

Nancy Lova: Checking in on your black friends

Part of **Support**

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When travel photographer and blogger Nancy Lova heard of the killing of George Floyd in the US, she was in lockdown in Kent, isolated from her family and friends in East London. She found herself dealing not only with the challenges of the pandemic, but also with the range of emotions sparked by the news of George Floyd's death and the global protests that followed it.



Nancy Lova

Trying to cope as best as possible through the pandemic has had its own challenges but the recent killing of George Floyd and the huge global protest for justice, rights and equality that followed, have added to the challenge and sparked a range of emotions for me. – Nancy Lova

Being on my own during the lockdown has had its positives and negatives. I live in an apartment by myself in a peaceful part of Kent but originally, I'm from a busy and somewhat chaotic part of East London where the area never truly sleeps. This is where my family and friends still are and, prior to the lockdown, I would make regular monthly visits but now for the last 10 or 11 weeks, for their safety, I have remained at home and, as a result, the peace and quiet of Kent has slowly turned into a deafening silence where I have been alone with my thoughts more than ever.

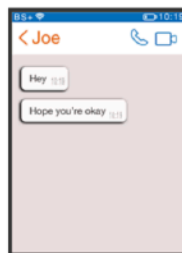
Trying to cope as best as possible through the pandemic has had its own challenges but the recent killing of George Floyd and the huge global protest for justice, rights and equality that followed, have added to the challenge and sparked a range of emotions for me. Some days I wake up angry and frustrated then find I'm crying myself to sleep at night.

Each bit of content, from videos and images on social media, to news articles in the papers and TV, has been triggering for me, as they have for many black people, reminding us of every time we've faced injustice, inequality and racism because of the colour of our skin.

I've found some of the support I've had from my white friends warming, but I know there are others who may not have known what to say or do. So, from my own personal experience, I want to share the kind of support that has been welcome from my white friends.

Hearing from close friends

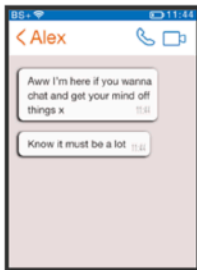
I've appreciated hearing from white friends who are already regularly in touch with me, like those who I meet up with on the weekends for lunch or catch up with over the phone on a weekly basis. A simple "hey, how are you" or "I'm here if you want to talk or clear your mind" was enough, as I knew they were coming from good intentions and creating a safe space for me to open up when I was ready. These are friends who I've grown up with, or built strong relationships with over my adult years, who have been to my home more times than I can count, or at least know me well enough to feel they can reach out.



On the other hand, I think white friends should avoid reaching out to the black people they rarely speak to, or aren't so close to, as this may look as if they are coming from a place of guilt rather than genuine support or concern. I would have felt uncomfortable if I'd heard from someone I probably last spoke to when we bumped into each other at the coffee shop several months ago, or the white person who doesn't have my number but chooses to send me a direct message on Instagram to check in on me. I get the intention, but it feels impersonal.

Friends who listen

Our conversations weren't about pity. There were no "I'm so sorry," "it's so sad," "omg I can't believe this is happening," "I feel so bad" or sending more videos of arrests or assaults on black people in America with follow-up messages like "have you seen this video?". Black people are probably already glued to social media and the TV evening news more than we should be, so sending messages that remind us of how overwhelming things are only adds to the anxiety. Also, being overly apologetic to black friends and dramatising the conversation can come across as patronising. There's no need to apologise, or use personal examples, because this has the potential to make the conversation be about the white friend. Checking in on your black friend is an opportunity to show them support and listen to how they're feeling, nothing more.



Friends who educate themselves

What spoke volumes to me more than anything else was the white friends who actively educated themselves on the topic of racism towards black people. They researched the documentaries and films they could watch, or the books they could read, to gain understanding on the matter and when we caught up over the phone, they were no longer coming from a place of complete confusion. They were able to begin to understand me. We were then able to discuss what we'd watched or read and come up with new ideas of what else could be done and, at this point, I was happy to suggest more for them to watch or read.

So, I would say to white friends: do not let the first time you are reaching out to your black friends be a question about what you can watch or do. It is all readily available online and through streaming platforms. Actively look for ways to educate yourself first, and when the time or conversation feels right, you can catch up and discuss this with your black friends.

This is a delicate time for black people. We appreciate you want to support and understand us, so when the time is right discussions on resources are welcome, but avoid the expectation for your black friend to educate you simply because they're black.

Friends who give space without expectation

Lastly, the best responses were those where there was no expectation for me to respond to their call or message. This is why it's important that if white people are going to check in on their black friends, then they should do so with those that they are close with. My friends knew I would respond when I was ready and there would be no offence taken if I didn't. The initial "how are you?" Or "I'm here if you want to talk" shows support but can cause a black friend to feel overwhelmed with emotion whilst thinking of what to reply. They may not also be ready to receive support yet, so give them space to respond when they feel ready.

