



Ouch/Oops

**A tool for responding to and learning
from macro and micro aggressions.**

**A way forward through the challenges of
learning in mixed spaces.**

A Homa Psychotherapy Training Booklet

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What is the Ouch/Oops tool?

Ouch/Oops is a tool that is available to people who live in the world with protected characteristics, with the addition of three non-protected characteristics identified by Homa.

In a group situation, and indeed in all relationships, it is inevitable that people will, at times, say or do things which demonstrate their ignorance, assumptions and/or prejudices. Their words or actions can impact us in various ways.

Ouch/Oops offers one way to respond to micro and macro aggressions and a way forward for all through the challenges of learning in mixed spaces.

Micro and Macro Aggressions



- A micro aggression is something that people do or say, intentionally or unintentionally which demonstrates their prejudice, bias, discrimination and/or assumptions towards or about a person with protected characteristics.
- A macro aggression is something that people do or say, intentionally or unintentionally which demonstrates their prejudice, bias, discrimination and/or assumptions towards or about a group of people with protected characteristics.

Protected characteristics include:

- ✓ Race - including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Disability
- ✓ Gender reassignment
- ✓ Marriage or civil partnership
- ✓ Pregnancy and maternity
- ✓ Religion or belief
- ✓ Sex
- ✓ Sexual orientation

Non protected characteristics added by Homa include:

- ✓ Body size and shape
- ✓ Class
- ✓ Menopause

Ouch/Oops can be used in groups or organisations where everyone involved understands and agrees with the process. Using Ouch/Oops is one way to build more thoughtful, respectful and responsible relationships between individuals and in a group, and to honour and respect difference.

Definitions

In this booklet, we will refer to the person experiencing a micro or macro aggression as the **Oucher** and the person responsible for the micro or macro aggression as the **Oopser**.

When to use the Ouch/Oops tool

When a person experiences a micro or macro aggression, often their reaction to being attacked in this way is to react with fight, flight, faun or freeze. By the time it feels possible to respond rather than react, the moment has passed and they are left with their hurt and feelings of anger, fear, sadness, guilt or shame.

The Ouch/Oops tool intends to offer people who live in the world with the characteristics identified above, a way to express their hurt or anger in the moment, without having to do the emotional labour of explaining themselves, educating others or having to hold or manage fragility and defensiveness, unless they choose to do so. This tool is not intended to eliminate difficult or challenging conversations about prejudice, discrimination and difference. Rather, it puts the onus on the Oopser to take responsibility for having those conversations themselves, to reflect on, learn and understand the impact of their words and actions.

This provides us all with the valuable opportunity to learn and undo our deeply ingrained and often unconscious biases, assumptions and prejudices and to create a space in which people meet each other with respect, kindness and a willingness to change. Following on from the Ouch/Oops process there is a valuable opportunity for reflection, rich conversations and learning.

How to use the Ouch/Oops tool

Step 1 - Ouch



When someone experiences a micro or macro aggression they can choose to say **“Ouch”**, in the moment, without giving any explanation or additional information.

All they say is “Ouch”. This means that in the moment of experiencing the micro/macro aggression, they don’t have to think about what to say, they don’t have to explain or find the right words or try to use the right tone to convey to the other person that they have experienced something painful, hurtful or offensive.

“Ouch” is essentially code for “You have said or done something which hurts and/or which I feel offended by or angry about and which demonstrates your prejudice, bias or assumptions about me or people like me”.

There is no tone policing of how the Ouch is said, by the oops err or anyone else. It may be quiet and unemotional or it may be said loudly and angrily, whatever is authentic for the Ouched person at that moment. Having experienced a micro

or macro aggression, there is no onus or requirement to use this tool. It is available should anyone *wish* to use it.

The choice of the word Ouch is due to its onomatopoeic quality. It is more of a sound than a word. The intention is for the person who has experienced the micro/macro aggression to have this word/sound available to them, thus removing the process of having to think about what to say or how to respond in these instances.

When we experience a micro/macro aggression one of the common reactions is to second guess ourselves or think ourselves out of saying something, we may find ourselves thinking:

- "Did they really say/do that?"
- "Is that really sexist, racist, homophobic or is it just me being over-sensitive?"
- "Maybe I'm just making a big deal out of something?" ...
- "I don't want to be difficult, they probably don't even mean it"
- "It's not worth the hassle, there's no point saying anything"

If you felt the hurt, the jab of the aggression, if you feel angry or offended, whether it is big or small, intentional or unintentional, you can say "Ouch", if you want to.

We recognise that the person saying Ouch is taking a risk. They have no guarantees about how the other will respond. It may

or may not be worth it for them. Using this tool is always a personal choice.

The Oucher, if they want to, can then make some time and space, at a time that works for them, to acknowledge and process their thoughts and feelings about the micro/macro aggression they experienced, ideally with support - venting and/or talking it through with someone they trust.

This tool is not asking people who experience micro and macro aggressions to silence themselves. They are free to use this tool or to respond to these aggressions in any way they see fit.

Step 2 - Oops



In response to the “Ouch,” the other person says “**Oops, thank you**” nothing *else at all*. No sorry or other apology is added.

The “Ouch” is information for them that their words or actions have had an impact on the other person, regardless of their intention. Saying thank you indicates that they appreciate the risk the Oucher is taking by engaging in this process and that they welcome the opportunity to better understand and learn.

This is *not* a time to ask questions or offer apologies or an explanation.

Oops is code for “Thank you for letting me know that I have hurt or offended you, I will find someone to talk this through with to understand the impact of my words/actions and to effect change in myself and the world”.

Step 3 - Reflect and Learn



The Oopser is required to follow up their oops with some reflection and learning. They *do not do this alone, they must* first talk it through with someone who can support them. The Oopser, with this support, takes responsibility for understanding how they have caused harm and not repeating their behaviour/s. This is not an optional part of the process. Even if the oopser thinks that they know the impact of their words or actions, they nevertheless talk it through with at least one person. This process of learning and reflection can be done in small groups, thus extending the learning.

It is recommended that there be specific people who volunteer or are designated to support the Oopsers in reflecting and learning. These are ideally people who can hold defensiveness and fragility with clarity and kindness. Their role is to support the Oopser to understand the impact of their actions and to point them to resources and actions for further learning. With this support, the Oopser can do the heart work of recognising how prejudice, bias and assumptions live in them and come out in their actions and attitudes. The reflection and conversation with the support person is not about optical allyship (wanting to look like a good person). This

is a real opportunity to do some heart and soul-searching work and to responsibly take action in the work of social justice.

It is a given that the support people are not perfect nor superior to the Oopser, as none of us can be. They are all people who will be Oopsers themselves at times and it is accepted and understood that everyone in the group is willing to keep learning and taking action.

The Oopser will follow up the conversation with further education by reading, watching or listening to resources and having more conversations with others to continue and deepen their process of understanding and learning.

Step 4 - Accountability



After the Oopser has reflected and learned, they go back to the Oucher to let them know and to listen, if there is anything that the Oucher wants to say.

They let the Oucher know this as simply and concisely as possible, something like:

“I want to let you know that I have reflected and learned and I am available to listen if there is anything you want to say”.

They don't share their learnings or give an apology. *The apology is in the action they have undertaken; talking and learning.* By being willing to reflect and learn they are demonstrating their regret and commitment to not continuing to cause harm or offence and to effect change both in themselves and the world.

If the Oucher wants to say something, the Oopser listens. They don't say anything else at all unless the Oucher explicitly invites a conversation or a response.

There is *no* onus on the Oucher to say anything in response to the Oopser letting them know they have reflected and learned. The accountability part of the process is intended to give the Oucher the confirmation that the Oopser has taken

their Ouch seriously. If the Oucher knows that their willingness to take the risk to say Ouch has been acted on, it can make saying Ouch worth the risk.

The Oucher may be up for a conversation or may not and they are free to respond in any way that is authentic for them with no onus on them to reassure, forgive or explain anything to the Oopser. If they want to have a conversation, they can have one, or if they want to tell the Oopser something about the impact of their actions they can do so and they also can receive the information without saying anything at all.

Witnessing a micro or macro aggression

A person does not say Ouch on behalf of someone else. If they believe they have witnessed (rather than personally experiencing) a micro or macro aggression they can ask to speak to the person privately whom they saw or heard acting in a way they believe to be harmful or hurtful. They can let that person know what they saw/heard and talk it through with them to provide an opportunity to learn and grow. This is not an invitation to shame or imply that they are a better ally. They can also acknowledge that they don't know if the person or people in question experienced the micro or macro aggression or felt the Ouch.

If a person with a protected characteristic experiences an Ouch when they witness a micro or aggression towards another person with the same protected characteristic, they can say Ouch. In this case, they are essentially saying it on their own behalf, since witnessing the micro/macro aggression has caused *them* to experience it also and has hurt or offended them too, as well as potentially hurting the other person. In this case, the Oopser will come back to the Oucher, not the third party, for accountability.

OUCH/OOPS

A tool for responding to and learning from micro and macro aggressions



MICRO/MACRO AGRESSION

- You experience intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect prejudice, discrimination or assumptions about you and/or your identity group(s).
- You feel hurt and/or angry.



OUCH

- You say "Ouch".
- Trust your experience.
- You don't have to explain or say anything else unless you want to.
- If you need to, take time in the moment or later to process your experience. Ideally, with support.



OOPS

- In response to the "Ouch", the other person says "Oops, thank you".
- The Oopser doesn't apologise or explain or say anything else.
- Oops is shorthand for "I'm sorry, I will reflect and learn and hold myself accountable".



REFLECT & LEARN

- The Oopser talks through the micro/macro aggression with a tutor or peer.
- The Oopser takes action to understand how they caused hurt so that they can effect change in themselves and the world.



ACCOUNTABILITY

- The Oopser goes back to the Oucher and tells them: "I have reflected and learned and I am willing to listen if there is anything you want to say".
- If the Oucher wants to respond, the Oopser listens.

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