

# RACIAL TRAUMA

Racism and racial discrimination can negatively affect your physical and mental health. Regardless of your previous awareness, you may find yourself struggling to process your reactions to current and/or past experiences of racism and racial discrimination—reflecting an experience known as racial trauma. This resource card provides information on racial trauma and resources to foster resilience and healthy coping.

## What is Racial Trauma?

Racial Trauma is one term used to describe the physical and emotional symptoms that People of Color often experience after exposure to particularly stressful experiences of racism and/or racial discrimination.

**Exposure may be either direct or indirect, including:**

- Encountering racism
- Experiencing racial discrimination, teasing and/or harassment
- Witnessing the people close to you or from your racial community be affected by racism
- Being made aware of and/or reminded of the longstanding history and influence of racism directed toward your racial community in the US and world

**Racism and discrimination experiences do not exist in isolation:**

- Racial trauma builds over time as a person experiences large and small racial events
- Every encounter with racism and/or racial discrimination that happens to you or that you witness or read about contributes to additional chronic stress

## Signs of Racial Trauma?

Racial trauma can be experienced in our bodies and minds in many ways. Some symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Hypervigilance and increased arousal
- Re-experiencing thoughts, feelings and/or images related to racial incidents
- Headaches
- Memory loss
- Insomnia
- Body aches
- Guilt and shame
- Confusion

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## How to Cope

It can be difficult to know where to begin when you are experiencing racial trauma. Here are some suggestions

- Acknowledge the impact of racial trauma
- Discuss your experiences with those you trust
- Seek support (e.g. community, counseling, spiritual or religious guidance)
- Self-Care: Engage in activities that bring pleasure and promote healthy lifestyle
- Empowerment through Resistance: Speak up and engage in community service or activism

## Self-Care: Recovery Plan Steps

<b>RACIAL WELLNESS TOOLBOX</b>	Describe what you are like when you are managing and responding to racism and racial trauma in a healthy manner.
<b>DAILY MAINTENANCE OF CENTEREDNESS</b>	List connections or tools that help you maintain your centeredness in the face of racism. Such items include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources on racial identity and racial trauma</li> <li>• Connect with friends who are equally or better able to engage in conversations about racial awareness</li> <li>• Engage in prayer, spiritual practices or use of mantras</li> <li>• Engage in activism</li> <li>• Practice self-management (i.e. healthy eating, exercise and favorite activities that help you feel centered)</li> </ul>
<b>TRIGGERS AND RESPONSE PLAN</b>	List items or experiences that tend to result in racial trauma symptoms (e.g. anger, isolation, sadness). After each item or experience, identify a specific centeredness responses (e.g. calling a friend, writing in your journal, activism).
<b>EARLY WARNING SIGNS AND RESPONSE PLAN</b>	List early warning signs that you are experiencing racial trauma (e.g. body aches, fatigue, anxiety, depression, difficulty sleeping) and related ways of coping from you Daily Maintenance of Centeredness coping skills list.
<b>ACUTE RACIAL TRAUMA RESPONSE PLAN</b>	List signs that you are experiencing acute racial trauma (e.g. hypervigilance; heightened emotional experiences, such as depression, anxiety, and anger, which compromise your ability to engage in chosen activities of work, sleep or school). Identify an action plan for each item on your list.
<b>CRISIS PLANNING</b>	Ask yourself how you would know if you were experiencing a crisis due to racism (e.g. thoughts of harm to others/or self; inability to care for self and/or others; acute racial trauma symptoms that last longer than a specified duration). List a person(s) or additional resources to contact in the event you experience such a crisis.
<b>POST CRISIS PLANNING</b>	List ways of reconnecting with yourself and your communities to regain centeredness in the face of racism and racial trauma.