

How do you process uncomfortable information?

You hear uncomfortable information about harm that's been done by you or someone who's part of your lineage.

Maybe it's about the colonization or genocide committed by your ancestors. Or the racist, ablist, or sexist comment you made at work. Your first reaction is to run from it, avoid it, deny it, make a joke about it, and/or distance yourself from it. But that's not the kind of person you really want to be.

What do you do instead?

1

PAUSE and take long slow breaths. Go outside in nature, if you can, or hug a pet. Your body needs to be told it is safe, so that you have capacity to process the rest of this.

2

WITNESS and name what is going on in your body and what emotions you feel. Let those emotions and sensations complete their cycle and then let them go.

3

BE HONEST with yourself. Notice your defensiveness and your need to feel safe and have a sense of belonging. These are all human responses and needs.

4

REFLECT on why these feelings are coming up and what you're trying to defend yourself from. A journal or art practice helps with this.

5

SLOW DOWN. Your immediate response might be to quickly try to fix things and/or say something meaningful. If done too quickly, this might perpetuate the harm.

6

FIND PEOPLE who will hold you in unconditional positive regard, who will hold you accountable, and who are in no way impacted by the harm.

7

UNPACK the harm, defensiveness, shame – whatever needs to be unpacked – together with your circle of trust.

8

PLAN for the reparations that need to be made, the words that need to be spoken, and the changes that need to happen. Place the needs of those harmed at the centre of your plans.

9

TAKE ACTION. Apologize if needed, make changes, adjust policies, repair relationships, give up power – whatever needs to be done.

10

RELEASE the outcome. The people who've been harmed need to find their own path through and they owe you nothing. Let go of your expectations of how this will go.