



WHITE FRAGILITY

DISCUSSION GUIDE | NOVEMBER 2018

White Fragility

Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism

Book by Robin DiAngelo (Beacon Press, 2018)

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Introduction

This discussion guide invites readers to examine and discuss the ideas Robin DiAngelo presents in the book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018). Written with white people in mind, this guide invites participants into the work of learning skills to disrupt racism as a Unitarian Universalist faith commitment and practice. The guide will open paths for white participants coming to terms with their own and others' fragile, defensive, and coded responses when a conversation turns to race. It invites examination of the ways that conversations about race, either interracial or among white people, can—whether one is aware or not—reinforce racial hierarchy.

The guide provides a series of questions, activities, and reflection and sharing opportunities to help participants find, in their own stories and experiences, ways in which they have upheld and reinforced the culture of white supremacy. It offers plans for time together that invite a Unitarian Universalist group into new set of practices, new ways of being that act to disrupt white supremacy-based culture.

In your promotional materials for a *White Fragility* discussion group, you may wish to include a link to [Why "I'm not racist" is only half the story](#), a short (6:11) video from Big Think Science. In it, DiAngelo introduces the ideas she explores more deeply in her book.

Using the Guide

This discussion includes plans for a series of three, 90-minute sessions. We recommend that you offer all three as a series for deepening dialogue and practicing the very skills set forth through the guide and the book itself. Adapt this discussion guide to congregational, cluster, or regional programming for white Unitarian Universalist adults of all ages and life stages, gatherings of advocacy or white identity-based UU groups, campus groups or young adult groups, youth groups, or cross-generational groups of adults and youth.

If you have access to a computer and projector, you may wish to share these [PowerPoint](#) slides rather than write out newsprint or make a handout for questions and some other shared material.

Editors' note: As a publisher, the UUA honors the preferences of our authors with regard to capitalization of race and identity terms. In this discussion guide, as in Robin DiAngelo's book, you will find "black," "white," and "people of color."

Goals

- Invite participants to explore and respond to *White Fragility*
- Guide participants in developing racial awareness and critical thinking skills
- Guide participants to recognize and come to terms with the personal and sociological ramifications of living in a white supremacist society
- Support participants to examine how personal and collective cultural stories, experiences, and behavioral patterns reinforce racism
- Facilitate a space in which white people can learn collectively the language, ideologies, and conversations of disrupting race and becoming accountable to the racism in their everyday lives
- Challenge participants to practice ways to disrupt racist patterns

Session 1: Facing White Supremacy

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Notepad for facilitator notes
- Pens or pencils and blank paper
- A copy of *White Fragility*
- Timekeeper such as a watch, phone, or clock
- Optional: Computer with internet access and a projector or large monitor
- Optional: Slides 1-9 ([PowerPoint](#))

Preparation

- In advance, encourage participants to bring copies of *White Fragility* and personal journals or notebooks.
- Create a handout with the opening words by James Baldwin and make copies for all or prepare to project the words so that all may see them and read them aloud together.
- Write this covenant (behavioral guidelines) on newsprint and set aside:
 - We each promise to:
 - Speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others, creating supportive space for each person to learn.
 - Actively resist making assumptions about one another.
 - Refrain from fixing, saving, advising, or correcting each other.
 - Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
 - Expect and accept non-closure, because the work of disrupting racism is ongoing.
 - Be willing to be challenged to disrupt racist patterns, both by the activities and discussions and by other participants.
 - Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Write on newsprint and post for First Impressions:
 - What insight stays with you after reading the book *White Fragility*?
 - What did you find surprising? Challenging? Liberating? Hopeful?

- Write on newsprint, and set aside, the discussion questions for Racial Ideology in the United States.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside, the Unitarian Universalist Principles:
 - 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
 - 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
 - 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
 - 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
 - 5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
 - 6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
 - 7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside, the Six Sources of Our Living Tradition:
 - Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
 - Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
 - Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
 - Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
 - Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
 - Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.
- For Closing, create a handout with the reflection questions from page 14 of *White Fragility* and make copies for all, or prepare to project the words so that all may see them.
- Set out the chalice.
- Optional: Find out more about writer and social critic [James Baldwin](#) to share with participants.

Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

Say, “Our chalice lighting words were written by James Baldwin, published in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961), adapted to use inclusive gender language. In this passage, he is writing about white, US Americans.”

Then read:

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a [person] is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream [they have] long cherished or a privilege [they have] long possessed that [they are] set free—[they have] set [themselves] free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

Light the chalice.

Say, “This three-session book discussion is for people who identify as white. It is an opportunity to come to examine what DiAngelo has termed ‘white fragility’ and to talk about racism and the way it has personally shaped and affected our lives as white people.”

Project the Baldwin quote you used as a chalice lighting (Slide 3) or distribute the handout you have created. Invite participants to read the words of Baldwin a second time, this time aloud and together.

Introductions and Establishing Guidelines (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly, sharing their name, preferred pronouns, and race. Post the covenant (behavioral guidelines) you have written on newsprint (or, project Slide 4) and propose these points as shared commitments for the group. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on the newsprint (or, make a notes for later editing of the slide). When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Keep this newsprint for future sessions.

First Impressions (10 minutes)

Offer participants two or three minutes to reflect on the questions you have posted (or, project Slide 5), offering them the option to use their journals or the writing materials you have provided. Then ask them to briefly share an initial response to the book, one speaker at a time, without interruption. Assure them that it is fine to pass. Say, "There will be plenty of time for in-depth conversation, sharing, and discussion. For now, please just share a sentence or phrase about the book." Jot down participants' initial responses so that you can return to them in a later session.

Discussion: Racial Ideology in the United States (20 minutes)

Share this reading from pages 20-21 of the book:

The racial ideology that circulates in the United States rationalizes racial hierarchies as the outcome of a natural order resulting from either genetics or individual effort or talent. Those who don't succeed are just not as naturally capable, deserving, or hard-working. Ideologies that obscure racism as a system of inequality are perhaps the most powerful racial forces because once we accept our positions within racial hierarchies, these positions seem natural and difficult to question, even when we are disadvantaged by them. In this way, very little external pressure needs to be applied to keep people in their places; once the rationalizations for inequality are internalized, both sides will uphold the relationship.

Racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of our society. It is not limited to a single act or person. Nor does it move back and forth, one day benefitting whites and another day (or even era) benefitting people of color. The direction of power between white people and people of color is historic, traditional, and normalized in ideology. Racism differs from individual racial prejudice and racial discrimination in the historical accumulation and ongoing use of institutional power and authority to support the prejudice and to systematically enforce discriminatory behaviors with far-reaching effects.

Lead a discussion, inviting participants to name examples of the ideology that says racial hierarchies are part of the natural order in current US culture and political discourse. If the group needs help to get started, refer them to the points listed on page 30. Ask:

- What is meant by the sentence “Racism is a structure, not an event,” a J. Kēhaulani Kauanui quote cited by DiAngelo? How does that speak to you?
- What are some implications—both local and national—of racism being a foundational structure and ideology in US American history and culture and its economic system and civic life?

Sharing: Turning to Our Unitarian Universalist Tradition (15 minutes)

Invite participants to shift from *thinking about* the implications of the idea that racism is a structure and not an event to *feeling* the implications. Pause for a minute or two. Then share again the first sentence of the Baldwin quote: “*Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.*” Say:

The work of dismantling an embedded racial ideology and its pervasive effects does imply, as Baldwin states, “the breakup of the world as one has always known it.” Our faith commitments and communities are well suited to helping us navigate this breakup in order to set ourselves free. Our Unitarian Universalist tradition is about transformation, about a vision for a world made whole. While fully acknowledging that our religious institutions are embedded in the dominant culture and reflect its ideologies, including its racial ideology, we can also look to our shared faith to ground us in our vision and call us to our deepest religious commitments as we learn to talk openly and honestly about race.

Rephrase the two ideas in the last sentence: “Our *religious institutions* are embedded in the dominant culture and reflect its white supremacist racial ideology. Our shared *Unitarian Universalist faith* can help us talk honestly about this and work on changing it.”

Post both the UU Principles and the Sources of Our Living Tradition. (If you are using Slides 7 and 8, show each for a minute or two, then prepare to toggle back and forth during discussion.) Note that these are helpful to some, while others may find deeper meaning in texts, music, or spiritual practices. Invite participants, as they are ready, to name what grounds and centers them as a Unitarian Universalist. In what ways can they turn for guidance from their faith, both in conversations about race and in the practice of actively resisting embedded racial ideology as they encounter it in their own lives and thoughts?

Sharing: White Fragility (15 minutes)

Say, “DiAngelo lists defensive behaviors that white people exhibit when challenged with racial stress, calling these responses *white fragility*, a phrase she began using several years ago.” She states, on page 2:

These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy.

She later states, on page 3:

White progressives do indeed uphold and perpetuate racism, but our defensiveness and certitude make it virtually impossible to explain to us how we do so.

Invite participants to turn to another person and share a time when they have been challenged by racial conflict or stress and felt a defensive reaction. Say that one person will share while the other listens, without comment, and then they will switch roles. Remind them that the group has covenanted not to fix, save, advise, or correct others. Allow about five minutes each for this conversation, giving pairs 30 seconds notice of when to change speakers. If there is an uneven number of participants, a facilitator should partner with someone, rather than having a group of three.

Call participants back to the larger group. Ask for comments about the experience of disclosing uncomfortable stories.

Closing and Taking It Home (10 minutes)

Introduce the closing, saying, “DiAngelo suggests that we use our own racial discomfort as a door to greater understanding by asking ourselves some questions.” Share the reflection questions from page 14 to think about between now and the next meeting:

Why does this unsettle me?

What would it mean for me if this were true?

How does this lens change my understanding of racial dynamics?

How can my unease help reveal the unexamined assumptions I have been making?

Is it possible that because I am white, there are some racial dynamics that I can't see?

Am I willing to consider that possibility? If I am not willing to do it, then why not?

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and place to reconvene for Session 2. Invite them, between meetings, to be aware of their own responses (actions, speech, thoughts, and feelings) when race is a stated or unstated part of an in-person or online interaction with others. Suggest journaling about their interactions and responses.

Make sure to store the newsprint covenant (behavioral guidelines), or update the suggested covenant on the slides, so you can quickly review it with the group at the start of the next meeting.

Share these words from Rebecca Parker, who is white, from her essay in *Soul Work: Antiracist Theologies in Dialogue* (Skinner House, 2003):

My ignorance is not mine alone. It is the ignorance of my cultural enclave. Most of us do not know more than our community knows. Thus my search for remedial education, to come to know the larger reality of my country, is necessarily a struggle to transform my community's knowledge—not mine alone. As I gain more knowledge, I enter into a different community—a community of presence, awareness, responsibility, and consciousness.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Session 2: How Does Race Shape the Lives of White People?

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Lined and unlined paper
- Pens, pencils, colored pencils and markers
- Covenant (behavioral guidelines) from Session 1
- A copy of *White Fragility*
- Timekeeper such as a watch, phone, or clock
- Optional: Computer with Internet access and a projector or large monitor
- Optional: Slides 10-13 ([PowerPoint](#))

Preparation

- In advance, encourage participants to bring copies of *White Fragility* and personal journals or notebooks.
- Post the covenant (behavioral guidelines) from Session 1.
- Set out paper, pens, pencils, colored pencils, and markers.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside for Reflection and Journaling:
 - How is my life shaped by race?
 - What has previously been invisible or hidden from my perception?
 - Where has antiblackness (hatred, contempt, condemnation, or devaluation of or indifference to black people) played out in my life?
- Review the discussion and reflection prompts for this session. Check in with yourself about your own stories and your willingness to share so that you are prepared to do so if necessary to prompt discussion.
- Set out the chalice.
- Optional: Find out more about white antiracism activist [Tim Wise](#) and/or white poet [Tricia Knoll](#), and prepare to share with participants

Chalice Lighting and Check-In (10 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from white antiracism activist Tim Wise, author of *White Like Me* (Slide 11):

The irony of American history is the tendency of good white Americans to presume racial innocence. Ignorance of how we are shaped racially is the first sign of privilege.

In other words. It is a privilege to ignore the consequences of race in America.

Invite participants to reintroduce themselves and, if they wish, to share what they have been thinking about since Session 1. Review the covenant (behavioral guidelines) from Session 1.

Brainstorm: White Racial Innocence and White Supremacy (15 minutes)

Post blank newsprint.

Share this quote from DiAngelo, from page 27 in the book:

To say that whiteness is a standpoint is to say that a significant aspect of white identity is to see oneself as an individual, outside or innocent of race—“just human.” This standpoint views many white people and their interests as central to, and representative of, humanity. Whites also produce and reinforce the dominant narratives of society—such as individualism and meritocracy—and use these narratives to explain the positions of other racial groups...

To say that whiteness includes a set of cultural practices that are not recognized by white people is to understand racism as a network of norms and actions that consistently create advantage for whites and disadvantage people of color. These norms and actions include basic rights and benefits of the doubt, purportedly granted to all but which are only consistently granted to white people. The dimensions of racism benefitting white people are usually invisible to whites.

Invite participants to name, popcorn style, the ways in which white people, consciously or unconsciously, accept whiteness as central to and representative of humanity. Invite them to name things large and small, from treatment by law enforcement to representation in marketing materials and mainstream media. Invite them to consider naming ways in which they personally have viewed

whiteness as the norm or standard for being human. Ask a participant to capture ideas on newsprint while you keep the brainstorm moving. After about five minutes, end the exercise, noting that it would take hours and hours to name every way in which whiteness is viewed as central.

Invite participants to take a deep breath and feel the weight of racism, which is often invisible to white people.

Then share these words from the book, pages 30 and 32:

Race scholars use the term white supremacy to describe a sociopolitical economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefits those defined and perceived as white... Our umbrage at the term white supremacy only serves to protect the processes it describes and obscure the mechanisms of racial inequality... White supremacy is more than the idea that whites are superior to people of color; it is the deeper premise that supports this idea—the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as a deviation from that norm.

Reflection and Journaling: Antiracism (15 minutes)

Tell participants that you are going to take some time for them to check in with themselves and their own story. Say that people will be in different places in coming to terms with new knowledge, and there are likely some strong feelings in the room. Say that you will share one more passage from the book, and then pause for some individual reflection and journaling. Then share these passages, from pages 94-95:

There is a curious satisfaction in the punishment of black people: the smiling faces of the white crowd picnicking at lynchings in the past, and the satisfied approval of white people observing mass incarceration and execution in the present. White righteousness, when inflicting pain on African Americans, is evident in the glee the white collective derives from blackface and depictions of blacks as apes and gorillas. We see it in the compassion toward white people who are addicted to opiates and the call to provide them with services versus the mandatory sentencing perpetrated against those addicted to crack. We see it in the concern about the “forgotten” white working class so critical to the outcome of the last presidential election, with no concern for blacks, who remain on the bottom of virtually every social and economic measure...

To put it bluntly, I believe that the white collective fundamentally hates blackness for what it reminds us of: that we are capable and guilty of perpetrating immeasurable harm and that our gains come through the subjugation of others.

Post the Reflection and Journaling questions you have written (or, direct attention to Slide 12. Indicate where you have placed writing and drawing materials. Invite participants to take about ten minutes to reflect and to write or sketch in response to one or more of the questions posted, challenging themselves to address the question that feels the most uncomfortable or weighty for them right now. Say that they will not be asked to share these reflections.

Sharing: Beyond the Good Person/Bad Person Binary (20 minutes)

Say:

DiAngelo states that after the civil rights movement, one could not be a good moral person and be complicit with racism. Only bad people were racists. Racism as a concept was reduced to simple extreme acts of racial prejudice. This redefinition of racism prevails today. Therefore, to suggest that a white person is racist or is complicit with racism is to attack their character. It causes the defensive reaction DiAngelo calls “white fragility,” while the white person demands or maneuvers to be validated as a “good person.”

Pause for a moment. Then say:

It is probable that every one of us has experienced defensiveness about a suggestion that we are complicit in a racist system. How have we expressed our defensiveness?

Invite participants to find in themselves the humility, courage, and honesty to share, one at a time as they are moved, without interruption or cross-talk, a story about a time when they felt (and perhaps acted on) the defensiveness that defines white fragility. Invite them, as part of their sharing, to imagine how they might handle the situation differently. Note that they may choose to share the same story they shared with a partner in the first session, perhaps with new insights, or a totally different story.

It may be difficult to get this sharing started. Pause for two or three minutes, letting the silence be uncomfortable. If no one begins speaking after a significant silence, share a story of your own to get things started.

Discussion: White Women's Tears (25 minutes)

Note that in the "White Women's Tears" chapter of the book, DiAngelo explains why white women's tears in cross-racial or multiracial settings are problematic. Share this quote from page 136:

Whether intended or not, when a white woman cries over some aspect of racism, all the attention immediately goes to her, demanding time, energy, and attention from everyone in the room when they should be focused on ameliorating racism. While she is given attention, the people of color are yet again abandoned and or blamed... Antiracism strategist and facilitator Reagan Price paraphrases an analogy based on the work of critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Price says, "Imagine first responders rushing to the scene of an accident rushing to comfort the person whose car struck a pedestrian, while the pedestrian lies bleeding on the street. In a particularly pernicious move of perverting the racial order, racism becomes about white distress, white suffering, and white victimization."

DiAngelo goes on to quote a woman of color who was "in no mood for white women's tears" after yet another shooting of an unarmed black man. The woman said:

It's infuriating because of its audacity of disrespect to our experience. You are crying because you are uncomfortable with your feelings when we are barely allowed to have any. You are ashamed or some such thing and cry, but we are not allowed to have any feelings because then we are being difficult. We are supposed to remain stoic and strong because otherwise we become the angry and scary people of color. We are only allowed to have feelings for the sake of your entertainment, as in the presentation of our funerals. And even then, there are expectations of what is allowed for us to express. We are abused daily, beaten, raped, and killed but you are sad and that's what is important. That's why it is sooooo hard to take.

Allow for a couple of minutes of silence to let the emotional weight of the quote sink in. Then lead a discussion, asking:

- Why do you think DiAngelo wrote this chapter?
- What did you learn from reading it?
- Have you witnessed white women crying or expressing other strong emotions when the conversation turns to race (perhaps yourself)? How did other white people in the room respond? How did people of color respond?

- How does this new information or perspective change the way you understand interactions in cross-racial groups, especially when the topic turns to race, racism, or racially problematic behavior?

Closing (5 minutes)

Invite participants to continue to reflect in the days ahead on how race has shaped their life. Remind the group that this is the second of three meetings. Tell them that the third session will focus on DiAngelo's question in the Chapter 12 title, "Where Do We Go from Here?," considering how we might respond differently to our own white fragility and to that of other white people with whom we interact.

Share "Connecting," a poem by Tricia Knoll, who is white, published in *To Wake, to Rise* (Skinner House Books, 2017):

*I'm white space
between black dots.
I grew up catching tigers
by the toe, School books
came with unbroken backs.*

*No one ever called my people X.
Families on TV looked like mine.
I burn in the sun. I believed
money could get me where I wanted to go.*

*I own the land I live on.
I was never a melting anything—
fondue, chocolate, molten pot
hot lava lamp or zombie brain.*

*A bubble surrounds me,
shimmer-soap surprise
I thought would never pop
until it did.*

Confirm the day, date, time, and place to reconvene for Session 3. Make sure to store the newsprint covenant (behavioral guidelines), or edit it on the slides, so you can post and quickly review it at the start of the next meeting.

Thank participants. Extinguish the chalice.

Session 3: Interrupting Racist Patterns

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Lined and unlined paper
- Pens, pencils, colored pencils and markers
- Covenant (behavioral guidelines) from Session 2
- A copy of *White Fragility*
- Timekeeper such as a watch, phone, or clock
- Optional: Computer with Internet access and a projector or large monitor
- Optional: Slides 14-17 ([PowerPoint](#))

Preparation

- In advance, encourage participants to bring copies of *White Fragility* and personal journals or notebooks.
- Post the covenant (behavioral guidelines) from Session 2.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside, these questions for Reflection and Sharing: What Are You Missing?:
 - Did you grow up in a racially segregated environment? Do you live in one now?
 - If you grew up in a racially diverse environment, how did it become racially diverse? Was it becoming more or less diverse over time? What messages were you given about the desirability of a racially diverse environment?
 - If you grew up in a racially segregated environment, how did it become segregated? What messages were you given about the desirability of a racially segregated environment? Were they overt or coded?
 - Was the school you attended racially diverse or racially segregated? How did the school become racially diverse or racially segregated?
 - Did anyone ever tell you that you were missing something of value by living in a racially segregated environment? Did anyone ever tell you that there was value in living in a racially diverse environment?
 - If you lived in a racially segregated environment in your younger years, what were you missing?

- What are you missing now if you live in a racially segregated environment?
- Have you engaged in conversation where it was assumed that a racially segregated environment was desirable? Have you, yourself, sent such messages?
- Write on newsprint, and set aside, the Paired Reflection process for Reflection and Sharing: What Are You Missing?:
 - First person shares (2 minutes)
 - Second person responds, stating what they heard and asking clarification questions (2 minutes)
 - Second person shares (2 minutes)
 - First person responds, stating what they heard and asking clarification questions (2 minutes)
 - Consider commonalities and differences in your experiences. Focus on “What were you missing?” and “What are you missing now?” (5 minutes)
- Find and bookmark information online about the proposed Unitarian Universalist [8th Principle](#).
- Set out the chalice and supplies for writing and drawing
- Optional: Find out more about writer [Michael Eric Dyson](#) and prepare to share with participants.

Chalice Lighting and Check-In (10 minutes)

Share these words by Michael Eric Dyson, a black educator and writer, from the preface to *White Fragility*, page xi:

White fragility is an idea whose time has come. It is an idea that registers the hurt feelings, shattered egos, fraught spirits, vexed bodies, and taxed emotions of white folks. In truth, their suffering comes from recognizing that they are white—that their whiteness has given them a big leg up in life while crushing others’ dreams, that their whiteness is the clearest example of the identity politics they claim is harmful to the nation, and that their whiteness has shielded them from growing up as quickly as they might have done had they not so heavily leaned on it to make it through life.

Light the chalice. Invite participants to reintroduce themselves and, if they wish, to share what they have been thinking about since Session 2. Review the covenant (behavioral guidelines) from the last session.

Tell participants that today you will take up the question “Where do we go from here?” and begin to learn new ways to respond to white fragility, our own or that of other white people with whom we interact.

Reflection and Sharing: What Are You Missing? (35 minutes)

Share this quote from *White Fragility*, page 37:

Predominantly white neighborhoods are not outside of race—they are teeming with race. Every moment we spend in those environments reinforces powerful aspects of a white racial frame, including a limited worldview, a reliance on deeply problematic depictions of people of color, comfort in segregation with no sense that there might be value in knowing people of color, and internalized superiority. In turn, our capacity to engage constructively across racial lines becomes profoundly limited.

Then invite participants to use writing materials and/or their own journals to sketch a neighborhood from their childhood that they clearly remember. Invite them to identify the names and races of those in the neighborhood, to the best of their ability. Tell them that this is a sketch, not a finished piece, and that they will have three minutes. Then invite them to sketch their current neighborhood, identifying names and races of those who live there. Allow two minutes for this.

Then invite them to look at what they have sketched and take a breath. Ask them to consider in silence the question “How has whiteness been part of the places where you live?”

Then share this quote from page 67:

The most profound message of racial segregation may be that the absence of people of color from our lives is no real loss. Not one person who loved me, guided me, or taught me ever conveyed that segregation deprived me of anything of value. I could live my entire life without a friend or loved one of color and not see that as a diminishment of my life...

Pause for a moment and consider the profundity of this message: we are taught that we lose nothing of value through racial segregation. Consider the message we send to our children—as well as to children of color—when we describe white segregation as good.

Explain that we might describe white segregation as good not only in explicit words but through coded language about good schools and good neighborhoods.

Post the questions you have written on newsprint (Slides 15 and 16). Call attention to the paper and writing and drawing implements you have set out. Invite participants to consider the questions you have posted and write or draw in response. Allow about five minutes for personal reflection.

Then ask participants to form pairs to share their reflections with one another. Remind them of the agreement not to fix, save, advise, or correct each other. If there is an uneven number, pair with one of the participants yourself. Ask them to follow this format:

1. First person shares (2 minutes)
2. Second person responds, stating what they heard and asking clarification questions (2 minutes)
3. Second person shares (2 minutes)
4. First person responds, stating what they heard and asking clarification questions (2 minutes)
5. Consider commonalities and differences in your experiences, focusing on the questions “What were you missing? What are you missing now?” (5 minutes)

Help the pairs keep track of time for switching speakers.

Regather the group. Invite participants to share insights gained from their reflections and the paired sharing and ways they might want to move forward to fill in some of what they might have missed by being in racially segregated environments. Remind participants of the warning that DiAngelo gave that people of color should not be expected to teach white people about racism; information can be sought from books, websites, films, from other white people, like DiAngelo, and from people of color who *are* committed to teaching white people about racism on their own terms.

Racist Patterns (15 minutes)

Invite participants to turn to pages 119 and 120 of the book, looking at the list of “Feelings,” “Behaviors,” and “Claims.” Then go around the circle one by one reading aloud the lists of feelings and behaviors that mark white fragility, the defensive behaviors white people exhibit when confronted with racial stress. Invite them to consider the story they told in Session 2 or another incident that has arisen or that has come to mind. Then go around the room one by one reading aloud the “claims” that white people sometimes make to justify these feelings and behaviors. Ask, “When have you made such claims?” Pause for a few moments of reflection and then invite

responses, saying that it is OK for participants to share out loud or to keep their reflections to themselves.

Close the activity by sharing this quote from page 129:

Regardless of whether a parent told you that everyone was equal, or the poster in the hall of your white suburban school proclaimed the value of diversity, or you have traveled abroad, or you have people of color in your workplace or family, the ubiquitous socializing power of white supremacy cannot be avoided. The messages circulate 24-7 and have little or nothing to do with intention, awareness, or agreement. Entering the conversation with this understanding is freeing because it allows us to focus on how—rather than if—our racism is manifest. When we move beyond the good/bad binary, we can become eager to identify our racist patterns because interrupting those patterns becomes more important than managing how we think we look to others.

Discussion: Responding to Feedback about Racist Behaviors and Actions (20 minutes)

Say, “Robin DiAngelo offers specific steps for responding to feedback received when one has done or said something racist or racially problematic.” Invite participants to silently reread the story she tells on pages 139-140, allowing about five minutes.

Discuss the feelings, behaviors, or claims DiAngelo exhibited from the white fragility lists participants just shared. Then discuss how DiAngelo handled the feedback. Ask, “What can we learn from this scenario?”

Then invite participants, once again, to recall from Session 1 how Unitarian Universalist faith calls them to personal and communal work to dismantle white supremacy. Invite one or more participants to share a real-life situation that they observed or participated in, where feedback about racism or a microaggression was not well received by a white person. If no one shares after a couple of minutes of silence, share an example of your own. Together as a group, discuss ways of handling the situation that might have interrupted racist patterns. If the group is willing, try role-playing the scenario. Explain that the work the group is doing right now is building what DiAngelo calls “racial stamina,” which works against the impulse to engage in defensive or fragile responses.

Closing and Moving Forward (10 minutes)

Ask, “Is this group interested in forming an ongoing accountability group, meeting regularly to talk with one another about the skills we are developing and the learning we are doing to interrupt racist patterns?” If so, ask for someone in the group to take responsibility for talking with the group via email or social media to organize those meetings.

Tell participants that a group of Unitarian Universalists are proposing that we adopt an eighth UU Principle: “*Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.*” Share [website information](#) with the group and ask for volunteers to find out more, exploring the possibility of asking your congregation to join the adoption movement.

Close with the same reading that began this three-session exploration of the book *White Fragility*. (Optional: Display Slide 3.) Remind participants that these words were written by James Baldwin.

Then read:

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a [person] is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream [they have] long cherished or a privilege [they have] long possessed that [they are] set free—[they have] set [themselves] free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.