* We define racism as the one-way, systematic, institutionalized oppression of people on the basis of skin color or the presumption of membership in particular racialized groups.

Pacific Islanders, Latinos/Latinas, Chicanos/Chicanas, Mestizos/Mestizas, Arabs or Arab descendants—people of color. Also because of racism, the mainstream environmental movement in the globally dominant nations has been slow to redress this destruction and has marginalized or excluded the perspectives of people in these groups. This unaware and unchallenged racism has made the movement unwelcoming to these populations.

Although racism is aimed at particular sections of the population, it corrodes and corrupts the entire society—severely limiting the society's progress, and the progress of every individual within the society, toward a full and meaningful life. Racism also limits the effectiveness of the environmental movement by limiting its focus and vision, and keeping it from being strong, diverse, and united.



To end racism, policies must change, racist behavior must stop, the injustices from racism must be redressed, and all people must recover from the damage done to them by racism. Healing the damage done to individuals by racism is not the same as ending racist policies, but only by healing this damage can we be confident that racist behaviors will not continue and that racist policies will not reappear in other guises.

**To fully eliminate racism, we must heal three forms of damage:**

1. The corruption of the minds and spirits of those who have been conditioned by society to be the agents of racism
2. The damage done to the people who have been targeted by racism
3. The damage to the oppressed groups' attitude toward themselves, causing



*Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



[SustainingAllLife.org](http://SustainingAllLife.org)



[UnitedToEndRacism.org](http://UnitedToEndRacism.org)



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them to believe racist misinformation about themselves, other members of their group, and other groups of people of color

All three forms of damage can be healed if people can be listened to well and supported to release their accumulated hurts. Doing this healing work frees people's minds from the damage of racism and allows people to feel good about and value themselves. It can help people think about how racism is acted out in the environmental movement and the broader society, and how that can be addressed. It can help people cooperate across lines of oppression and take action to set things right.

We all need to heal from the effects of racism to be able to create a united movement to end environmental degradation, the climate crisis, and restore the environment. This is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist emotional work. We may feel like there isn't time. Or we may feel that we have

been able to succeed in life only by not showing anyone how much we've been hurt. We may feel ashamed of or embarrassed by our feelings. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming we will never be free of it. We may feel it would be unbearable to look at and to feel those feelings again. Perhaps this is because we have had no opportunity to tell our stories or have not been treated well when we have tried to tell them.

In *Sustaining All Life* we have learned that it is possible to heal the emotional damage from racism and internalized racism, and we offer the tools to do this. Healing from the effects of racism is not a substitute for taking action to end institutional racism, but it is a vital part of the work to end racism. It is vital to becoming widely effective in the work to end the destruction of the environment.





## The Work of Sustaining All Life and United to End Racism

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

### **The role of oppression**

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

### **The importance of healing personal damage**

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



**For more information, see:**

[www.sustainingalllife.org](http://www.sustainingalllife.org) or [www.unitedtoendracism.org](http://www.unitedtoendracism.org)  
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