Antidotes to WSC

*The following document was adapted from Tema Okun's article, [White Supremacy Culture - Still Here](#)
by the facilitators of Downers Grove South's Antiracism Cooperative.*

Underlying Force
Underlying all the aspects of WSC is fear. Understanding how fear influences all other aspects of WSC, is necessary for the group, and every individual, to interrogate. *i.e. "If I'm feeling defensive, right now, where is this coming from? What am I afraid of?"*
Fear
White supremacy culture's number one strategy is to make us afraid. All of the characteristics listed here are driven by fear. We fear not being good enough, not being enough, not being lovable. When we are afraid, whatever the reason, especially when we don't have the skills to hold that fear, we are easily manipulated by any false yet powerful sense of safety. The promised safety is false because it is always based on the abuse and misuse of power that shows up as everything from microaggressions to deadly violence directed at whoever or whatever we are told to be afraid of. Often it is the racialized other. Often it is ourselves.

WSC Characteristic	Antidotes
Sense of Urgency A constant sense of urgency reflects our cultural habit of applying a sense of urgency to our every-day lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance while disconnecting us from our need to pause and reflect. The irony is that this imposed sense of urgency serves to erase the actual urgency of tackling injustice. A sense of urgency makes it difficult to be inclusive and reinforces existing power hierarchies.	• leadership who understands that everything takes longer than anyone expects; • a commitment to equity, including a commitment to discuss and plan for what it means to embed equity practices into the workplan; • an understanding that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because inevitably people who didn't get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine a decision where they were left unheard; • developing a personal and collective practice of noticing when urgency arises and taking a pause to deliberate with thoughtfulness and intention about the nature of the urgency and the range of options available to you.
One Right Way The belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it. When a person or group does not adapt or change to "fit" the one right way, then those defining or upholding the one right way assume something is wrong with the other, those not changing, not with us	• create a culture of inquiry about what constitutes the "right way" and what defines a "mistake"; • build in an understanding that every approach yields unintended consequences and even strategically made decisions will have unanticipated consequences; • accept there are many ways to get to the same goal; once a group has made a decision about what to do, honor that decision and see what you and the community/organization learn from making that decision, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen; • work on developing the ability to notice when you become defensive and/or insistent about doing something your way and do everything you can to take a breath; allow room to consider how a different path or paths might improve your approach and/or offer you something you really need; • look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the

	same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it.
Paternalism Those holding power assume they are qualified to (and entitled to) define standards and the one right way as well as make decisions for and in the interests of those without power. Those without power may internalize the standards and definitions of those in power and act to defend them, assimilate into them, and/or collude with those in power to perpetuate them in the belief that this will help them to belong to and/or gain power; they may have to do this to survive.	• make sure that everyone knows and understands the decision-making hierarchy in the community and/or organization (transparency); • make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization; • avoid making decisions in the absence of those most affected by those decisions or, said more proactively, always include those most affected in the brainstorming and decision making; • support people at all levels of power to understand how power operates, their level of power, what holding power responsibly looks like, and how to collectively resist and heal from internalized tendencies to hoard and defend power.
Defensiveness People respond to new or challenging ideas with objections or criticism, making it very difficult to raise these ideas. People in the organization, particularly those with power, spend a lot of energy trying to make sure that their feelings aren't getting hurt, forcing others to work around their defensiveness rather than addressing them head-on. At its worst, they have convinced others to do this work for them. White people spend energy defending against charges of racism instead of examining how racism might actually be happening.	• understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege). • work on your own defensiveness; ask yourself what you are defending against and why • discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission. Use your own experience with your own defensiveness and resistance as an example. Brainstorm options for what the group can and will do when defensiveness and resistance show up. • consider the power differences at play; when someone with a lot of power is defensive and resistant, the options are very different than when someone with less or little power is defensive and resistant. Be clear about the power dynamics in the situation and respond thoughtfully. The person with power has greater responsibility to name and move through their own defensiveness and resistance, although the collective is best served when everyone has those skills. • know that resentment is a form of defensiveness and signals that the person feeling the resentment feels unseen and unheard. Or afraid of losing power. See the bullet point above.
Power Hoarding This characteristic supports the tendency to blame the person or group causing discomfort or conflict rather than addressing the issues being named. Power hoarding shows up as little sharing of power and those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened. Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed, emotional, and inexperienced. Blaming the	• if you are a leader and/or hold power, understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership are often healthy and productive; adopt the "tell me more" approach to challenges; • if you are a leader and/or hold power, avoid taking challenges personally and return to the principle of collective thinking and action; ask for help with your leadership, particularly when feeling highly defensive; • lean in to the racial equity principle of "know yourself" and develop strategies for making friends with your ego so that you are leading and/or acting from a place of integrity rather than fear or anxiety about your importance.

messenger rather than focusing on the message,	
Quantity over Quality Most or all resources directed toward producing quantitatively measurable goals; little or no value attached to process in the internalized belief that if it can't be measured, it has no value; discomfort with emotion and feelings;	• honoring the ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future; • include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do; • look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of mutually respectful relationships, think about ways you can measure how you are living into that goal); • learn to recognize those times when you need to go off the planned agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns with the knowledge that doing so will result in a more solid product in the long term; • distinguish between growth, which is necessary and organic, and the conditioned desire for "more" - more stuff, more transactional power, more people, more … for its own sake;
Fear of Open Conflict Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line; punishing people either overtly or subtly for speaking out about their truth and/or experience; labeling emotion as "irrational" or anti-intellectual or inferior, which means failing to recognize the importance of emotional intelligence; pretending or insisting that our point of view is grounded in the "rational" or the intellectual when we are in fact masking our emotions with what appear to be rational or intellectual arguments.	• distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues; • don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in 'acceptable' ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address them; • develop your emotional intelligence so you can tell when you are hiding your emotions with the excuse that you are being "rational;" • be transparent about power, so that everyone understands who makes the final decision and/or how the final decision is made before you dive into the conflict; • once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently.
Right to Comfort The belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (valuing 'logic' over emotion); scapegoating those who cause discomfort, for example, targeting and isolating those who name racism rather than addressing the actual racism that is being named	• understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; • welcome discomfort and learn to sit with discomfort before responding or acting; • welcome honest and hard feedback as the gift it is, knowing that people could so easily choose to stay silent and talk about you behind your back rather than gift you with their truth about how your attitudes and/or behavior are causing a problem;
Perfectionism Perfectionism is the conditioned belief and attitude that we can determine whether others are showing up as perfect and demand or expect that they do so. White supremacy culture uses	• develop a learning community or organization, where the stated expectation is that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning and sometimes lead to positive results. • separate the person from the mistake; when offering feedback, always speak to what went well before offering critical feedback; • realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not

perfectionism to preserve power and the status quo. As long as we are striving to be perfect according to someone else's rules, we have less energy and attention to question those rules and to remember what is truly important.	help you or the group realize the benefit of learning from mistakes; if you are constantly criticizing yourself in your relationships with others, you focus the attention on you, on support for you, rather than on the issue at hand;
Objectivity The belief that there is such a thing as being objective or 'neutral'. Refusal to acknowledge the ways in which objectivity is used to protect power and the status quo. Impatience with any thinking that does not appear 'logical' or 'rational' in ways that reinforce existing power structures; in other words, those in power can be illogical, angry, emotional without being disregarded while those without power must always present from a 'rational' position.	- you are not "objective," you are steeped in your own world view and if it is the dominant world view, realize how that worldview includes the belief that it has the capacity to be objective; - support yourself and your group to sit with discomfort when people are sharing points of view or lived experiences that are not familiar to you; - understand that emotional intelligence is real and valuable; work to become more emotionally intelligent; - engage in the simple act of using "I" statements, which leads us to claim our own experience rather than generalizing from our experience in ways that can exclude those who have a different experience or perspective - get curious about sources of information and stories, both to insure that those who are often overlooked as sources get lifted up and recognized and also to insure that those who claim credit are grounded in lived experience and social justice values
Qualified Those of us who are white internalize the sense that we know when we actually don't. This internalization that we are qualified, that we know best, that we can fix and save and set straight, is actually deeply harmful to those of us who hold it. We can never live up to knowing what is best all the time or even most of the time. Even when we think we know what's best, if we are honest, we will find ourselves surprised by the unintended consequences and unanticipated twists of this life. We know deep inside where authentic knowing resides that our own insistence about how right we are makes our bodies tense as we hide our fear of finding out we might not be, which makes us insist even more that we know what we couldn't possibly and on it goes	- knowing ourselves so that we become skilled at catching our internalized assumptions about our own qualified-ness - learn to question and get comfortable with the limits of our knowing - learn to prioritize relationships over being right - learn to lean into the racial equity principles of collective action and accountability - learn to let go of the need to fix, save, and set straight in the acknowledgement that we are at our best when we are "with" others (and ourselves)
Either/Or Thinking Positioning or presenting options or issues as either/or — good/bad,	- Notice when you or others use 'either/or' language and make time to come up with more than two alternatives; - Notice when you or others are simplifying complex issues, particularly

right/wrong, with us/against us; Little or no sense of the possibilities of both/and; Trying to simplify complex things	when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made; ● When urgency arises and binary thinking emerges, or when faced with an urgent decision, slow down and encourage people to take a pause, a breath, restate the goal, and dive deeper into alternatives; ● Avoid making decisions under extreme pressure and work to distinguish what is actual pressure and what is pressure that you or others are creating; ● Avoid trying to assign a single cause to a problem or a challenge; ● acknowledge the ways in which oppressions intersect and reinforce each other as well as the ways in which oppression can be operating at the interpersonal, institutional and cultural levels.
Worship of the Written Word This characteristic explores our cultural habit of honoring only what is written and only what is written to a narrow standard, even when what is written is full of misinformation and lies. Worship of the written word includes erasure of the wide range of ways we communicate with each other and all living things. This characteristic has to do with how white supremacy culture requires things to be written down, on its own terms, in order to preserve power. Worship of the written word has nothing to do with the ability to write well and writing well comes in a wide range of approaches, styles, languages. Those who engage in repeated code switching understand this very well.	● make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, 'buzz' words, acronyms, etc.); ● practice listening; because our culture doesn't value oral traditions or storytelling wisdom, we are out of listening practice or remembering how to hold a spoken word with weight (without having to write it down) ● honor the value of collaborative and collective knowledge; ● appreciate when others learn from and expand on your knowledge and writing; see yourself and position yourself as one person in a stream of knowing and learning.
Individualism/ I'm the only one This characteristic explores our cultural assumption that individualism is our cultural story – that we make it on our own (or should), without help, while pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Our cultural attachment to individualism leads to a toxic denial of our essential interdependence and the reality that we are all in this, literally, together.	● seek to understand all the ways we are informed by our dominant identities and how our membership in dominant identity groups informs us both overtly and covertly (while realizing too that these identities do not have to define us); understand how membership in a dominant group (the white group, the male group, the hetero group, the wealthy group) extends psychic, spiritual, and emotional benefits as well as material benefits; seek to understand how these benefits are, in reality, toxic ● acknowledge that all white people have internalized racist conditioning and that an antiracist commitment is not about being "good" or "bad," it's about figuring out what we are going to do about our conditioning; ● do our personal work while also bringing focus to cultural, institutional, and systemic manifestations of white supremacy and racism; ● name teamwork and collaboration as an important personal and group value; acknowledge that teamwork and collaboration take more time, particularly at the front end and yield a better result with higher buy-in and higher ability to take shared risks; ● make sure the group or organization is working towards shared goals

	that have been collaboratively developed and named;
	• honor process as much as product (honor how you do things as much as what you do or produce); make sure that credit is given to all who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person; make sure that when you are given credit, you distribute it to all those who helped you with whatever was accomplished; • create collective accountability (rather than individual accountability);
	• create a culture where people feel they can bring problems to the group; use meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities;
Denial Denying what another person is saying about the ways in which white supremacy and/or racism are showing up in an interaction or space. A pattern that often has a white person with different levels of power denying what a Black, Indigenous or Person of Color or a whole community is saying about their experience of racism. Claiming the right to define what is and what is not racism. Insisting that white supremacy and racism require intent. Attempting to separate intent from impact in order to claim that if racism is not intended, then it is not happening.	• For white people: Avoid taking accusations of racism or collusion in racism personally. Avoid defending yourself. Learn to say "tell me more." Understand your racism (or your collusion in racism) as conditioning, not as who you essentially are. Understand that awareness of your conditioning is necessary if you are going to change and grow. • Call yourself and others in, not out. We will not grow the movement through shame and blame, even though shame and blame are necessary elements of our own individual and personal development. We will grow the movement by holding each other accountable from a position of care, kindness, and love. Sometimes we will have to employ tough love and always the goal is to avoid throwing ourselves or anyone else away. • Know our history. Learn our history. Understand how racist patterns repeat over and over again. Take the time to learn where you live and work and love and the Indigenous history of the peoples who lived and worked and loved there before you (or live there now). Take the time to learn your own indigenity. • Learn to admit when you are wrong. Understand that vulnerability can be a strength, particularly if you are sitting in a position of power and privilege. Understand that not everyone can afford to be vulnerable in the same way.