


10 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Call the Police on Black/Brown Bodies

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Serve and protect. That's the phrase that we most commonly associate with police ... so how do we deal with the reality that so many Black and Brown people live in constant fear and terror of blue uniforms? Thanks to modern day Black liberation movements like Black Lives Matter, the reality of police violence against marginalized communities is frankly undeniable. We no longer live in a world where we can plausibly deny the corrupt nature of our systems and how they actively work to oppress and disenfranchise certain communities.

Many activists have also come to point out how regular citizens are also complicit in the police violence that impacts Black and brown people. While the concept of over-criminalizing or assuming criminality of Black people is in no way new, the public shaming and ridicule of those who do it, delightfully, is. **White women like 'Permit Patty' who called the cops on an eight-year old Black girl for selling lemonade 'without a permit' or 'BBQ Betty' who reported a couple of Black men grilling food in an Oakland park, probably think they are doing their duty. In fact, they are playing into cruel and inaccurate stereotypes of Black people and also putting them in very real danger at the hands of law enforcement and the justice system.**

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself before you call the cops on Black and Brown people:

Do I actually see a serious crime taking place?

Is someone wielding a gun or a knife? Is someone being robbed or threatened or harassed? Is someone in actual danger of harm? If the answer to any of these is yes, calling the police is probably wise, especially if don't have the capacity to de-escalate the situation yourself. If people are minding their own business, doing harmless things, experiencing joy, helping their community, participating in regular activities... calling the police is completely unnecessary. Maybe, just maybe, you need a permit to sell \$1 lemonade on your front lawn but you also can't do any of these things either; have

snowball fights in Colorado, eat in a car in Connecticut, buy sex toys in Georgia or share your Netflix password in Tennessee. So, Becky, if you can honestly say you're such a model citizen that you can live without a vibrator....

Is this any of my business?

Probably not.

If you are not being directly impacted by something taking place, it's safe to say there's no need for you to get involved, unless your motive is to provide support or problem-solve. It's part of white privilege that you are able to go about your life, completely unquestioned and engage in activities that if your skin were darker, would be considered suspicious, inconvenient, aggressive or dangerous. People of colour don't have these same privileges and are tired of random people questioning their every move and motive.

If it is undeniably your business, see question 5.

Am I making assumptions about this person based on the colour of their skin?

Unconscious bias is something that we all have; we make assumptions about people based on the way they look and act accordingly. Unpacking and questioning those stereotypes takes years of hard work. Ask yourself; *am I assuming this person is up to no good just because they are not white?*

What are the repercussions of calling the police?

It's no secret that Black and Brown people, particularly in the United States, are stopped, searched, arrested and detained disproportionately. In addition, so many of those interactions with police end up being violent and sometimes even fatal. If you call the cops on a white person for selling lemonade or barbecuing, they may get a friendly warning or even a high five from a police officer. The same cannot be said for Black folks. Here's a list of 'crimes' that Black people have lost their lives over: carrying skittles, changing lanes, protecting their children, selling CDs and playing with toys in a park.

Regardless of their actions; no one deserves to die.

Can this issue be solved without involving the authorities?

There is so much beauty in communities coming together to support one another. What if we could fix our problems without having to rely on systems that are built to hurt and oppress certain people? We grow community gardens to share the fruits among people; what if we also had free self defense classes and inclusive neighbourhood watch teams and ride sharing services so women don't have to walk alone at night? Police are not always the answer; we can protect our own communities from danger rather than over-criminalizing Black and Brown people for the safety of those who are white. Think outside the box; solve the issue without calling the cops.

Do I need to reflect on what I consider 'suspicious' or 'shady'?

Whatever stereotypes you have in your mind about Black and brown people; they are not your original thoughts... they've been fed to you by negative media portrayals, inaccurate history lessons and bigoted relatives. Use your critical thinking skills and question the pejorative prejudices that float into your mind when you see a Black teenager with their hood up or a group of brown folks walking towards you. The majority of people are just going about their regular business; perhaps they're wearing a hoodie because it's cold or they're gathered together to socialize. The framing of people of colour in our media as criminals, terrorists, aggressors, vandals etc. is an intentional act to further marginalize these communities. Everyone can be part of ending these institutionally upheld forms of racism; it starts with undoing your own biases.

Can I live with sending someone to their death?

This may seem like a dramatic oversimplification, but it is the reality. So many 'random' police checks, speeding tickets, house visits, cautions, overnight detentions, prison sentences, and so on, end up quite literally fatal for many Black people. Maybe, by calling the police, you want to see some sort of justice served for something you perceive to be a violation. That won't happen; there is no such thing as justice in an unequal system. Death is far too high a price to pay for anything you may deem an inconvenience.

How can I help people instead of hurting them?

In a lot of the stories that have come forward about white people calling the cops on innocent people of colour, there seems to be a common thread. An eight year-old kid selling lemonade, Alton Sterling selling CDs, two Black men waiting for a business meeting at Starbucks. These people are trying to better their lives, support their

families and communities and survive capitalism. How about, instead of calling the cops, buy a cup of lemonade.

In the event that police are needed, how can I mitigate the harm caused?

If the police do show up, you'll immediately notice how people of colour are treated by law enforcement. You'll also notice that they are far more likely to listen to you, treat you with respect and let you go if you intervene. Use this privilege to protect and support people of colour in direct threat from law enforcement. Whether that's literally, with your body or by de-escalating a riled-up police officer, you could mitigate the harm caused.

How can I prevent police violence moving forward?

Sometimes we feel like there's not a lot we can do to change oppressive systems that are upheld by power and white supremacy. In some ways, this may be true but there are always small changes we can make in our own lives that propel us towards liberation. Here are some suggestions:

- Educate yourself about the experiences of people of colour
- Educate other white people
- Start an intersectional, inclusive neighbourhood watch program
- Brainstorm ways to protect communities that don't involve law enforcement
- [Donate to Black Lives Matter](#) and other causes fighting for justice
- Know your rights... and remember they are *everyone's* rights
- Take out your cell phone and record police interactions
- Attend anti-police violence rallies