

Imagine that you are reading a report in your neighborhood newsletter about a suspected car thief. As the words jump off the page, you realize, with horror, that the description fits you –  
“African American male.”

That’s all the information provided. Not only does it describe you, but also your sons and some of your neighbors.

You feel imprisoned now in your own neighborhood.

**Vulnerable**

**Scared**

**Angry**

How can you feel safe working in your yard? Walking the dog? Jogging for exercise?

You remember the beating of Rodney King and the killing of Amadou Diallo while police considered them “suspects.”

You are now considered a suspect in your own yard, on your own street, in your neighborhood business.

Your African American friends and relatives who may come to visit are also suspects.

Or the African Americans who may walk through the neighborhood to get to school, work or the store.

## **Stereotype Danger**

The previous section describes a situation from the perspective of an African American male. African American women also fear for the safety of their husbands, sons and themselves. The rest of this brochure will describe ways in which whites can make a difference.

In a neighborhood, residents often mistrust someone they don’t know, especially if the person looks different from themselves.

In neighborhoods where most of the residents look the same, there is a strong tendency to make assumptions about who is and isn’t a neighbor. Yet, neighborhoods are becoming increasingly pluralistic.

Neighbors can take steps to be inclusive of all, and most importantly, can acknowledge and undo personal racism that often sets neighbors apart.

Historically, the fear of black men and exploitation of black women has led to the reality of racism in our neighborhoods today. These behaviors continue despite decades of laws meant to extend equality to all.

## **What can white people DO?**

### **What can a neighborhood DO?**

**White people can do a lot to eliminate these stereotypes.**

Acknowledge that people of many racial and ethnic backgrounds live in the neighborhood.

Acknowledge that white skin color is not the norm.

Examine your own racial prejudices and stereotypes. Intentionally work to change your racial biases.

Begin a conversation with neighbors about racial stereotyping.

Share leadership with your neighbors of differing ethnicities and plan social gatherings for the neighborhood. Extend invitations to all members of the community, following up by speaking personally to everyone.

Plan activities that are inclusive of people of different backgrounds, for instance, a welcoming dinner for new residents, a potluck with foods from each individual’s heritage, a multi-cultural festival or a book discussion featuring multi-cultural authors.

# Neighborhood Safety and Stereotypes

**How can a community be  
safe for ALL neighbors,  
friends and visitors?**

## About the Authors

A discussion group of the Atlanta Friends Meeting, most of whom are white, wrote this brochure in response to a growing concern about racist behavior witnessed in predominantly white neighborhoods.

For instance, in the neighborhood of two of our members, an e-mail list identified a suspect only as an African American male. We became concerned about the consequences for Black people living in, working in, or walking through the neighborhood.

Many people live in multi-ethnic communities, yet very few are equipped with the experience and background necessary to live without racism in such a community. This is especially true for white people in the US who frequently have not lived, worked or worshiped with those of another racial or ethnic heritage.

We hope neighborhoods will find these ideas helpful. This is a work in progress and we are interested in your responses.

Copyright © June 2004

*Permission is granted to copy and  
distribute this brochure in its entirety.*

For an electronic copy of this brochure,  
please visit <http://www.quaker.org/atlanta>

When describing criminal suspects, be as specific as possible about their appearance and behavior. Avoid identifying people by race or ethnicity because these descriptions victimize all people of that background, including residents.

For example, the following description would really help residents look for a particular individual: “a male, short hair, about 40 years old, no facial hair, with dark complexion, tall and thin, wearing jeans, a yellow t-shirt, and a baseball cap, peering into parked cars in driveways.”

Use this test to help decide if behavior witnessed in a neighborhood is suspicious. Ask, “Would this behavior be suspicious if a white person was acting in this way?” For instance, a white person riding a bike through a white neighborhood would not be suspicious, but one who was trying the open doors on several cars would be.

Read more about stereotypes at the following web sites:

<http://www.thepeoplesinstitute.org>

<http://www.tolerance.org>

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

For more information call 404-377-2474.  
Ask to leave a message for “ORAIARH”  
(Our Roles As Individuals In America's  
Racial History).