

UNDERSTANDING RACIAL TRAUMA

WHAT IS RACIAL TRAUMA?

Racial trauma is the **stressful impact** or **emotional pain** that comes **from experiencing racism**.

WHERE DOES RACIAL TRAUMA COME FROM?

Racial trauma can come directly from interacting with other people **or** it can be experienced

- Vicariously, when you see others facing racism
- Intergenerationally, when racial trauma from previous generations impacts you

EXAMPLES OF RACIAL TRAUMA

- Experiencing or seeing hate crimes
- Experiencing racial bias (for example, harsher discipline in school based on race)
- Experiencing or witnessing police violence
- Feeling psychological stress due to the experiences of previous generations (for example, slavery, forced removal from tribal lands, seeking asylum from political violence)



REACTIONS TO RACIAL TRAUMA:

Everyone reacts differently: one person might experience intense emotions while another might feel very little emotion or numbness.

Racial trauma can impact our physical and mental health.

Some **physical responses** include your body feeling on "high alert" such as increased heartbeat, rapid breathing, difficulty sleeping, feeling anxious, irritable, and/or "jumpy"

Some **mental responses** include feeling hypervigilant like your mind is constantly on guard, scanning your surroundings for danger"

There are a number of different ways racial trauma can negatively impact one's health and well-being

Racial trauma can affect individuals and entire communities.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH RACIAL TRAUMA

Grounding:

- Practice mindfulness grounding techniques. Become aware of your environment and name the feelings in your body. For example you can do the mindfulness exercise 5,4,3,2,1: Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste



Connection:

- Connect with your inner sources of strength, wisdom, and love through prayer, meditation, visualization or other practices.
- Connect with others who understand, validate, and affirm you. Find those who can sit with difficult emotions that come with experiencing racial trauma without minimizing or dismissing them.



Rest & Joy:

- Listen to your body and find moments during your day to take a break—even if it is just a couple of seconds to take a few mindful breaths.
- Take a break from social media and other things that drain your energy.
- Take time to cultivate joy in your life by practicing gratitude, seeking connection with others, and doing activities you enjoy.
- Nurture your creative outlets (music, art, dance, sports).



Resistance:

- Engage in critical reflection and participation in social activism. This can be through direct action to make a change or supporting those advocating for change.

