

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT



Healing While Black/African American: Triumphing Over the Pain

“Black Lives Matter: I Can’t Breathe” SONG BY DAX

Diverse Black/African Americans—young and old, across genders, (dis)abilities, religions, nations of origin, and sexualities—are often aware of the dangers, fears, and threats of racism. Racism can take many forms and have varied impacts on Black/African American individuals and communities. Some days these experiences manifest as being followed around in a store, while other times racism takes the form of not getting a job or scholarship. However we experience racism, it can lead to feelings of frustration and anger that impact people’s sense of self, overall health, and hope for the future. Despite all this, we must believe mind, body, soul, and spirit: Our lives do matter!

Research shows the harm of racism, race-based discrimination, and prejudice takes a toll on both physical and mental health. The stress from racism affects us emotionally and physiologically, including through sweating, heart-racing, headaches, and stomachaches. Over time, racism can wear the body down and is linked with physical ailments, like high blood pressure, heart attacks, and loss of regulation of insulin. Racism has also been associated with depression, anxiety, and hypervigilance. Instead of resulting solely from lifestyle choices (e.g., how we eat and exercise), our physical and mental health is influenced by the dis-stress and dis-ease of racism.

Though difficult, dealing with the emotions related to the racism we experience can benefit our mental and physical health. Therapy is one option for coping and healing from past and present racism. Choosing a therapist that is culturally competent and trauma-informed can make the process much easier (see [HERE⁹](#) for tips on seeking help). This kind of therapist can understand the challenges you have faced as a Black/African American person, while also being able to identify strengths and resilience in you, your family or loved ones, and your community.

If you feel you would like support, but therapy is not an option for you, there are additional avenues for healing and joy (see [HERE⁶](#) for some more healing strategies). One avenue is social justice advocacy. The Psychology of Radical Healing Collective is a group of Black, Indigenous, & People of Color (BIPOC) psychologists and healers who encourage social justice action while highlighting marginalized communities’ strengths, resources, and actions. Their frameworks for liberation remind us that justice itself is healing. And we can fight for racial justice. In that process of advocating for change, we promote healing for ourselves and each other, as we work to make the world a better place.

Emotional connection is another key aspect of healing and joy. Connection with loved ones, friends, and family can be beneficial. However, we know that not everyone has people in their lives who are emotionally and/or physically close to them. When we are isolated, we can connect with others from a distance, through, for example, listening to music, watching a panel of radical Black activists, checking out books from the library on healing from racial trauma, listening to growth-fostering podcasts for free, reading Black affirmations, or participating in an online Black grief ritual (for more details on healing through the arts, see [HERE¹⁰](#)).

When we don't have close connections where we live, we can create them ourselves.

Community care can be a powerful healing strategy. You might consider creating a safe community space where people can come together discuss the panels, shows, the news, podcasts, music, and books they're engaging with. Community care might also involve leading talking circles, courageous conversations on issues affecting the Black community, and adventurous outings for connecting with nature or joining a pick up basketball game in the neighborhood.

A final healing strategy is both simple and difficult: acknowledge the pain, the anger, the frustration of being treated less than human as a Black/African American. When we acknowledge the pain of racism, it can support us in identifying the healing and resistance strategies needed to not only survive but thrive as a community. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, see [here](#). To learn about collective trauma, see [this](#). To learn more about how to heal and thrive, go to [here](#).