

Coping with the Psychological Impact of Racism

People of color experience significant trauma as a result of past and present realities—from surviving a history of slavery, genocide, and interment to the present day realities of disparate health outcomes, facing daily [microaggressions](#), and watching the ongoing horror of the murder of black people caught on video. Racial and ethnic minorities are [often more likely to experience psychological distress](#), but [have less access to mental health services](#) than do whites, are less likely to receive needed care, and are more likely to receive poor quality care when they do seek treatment. Added to this, [cultural messages often include stigma](#) about getting mental health support with cautions to save face and be tough.

How Can I Support my Mental Health?

The only thing that will end the pain of racism is the end of white supremacy and the dismantling systems of oppression. But in the midst of this trauma, your wellbeing and mental health matter.

- Recognize how traumatic it is to hear about or watch the killing of Black people, and give yourself permission not to be okay. Take time and space to feel horror, fear, sadness, grief, rage.
- Intentionally seek community. Loneliness can cause physical harm to our bodies. Connect to a [statewide Business Resource Group](#) like [BUILD \(Blacks United in Leadership and Diversity\)](#), the [Washington Immigrant Network](#), or the [Latino Leadership Network](#).
- Make a wellness plan that includes movement, a nourishing diet, and 7-9 hours of sleep. As Black poet and activist Audre Lorde wrote, “I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival.”
- Separate what is in your control from what is not. Set boundaries around when and how often you consume media. Choose which friends and coworkers are helpful to engage with right now.
- [Decolonize healing](#)—learn about the history of resilience in your family and community. Explore what culturally-based practices have worked to sustain people for centuries.

When Do I Need Professional Help?

EAP is here to support you with free, confidential counseling. Consider seeking professional help when:

- a traumatic event or vicarious trauma leads to prolonged symptoms of re-experiencing (flashbacks, nightmares), avoidance (of thoughts, people, situations), negative thoughts and mood (shame, fear), and arousal & reactivity (irritable, reckless, concentration, sleep issues).
- anxiety causes you to worry excessively in intensity, frequency, or amount of distress it causes, or when you find it difficult to control the worry (or stop worrying) once it starts.
- you are feeling little interest or pleasure in doing things you once enjoyed, or you are feeling down, depressed, hopeless, or are having thoughts of suicide.

Resources

[Therapy for Black Girls Podcast](#) with Dr. Joy Harden Bradford, a licensed Psychologist in Atlanta

[Free Online Healing & Grieving Group Sessions](#) for Black People by Black healers (in June 2020)

[Minority Mental Health information](#) from Mental Health America

[Encouraging Meaningful Conversations about Race and Trauma](#) from Mindful

[Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome](#) with Dr. Joy Degruy

[Strength Over Silence: Stories of Courage, Culture, and Community](#) Black and Latinx mental health



Washington State EAP is accessible, free, and confidential.
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