



ENLIGHTENED SOLUTIONS

Black Women's Safety Planning

Starter tips for Black Women
navigating exclusionary systems



If you are a **Black Woman** - this document is for you.

During Project Noir interviews, one of our most requested items was a resource sheet created for Black Women.

We wanted this document to serve as a preliminary step to help Black Women analyze the quality of select workplace, healthcare and education experiences.

This document is not meant to be holistic; if you are a Black Woman, please reach out to us if you are in need of further assistance, including therapeutic intervention and legal assistance.

ENLIGHTENED SOLUTIONS

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SNAPSHOTS: WORKPLACES

Toxic workplaces often have similar patterns and problems. Below are common examples of toxic workplace practices targeted towards Black Women.



Microaggressions

Black Women are often subjected to persistent microaggressions. Most manifest as racialized and gendered comments about hair, dress, food choices, body types, lack of 'cultural fit' or other coded language meant to belittle and 'other.'



Pay/Benefits

Black Women are routinely paid less than colleagues in the same positions. In addition, Black Women are offered less informal benefits like paid time off, schedule flexibility, access to social events and supplemental perks.



Covering for Bad Managers

When co-workers target Black Women, organizations will often blame the recipient (Black Woman), or claim that said individual is just a "bad manager." This is an avoidance tactic that enables abuse to persist and negatively influence all aspects of work culture.



Isolation/Segregation

In general, Black people are often placed in roles that leave them totally separated from other People of Color. This isolation technique leads to further marginalization. On the other hand, some organizations place all People of Color on teams together, where the entire team is then under-resourced, overlooked and devalued in comparison.



Higher Standards, Harsher Punishment

Organizations will often hold Black Women to impossibly high standards while enforcing (written or informal) policies against them that are not enforced against others. These organizations often enact harsh punishment on Black Women who make small or easily fixed infractions.



Black Women are "Unprofessional"

Managers and other staff will couch differences in terms of "professionalism" - standards developed by and for white men. "*Her hair is not professional*" or "*This report is just not up to our standards*" are coded phrases employed to deflect the reality of racist and gendered bias.



ASSESSMENT: WORKPLACES

This tool is designed to help you think through your workplace experiences. There is no specific score that will decide if your workplace is a good fit or not. Each question is designed to get you thinking about your own safety, goals, and needs.

I feel safe at my workplace	Yes	No	N/A
I can dress in a way I feel comfortable at work	Yes	No	N/A
People view me as a professional or expert in my area	Yes	No	N/A
I have people above me I can talk to and who support me at work	Yes	No	N/A
I am paid fairly	Yes	No	N/A
There are other women of color I can talk to and work with	Yes	No	N/A
The standards set for me are the same as others who have my role or similar roles	Yes	No	N/A
I feel included in informal and social networks at work	Yes	No	N/A
My performance reviews and feedback accurately reflect my work	Yes	No	N/A
I am treated with respect and dignity	Yes	No	N/A
When problems arise, my complaints are taken seriously	Yes	No	N/A
My managers and bosses do not tolerate or make excuses for racism or sexism	Yes	No	N/A



STRATEGIES: WORKPLACES

There are multiple avenues available to you. Here are some common options, and potential pros and cons of each path.

Status Quo

There is an option to stay and maintain where you are. If your stress levels are manageable, many people elect to not rock the boat.

- Pros: Predictable, steady income, people/situations you know, familiar work
- Cons: Encourages organizations to not change, stressful situations rarely improve, poor management issues are rarely resolved, so present stressors are likely to stay.

Important Points: If you do stay in a stressful situation, try to prioritize your mental health, get therapeutic support, and family support. Try to find and work with allies in your organization, and work to set boundaries wherever possible.

The Switch Up

The second option is to start planning a move to a new position. Give yourself permission and grace. Try to plan as far in advance as possible - it's your future.

- Pros: Opportunities to learn new areas, potential to find more inclusive employers
- Cons: New workplace could not be an improvement, challenging job market or prospects

Important Points: Lots of jobs will try to keep you when you come with a competing offer. On average, people who stay at that point are exited within six months. If you are going to leave, commit to leaving. Be careful when job searching, and use close friends and allies who won't disclose your search as references.





STRATEGIES: WORKPLACES

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Legal Accountability

Depending on your situation, you may have legal rights to enforce. These things can be pretty complicated and dependent on your specific facts. For greater detail into workplace advocacy, please reach out to us - we can help you evaluate your situation.

- Pros: Holding others accountable for bad behavior, monetary compensation, pressuring employers to change their systems.
- Cons: Long process, difficult to relive problems, legal systems are outdated

Important Points: Only a small fraction of bad behavior that happens on the job is actually reported, let alone legally pursued. The majority of poor interactions, harassment and discrimination is not penalized; bad behavior continues unchecked. Enforcing legal rights can help with this, but it can be a painful and frustrating process.

Go Solo

The fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs in America is Black Women.

If you have ideas that aren't heard, skills or products you'd like to sell, or other revolutionary thoughts, opening your own business, nonprofit, or other organization is an option.

- Pros: self-sufficiency, skill-sharing, opportunities to employ/support others.
- Cons: Some ideas/industries won't work, unreliable at first, starting can take time

Important Points: We are happy to talk through ideas with you and help you connect to programs, services, and people, that help Black Women-owned startups.





SNAPSHOTS: HEALTHCARE

What does a poor healthcare encounter look like? How does bias function within medical systems?



Gaslighting

Doctors and medical professionals downplay, ignore, or outright disbelieve you while you are sharing pain, symptoms, concerns, or physical ailments.



Controlling

Many medical professionals and hospital staff will be controlling and judgmental about reproductive choices, lifestyle choices, gender expression and sexuality.



Avoidant

Many medical professionals will avoid diagnostic or treatment services for Black Women. This leads to poor health outcomes, prolonged ailments and potential death. Healthcare professionals will downplay pain, bring up monetary concerns, talk you out of tests, and tell you there's no need for treatment.



Hyperfocus on Appearance

Medical professionals often hyper-fixate on weight and use it as an excuse to avoid treatment or diagnostics. This is true even when weight has no rational relation to the ailment or complaint. Doctors that do this are reinforcing misogynistic stereotypes about women, and often actively shame women rather than focus on physical issues.



Poor Complaint Systems

Many hospitals and healthcare systems are required to have formal complaints systems. Unfortunately, a common response to a patient filing a complaint is to ban the patient from that practice.



Downplaying Pain

A recent study found that 40% of medical students thought that Black people actually have thicker skin. Other studies have verified that healthcare personnel give less pain management to Black patients and women. For Black Women, this is a very common experience, of having healthcare professionals refuse to provide pain management.



ASSESSMENT: HEALTHCARE

This tool is designed to help you think through your healthcare experiences. There is no specific score that will decide if a healthcare provider is a good fit or not. Each question is designed to get you thinking about your own safety, goals, and needs.

I feel safe at my doctor's office	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor cares about my wellbeing	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor performs appropriate diagnostic testing	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor takes my pain seriously	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor sees me as a whole person, and considers all possible causes of my physical issues	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor helps me manage and alleviate pain in appropriate ways.	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor listens to my questions, and gives me straight answers	Yes	No	N/A
My health improves when I work with my doctor	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor's staff and support people are all kind and welcoming	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor welcomes my questions and encourages me to take an active role in my health	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor welcomes my support people and their questions	Yes	No	N/A
My doctor discusses weight at appropriate times, when it is related to a potential problem	Yes	No	N/A



STRATEGIES: HEALTHCARE

You shouldn't need these strategies, but we want you to have every possible tool at your disposal.

Document Beforehand

For Black Women, we suggest getting as clear and granular as possible about your symptoms or complaints before heading to the doctor's office. Written bullet-point notes or a diary of a progression of symptoms can ease anxiety about explaining sensitive medical issues.

Trusted People

Many women bring trusted family or friends with them to appointments to help with the process. Some women share that they specifically bring male partners - as they feel they were not being heard on their own.

Although sometimes awkward, this tactic can be helpful as healthcare marginalization on the basis of gender or gender expression can be unpredictable and difficult to manage in the moment.

Be Your Own Advocate

It is often necessary for women to push back and demand adequate care. Medical professionals often discourage patients from doing their own research or asking in-depth questions - but we recommend that you absolutely educate yourself as much as possible on your own health. Know that you are the best advocate for your body, and you are the only one who lives in your body day to day. Trust yourself.

Complaints and Legal Systems

If you have experienced poor healthcare, or been hurt by poor healthcare, there are options available.

Many healthcare systems have complaints processes, and while these can be effective, they are rarely a full solution. You can look to patient satisfaction departments, appointed ombudsman, and patient rights documentation to learn more about a specific system.

In addition, there are legal recourses available, depending on the severity or the injury, context, and surrounding circumstances. These situations are best evaluated by finding a personal injury attorney to discuss your options with.





SNAPSHOTS: EDUCATION

What does a dysfunctional educational experience look like? How can I tell if I am being systemically marginalized while seeking education?



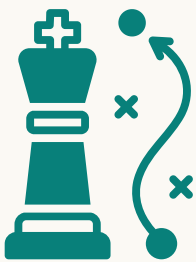
Steering

Guidance counselors and other staff steer Black Women into lower-paying, lower-prestige professions. Ex: *"I want to be a doctor." "Have you considered this STNA program?"*



Refusal to Teach

Some educators will refuse to offer additional assistance, office hours, or insights to Black Female students. Oftentimes, this will look like avoidance, with professors or educators claiming they are too busy to support this student.



Discouragement

Educational professionals will often discourage Black Women from pursuing certain careers. For example, a professor in a criminal justice major may tell a Black Female student that she won't do well in the field, and that he doesn't think she *"has what it takes."*



Asymmetrical Information

Many educational institutions put out information through backchannels. These are generally thought direct emails or conversations with staff, or informal tips are often communicated to students directly. Black women are rarely included in these backchannels.



Harsher Grading

Many Black Women have shared experiences of receiving unjustifiable grades on group projects that they managed or organized. Oral assignments are often graded poorly with educators utilizing tone, speech-pattern and/or accent biases when the information is communicated efficiently and correctly. This lack of grace is highly prevalent in K-12 schooling.



Dress, Hair and Adultification

Many educational systems are hyperfocused on controlling Black Women's dress, hair, passion, and overall expressiveness. There are often harsh penalties associated with these policies. In addition, Black girls especially are "adultified" - they are seen as "older" and thus punished more harshly than peers of the same age.



ASSESSMENT: EDUCATION

This tool is designed to help you think through your experience at school. There is no specific score that will decide if your educational institution is a good fit or not. Each question is designed to get you thinking about your own safety, goals, and feelings.

I feel safe on my school campus	Yes	No	N/A
I think teachers and professors want me to succeed	Yes	No	N/A
My grades reflect the effort I put in	Yes	No	N/A
I am able to express myself through my hair, clothing, and style.	Yes	No	N/A
I am in the appropriate classes for my learning level	Yes	No	N/A
I have access to the same information and opportunities as other students	Yes	No	N/A
My instructors answer my questions directly and will take extra time to explain things if needed.	Yes	No	N/A
I feel like I am on the educational path of my choice, and I haven't been pressured into a career	Yes	No	N/A
I feel like people recognize my value and innate talents	Yes	No	N/A
Staff and instructors are easy to reach and responsive to my questions.	Yes	No	N/A



STRATEGIES: EDUCATION

You shouldn't need these strategies, but we want you to have every possible tool at your disposal.

Ignore Unhelpful 'Advice'

Many Black Women have expressed the experience of being steered away from their preferred educational path. When expressing an interest in healthcare, for example, guidance counselors tend to recommend lower-paying paths like STNA.

Be sure to take guidance towards lower-paying and 'lower prestige careers with a grain of salt if that is not your intended career path. Trust your gut!

Advocate for Yourself

Continue to speak up where you feel comfortable, and where it is important for you. You don't need to fight every battle, but be sure to hold people, especially those in power accountable when your future is at stake.

Ask questions about grades, insist on rubrics, ask about opportunities, and insist on being included in informal educational perks, like internship and job e-mail lists.



Document

Be sure to document teacher and professor expectations and communications. When problems arise, it can be helpful to have notes, lecture recordings, or written materials to refer back to.

Complaints and Legal Systems

If you have experienced harassment or discrimination in education, there are specific legal protections available to you. These situations tend to depend on your specific situation, so talking to a lawyer to understand your rights can be helpful in some situations.

Questions?



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