

Cultural Responsiveness To Racial Trauma

UNDERSTANDING RACIAL TRAUMA, WHY IT MATTERS, AND WHAT TO DO

DISCLAIMER: Witnessing and experiencing acts of racism and race-based trauma on individual, systems, community, and population levels can have physical and emotional impacts on white people even though it is not their lived experience. While those impacts are important, this infographic is intentionally focused on the experiences of people of color to emphasize and honor the healing that needs to take place to create equity in our communities.



Cultural Responsiveness

is the ability to listen, learn, and reflect on one's own culture, the culture of others, and how they may interact during interpersonal interactions. By being culturally responsive, you increase awareness of your own biases and privileges, which can foster and promote respect, curiosity, and learning, and the experience of belonging.

WHAT IS RACIAL TRAUMA?

- Racial Trauma (or race-based trauma) refers to the cumulative effects of stress, both physical and emotional, due to racism.¹
- Racial trauma involves ongoing exposure, re-exposure, and injury on the collective and the individual levels. It happens through unintentional comments, passive-aggressive actions, omission or exclusion due to the color of someone's skin, failure to intervene or offer support during overt racism, or obvious behaviors rooted in racial biases. It also includes discrete events that look like harm or injury, humiliating or shaming, and witnessing harm to others based on race.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

- European settlers who enslaved Africans and enacted genocide on Native American communities brought Racial Trauma to the United States.
- Society then developed systems based on race, gender, and religion to dictate how society was ordered, power was assigned, and resources like jobs, food, and housing were distributed.
- These initial structures became embedded in laws and practices which have resulted in a long history of bias, disadvantage, ill treatment, violence, and exclusion for minority groups that still exist today.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL TRAUMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

People of color experience higher levels of trauma and adverse life experiences compared to their white counterparts and racism and race-based violence are fundamental causes of health and mental health inequities and poorer outcomes²:



FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Increased risk of PTSD³, depression⁴, and substance use⁵ due to chronic experiences of stress, threats, and violent events that occur in direct relation to race and aspects of identity.
- This impact may be exacerbated by lack of access to resources and supports for healing.⁶

FOR POPULATIONS

- Economic and educational disadvantages and lack of access to and trust⁷ in healthcare systems due to historical lack of access
- Police violence in Black and Brown neighborhoods⁸ and lack of equity in legal and health systems for migrants results in poorer physical and mental health outcomes⁹



FOR GENERATIONS

Intergenerational and historical trauma can impact ways of interacting and alter genetic expression (epigenetics)¹⁰





Cultural Responsiveness

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- The effects of racism, past and present, continue to play out today. Any true understanding of racial trauma must account for the sociocultural and historical context.
- A critical element of trauma intervention is overcoming taboos, such as naming racism, and “making the unspeakable, speakable”.
- An acknowledgment of past experiences of trauma enables opportunities for healing invisible wounds.
- Awareness of and responsiveness to a person’s cultural experience (both as a clinician and fellow human being) can significantly improve mental health outcomes⁴¹.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER?

- You are in a position to be an advocate to support healing and to share information about historical and present racial trauma and injustice.
- You are a position to mitigate racial trauma and injustice.
- You can take responsibility by having the humility and openness to:
 - ✓ Make space for the experiences of racial discrimination and trauma, as well as their effects on people of color.
 - ✓ Find hope in the language, meaning, and sources of support and resilience that people find for themselves and that are passed down within cultures from generation to generation.
- You can examine your racial identity, relationships, power dynamics, and privilege in relation to others, within systems, and within the communities you are navigating in order to:
 - ✓ Increase racial self-awareness and decrease discomfort discussing racial content
 - ✓ Avoid replicating negative, racist, or otherwise oppressive interactions.
 - ✓ Confer a sense safety and trust.
- As a mental health provider, you can reflect on how culture and experiences act as a filter through which we make meaning and express both trauma symptoms and wellness differently.

Understanding and acknowledging historical and current racism, your position within the systems that perpetuate racism, the negative effects that racism and racial trauma have on People of Color, and the differences in experience, understanding, and expression that arise from these different realities is key to becoming more culturally responsive to People of Color, and Racial Trauma. This understanding should also push you to think about how healing racial trauma goes beyond individual acknowledgement and coping and towards advocacy, resistance, and dismantling of systems and norms that contribute to Racial Trauma.¹²

FOOTNOTES

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