

# Social Influencers of Health and Suicide in Black Youth

**Dana Cunningham, Ph.D. and Nicole Cammack, Ph.D.**  
**Black Mental Wellness**

**March 1, 2023, 12:00 PM**



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**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The purpose of the MHTTC Network is technology transfer - disseminating and implementing evidence-based practices for mental disorders into the field.

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the MHTTC Network includes 10 Regional Centers, a National American Indian and Alaska Native Center, a National Hispanic and Latino Center, and a Network Coordinating Office.

Our collaborative network supports resource development and dissemination, training and technical assistance, and workforce development for the mental health field. We work with systems, organizations, and treatment practitioners involved in the delivery of mental health services to strengthen their capacity to deliver effective evidence-based practices to individuals. Our services cover the full continuum spanning mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery support.

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED  
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND  
ACCEPTING OF  
DIVERSE CULTURES,  
GENDERS,  
PERSPECTIVES,  
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND  
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS  
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR  
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND  
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND  
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR  
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH  
OUR ACTIONS,  
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

# MHTTC Network

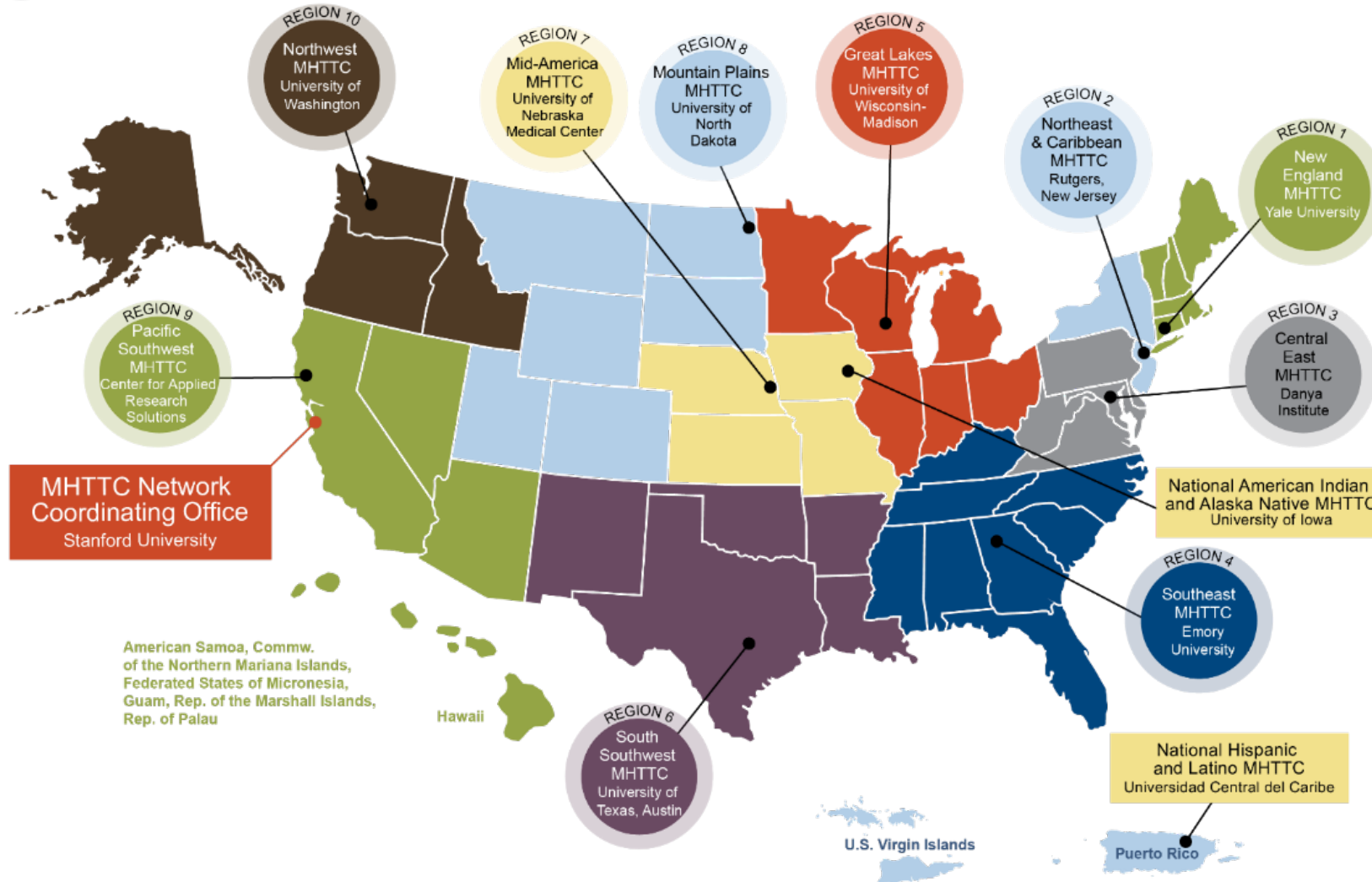


MHTTC

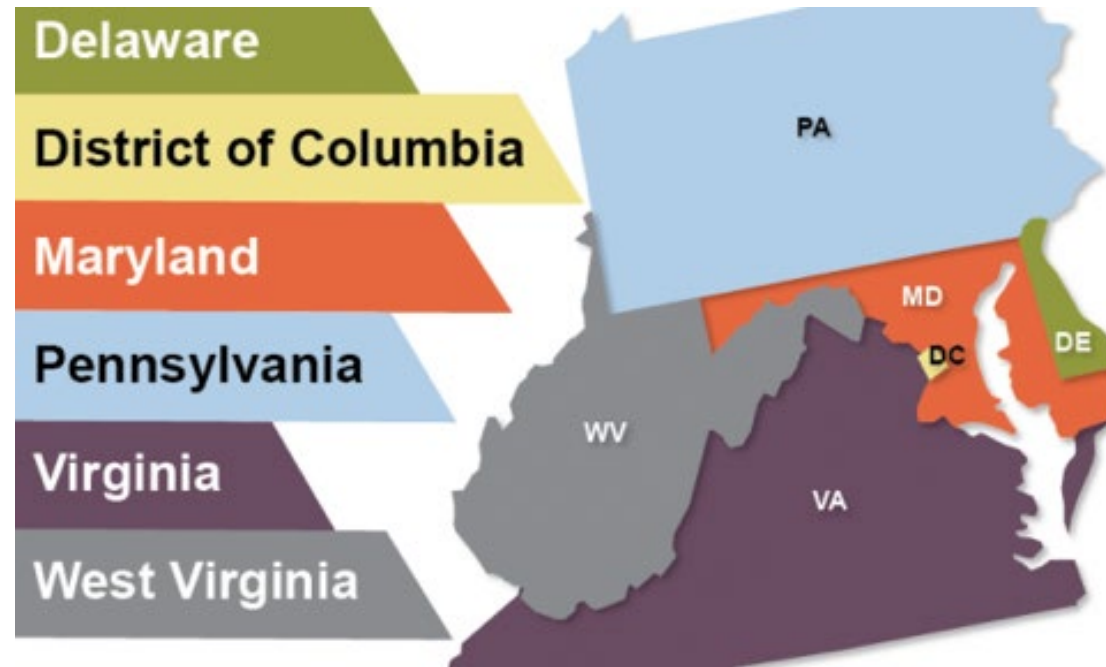
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

MHTTC Network



# Central East Region 3



Central East (HHS Region 3)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the views of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

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Presented 2023



# Evaluation Information

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[Evaluation Link](#)



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# Black Mental Wellness, Corp.

- **Dr. Nicole L. Cammack:**  
President & CEO
- **Dr. Danielle R. Busby:**  
Professional Relations & Liaison
- **Dr. Dana L. Cunningham:**  
Community Outreach & Engagement
- **Dr. Jessica S. Henry:**  
Program Development & Evaluation



# Black Mental Wellness, Corp.

## The Mission of Black Mental Wellness

- To provide information and resources about mental health and behavioral health topics from a Black perspective
- To highlight and increase the diversity of mental health professionals
- To decrease the mental health stigma in the Black community

[Black Mental Wellness website](#)



# Objectives

1. Identify at least three social influencers of health.
2. Identify how social influencers of health contribute to increased suicide risk in Black youth.
3. Identify at least three protective factors that can mitigate suicide risk in Black youth.

# Join Us for the remainder of the series!

**April 4, 2023:**      **Shame and Stigma: Re-imagining Masculinity and Strength for Black Boys**

**May 2, 2023:**      **Barriers and Risk Factors for Black LGBTQ+ Youth: Suggestions for Improving their Lived Experiences**

**June 6, 2023:**      **Black Youth Suicide: Exploring a Public Health Crisis and the Role of Racial Trauma**

All webinars will be held from 12-1 EST



Image [Source](#):

**“Things will never get better for me.”**

"I felt really stuck, really lost and really scared," said Waltz. "I didn't think I wanted to hurt myself. I wanted to go to sleep and not wake up."

**‘I Didn't Necessarily Want to Die’**

“I can discuss it, but it's very hard for me to see these Black deaths continue happening,” she said. “There's so much craziness, it's hard for me to focus.”



“When I told Mom how I was feeling, she didn't seem to care,” Denise said, adding: “She said I had nothing to stress about because I'm a kid.”

**“I just felt like there was nothing nobody could do to change the situation.”**



# Suicide in Black Youth: A State of Emergency

- Suicide rate of youth aged 5-12 is almost twice as high for Black youth compared to White youth (CDC, 2018)
- Suicide rate among 10-17 increased by 70% between 2006 and 2016
- Between 2018 – 2021, suicide rate among 10 -24-year-olds increased by 37%
- Only about a third of Black youth who have died by suicide were in mental health treatment or had a documented mental health problem (Sheftall, Vakil, Ruch et al., 2021)
- Among Black youth who have died by suicide, behavioral disorders (not depression) were the most prevalent mental disorders
- Highest rate of suicide attempts have been reported by Black girls in last two years of YRBS data collection (CDC, 2022)

# Video: Study Shows Suicide Rate Of Black Children Twice That Of White Children



Link: <https://youtu.be/UR7m2ncJB5w>

# Social Determinants of Health

The conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play and age that impact a wide range of health, functioning and quality of life outcomes.

(Healthy People, 2020)



# Why is suicide increasing in Black Youth?

Mental health

Racism and  
discrimination

Adverse  
Childhood  
Experiences

Violence  
exposure

Stigma

Limited access  
to mental  
health care

Social Media

Misdiagnosis

Mistrust of  
providers

Gender and  
sexual identity

Bullying

Implicit bias of  
providers

# Risk Factors for Suicide in Black Youth

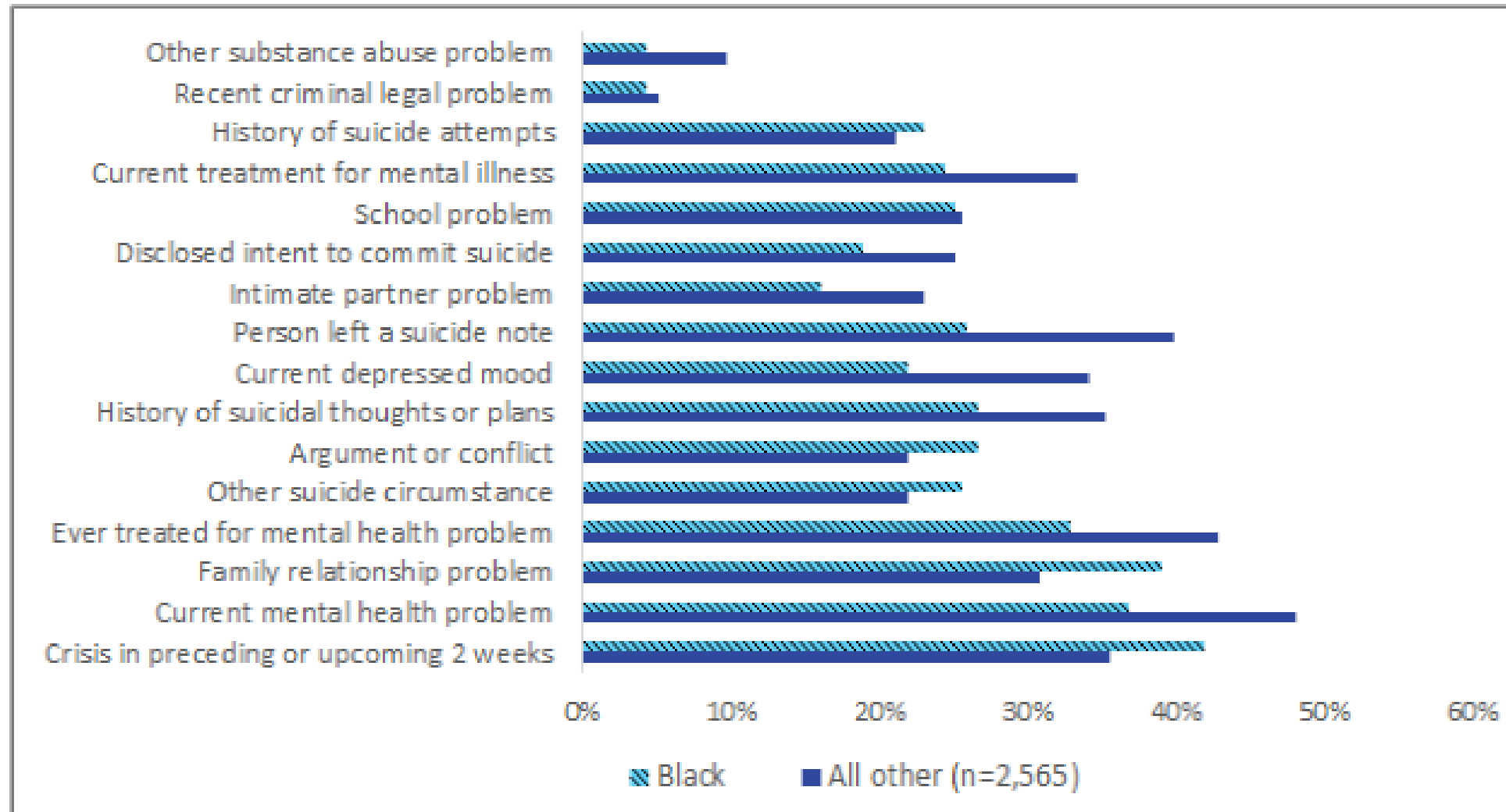
Interpersonal problems with family and friends

Higher rates of ADHD

Social determinants of health:

- Lower SES
- Lower educational achievement
- Unemployment
- Living in high poverty neighborhoods and homelessness
- Homelessness
- Racial discrimination

**Figure B-2. Circumstances\* preceding suicide among children aged 10 to 17, by race—United States, 2014–2017**



Source: [African American Youth Suicide: Report to Congress \(US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020\)](#)

# Fewer Black Youth Report:

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A current, known mental health problem/disorder

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Current depressed mood

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History of suicidal thoughts or plans

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Past or current treatment for mental illness

# Social Influencers of Health and Education

- SIHE are rooted in the social determinants of health
- *A child's health status and educational achievement* are influenced by multiple factors, many of which are external to the individual
- Often experienced disproportionately by race and ethnicity and contribute to health inequities, learning disruptions, and opportunity gaps





# Examples of Inequities

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**EDUCATION:** Youth of color are more likely to be placed in special education and suspended from school

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**INCARCERATION:** Youth of color are more likely to be arrested at school and referred to law enforcement

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**PUBLIC SAFETY:** 1 in 1,000 Black men or boys will be killed by the police in their lifetime

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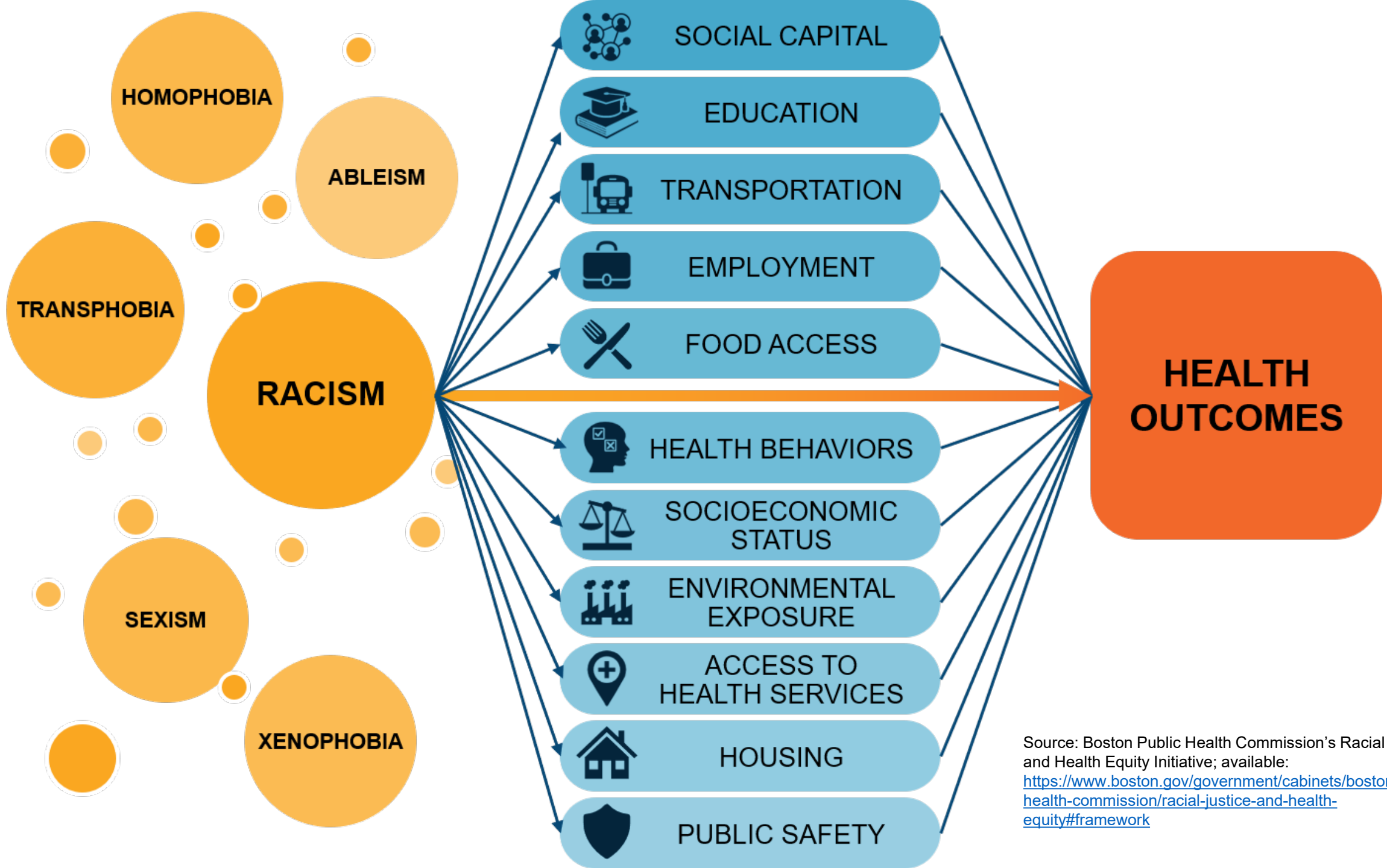
**COMMUNITY VIOLENCE:** More than 85% of youth who live in urban areas witness some form of community violence and almost 70% experience direct victimization

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**SERVICE PATHWAYS:** Youth of color experience greater delays in accessing mental health care services and are less likely to be screened for mental health concerns

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(Alvarez et al., 2022; American Public Health Association, 2020; Children's Defense Fund, 2021; McDonald et al., 2011)



Source: Boston Public Health Commission's Racial Justice and Health Equity Initiative; available: <https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/boston-public-health-commission/racial-justice-and-health-equity#framework>



# Masculinity and Emotional Expression in Black Boys

# “Man up. ”

- “Man up” is a term used when Black boys and men are dealing with challenges, to push their feelings aside and step up to handle a problem
- Research suggests that many Black men equate being a “real man” to providing for family, achieving respect of others, financial success, tough, self-sufficient, and in control of emotions and feelings
- “Boys don’t cry” and other statements that reinforce messages that emotional health does not serve as a positive value for boys and men
- Emphasis placed on success of physical activities such as sports, particularly for boys of a certain height or stature
- **Black masculinity norms negatively affect help-seeking behavior among Black men and exacerbated symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD**

# Black Masculinity: Media, Research, Police Brutality

## Media/Social Media

- Depicted as overly masculine, aggressive, and hypersexual
- Displays of emotions are often not deemed socially acceptable (weak, soft, emotional)

## Research

- Black boys as young as 10 are perceived as less innocent, mistaken as older, perceived as guilty, and face police violence if accused of a crime compared to peers
- “Black male, maybe 20, black revolver, black handgun by him..” (Tamir Rice, age 12)
- A “a suspicious person” (Trayvon Martin, age 17)

## Race, discrimination, and police brutality

- Unarmed killings of Black boys and men by police are often replayed continuously on social media and the news, may negatively impact mental health, feelings of safety, masculinity, and feelings of value in society
- Black youth experience disproportionate encounters with police at a younger age

# Black LGBTQ+ Youth

# Black LGBTQ+ Youth

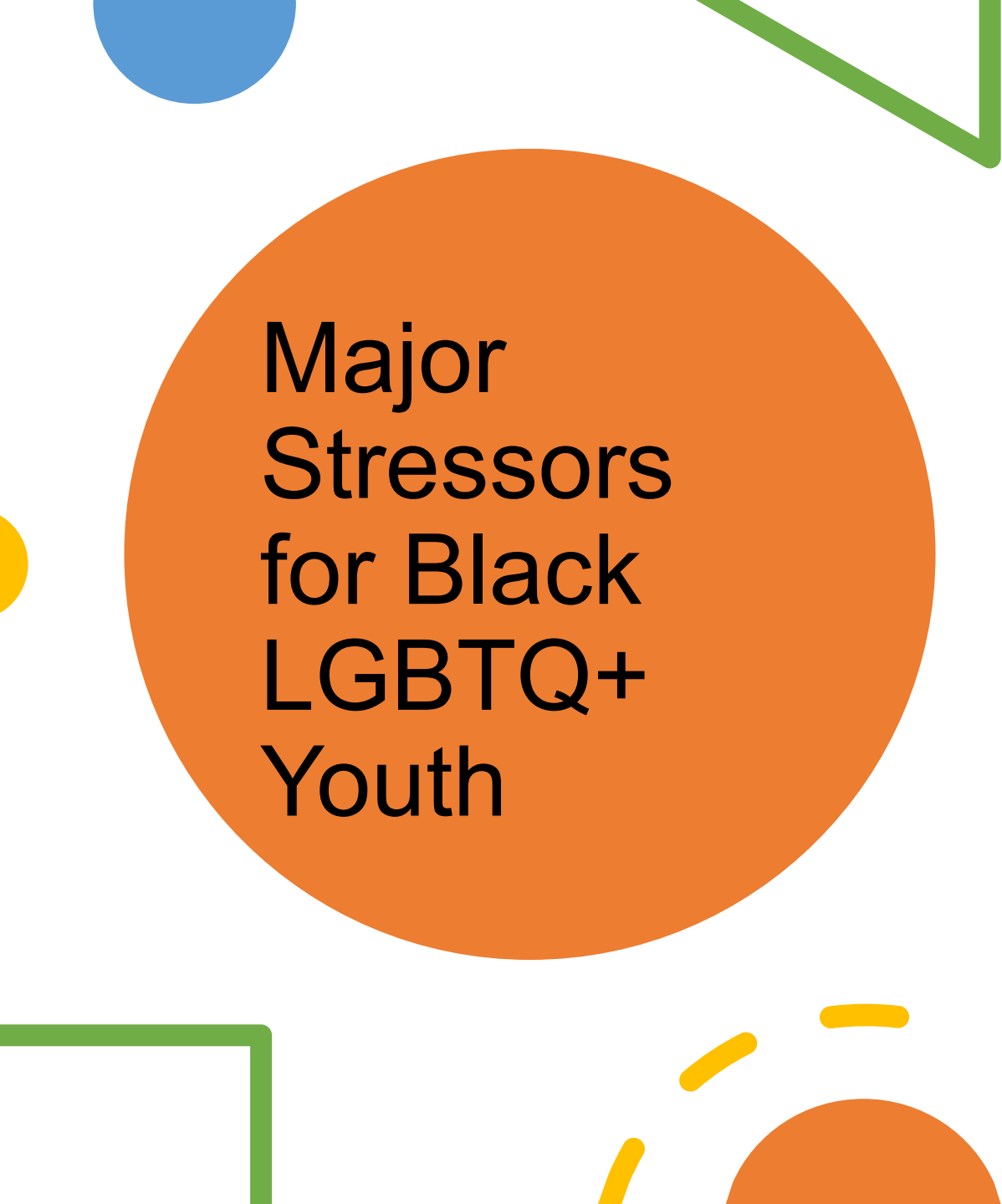
- Are less likely to receive mental health care (Trevor Project, 2020) compared to LGBTQ+ youth overall
- Report higher rates of depression and suicidality compared to cisgender peers
- Over 33% of Black LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide and 1 in 5 reported a prior attempt
- Black transgender and/or non-binary youth reported seriously considering and attempting suicide at a rate that was double the rate reported by cisgender Black LGBTQ youth

# Video: Camika Shelby Talks About Her Son Nigel




Link: [https://youtu.be/1zh3ITML\\_-I](https://youtu.be/1zh3ITML_-I)



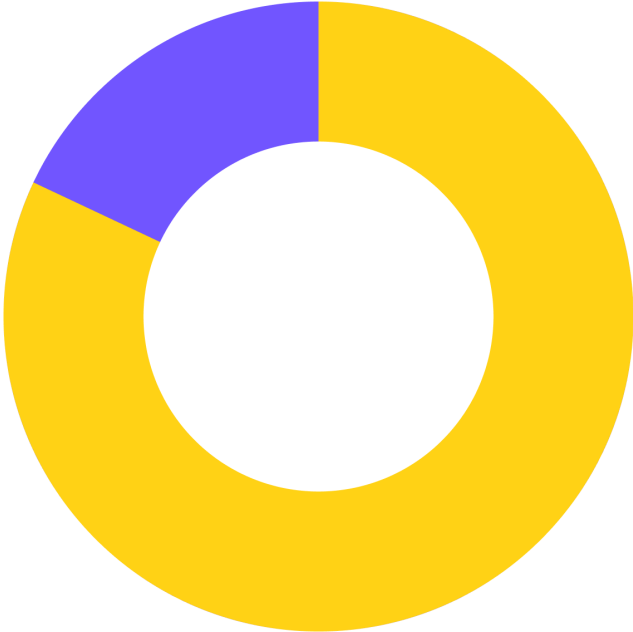


# Major Stressors for Black LGBTQ+ Youth

- 77% of Black and African American LGBTQ+ youth have heard family members say negative things about LGBTQ+ people
  - Only 19% said they can “definitely” be themselves at home
  - Fear of rejection and physical harm
  - Removal of affirming spaces
  - Discrimination, bullying, harassment
- 

## Desire for mental health care

82% Wanted care    18% Didn't want care



## Access to mental health care

60% Wanted but did not receive care    40% Wanted and received care





# Racial Stress and Trauma



Black Mental  
Wellness

# Racial Discrimination Among Youth

## Defined as:

- An act conducted by an individual or institution that denies equitable treatment to an individual or group because of phenotypic or racial group affiliation

## Experiences may include:

- Objective and subjective (e.g., macroaggressions, microaggressions)
- Interpersonal (e.g., experiencing racial teasing or bullying)
- Vicarious (e.g., viewing the unarmed killing and harassment of Black and Brown children in person, on television, or the Internet)
- Institutional

# Racial Trauma

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Dangerous or frightening race-based events, stressors, or discrimination that “overwhelm one’s coping capacity and impacts quality of life and/or cause fear, helplessness, and horror...” (Carter, 2007)

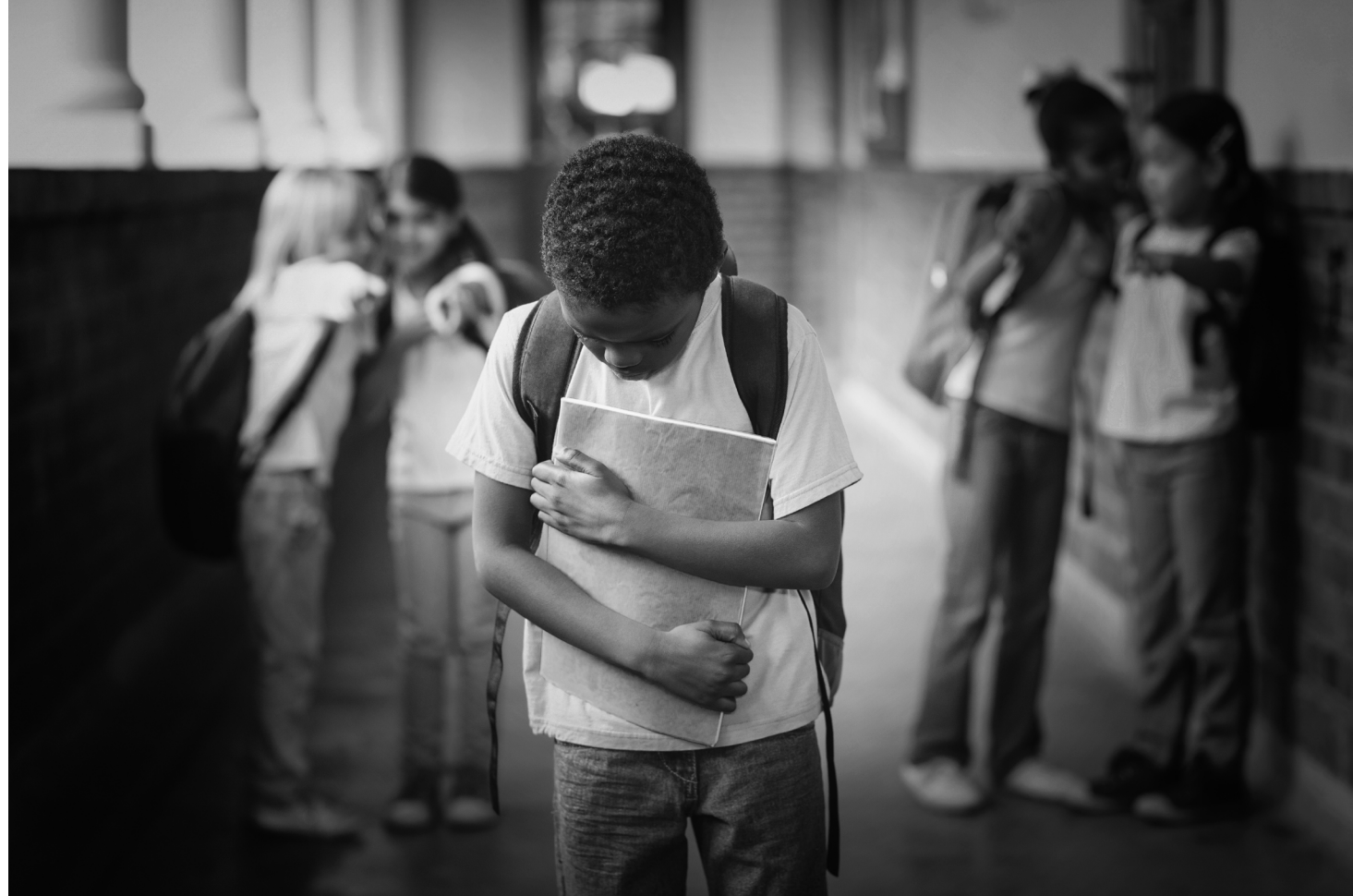




Image [Source](#):

## Exposure to Racism and Racial Stress

- In a national study of over 7,000 students, approximately 55% of Black high school students report experiencing racism (Mpofu et al., 2022)
- Black adults and children as young as 8 years old report an average of 5 daily experiences with racial stressors (Metzger, 2020)
- “Weathering” describes how the stress from coping with chronic toxic stress, from structural and interpersonal racism and bias, over a lifetime causes physiological changes which can result in chronic disease, adverse health outcomes, and premature death (Geronimus et al., 2006)



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# Impact of Racial Trauma on Youth

- Physiological problems
- Substance use
- Depression, low mood
- Lower self-competency and self-esteem
- Appear disconnected
- Academic decline
- Anger, irritability
- Decreased motivation to achieve
- Decreased concentration
- Psychological symptoms (Depression, anxiety, trauma)

# Racism and Suicide Risk

- In young Black adults, racial microaggressions (invisibility, low-achievement/undesirable culture, and environmental invalidations) and experiencing racism online are associated with feeling like a burden to others (Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Keum et al., 2022)
- Feeling like a burden to others is associated with higher suicide risk in young Black adults (Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Keum et al., 2022)
- Experiencing discrimination increased the risk of depression and suicidal thoughts in Black youth (Assari et al., 2017; Tobler et al., 2013)
- Overt and subtle experiences of racism are associated with thoughts of suicide in Black youth (Madubata et al., 2022)





# Ways to Support Black Youth



## Breakout groups

# Breakout Group Discussion Questions

Discuss the question assigned to your breakout group:

1. What are some strategies for supporting Black youth at the individual level?
2. What are some strategies for supporting Black youth at the community level?
3. What are some strategies for supporting Black youth at the system or policy levels?

# Protective Factors

- Families, caring adults, and/or schools that provide safe, supportive, and affirming environments
- Family cohesion
- School connectedness
- Sense of belonging
- Problem solving and coping skills
- Positive peer relationships
- Spirituality
- Strong sense of ethnic identity

# Systemic Needs

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Decrease barriers to mental health care access

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Increase in child mental health providers and providers of color

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Increase in school-based mental health services

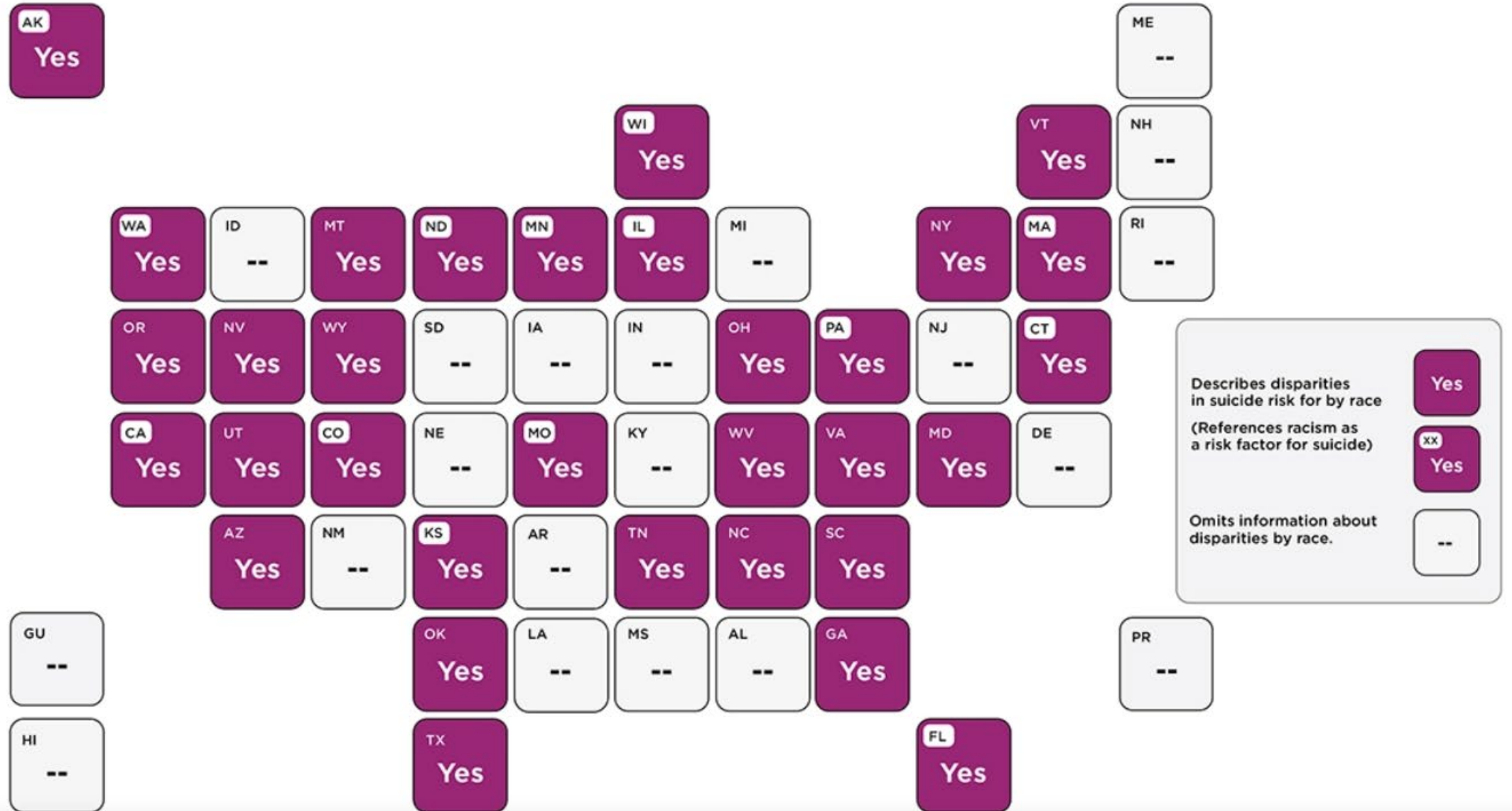
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Early detection of mental health concerns and enhanced screening

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Increased funding for suicide prevention research

# State Suicide Prevention Plans that Address BIPOC Youth ([Child Trends, 2022](#))



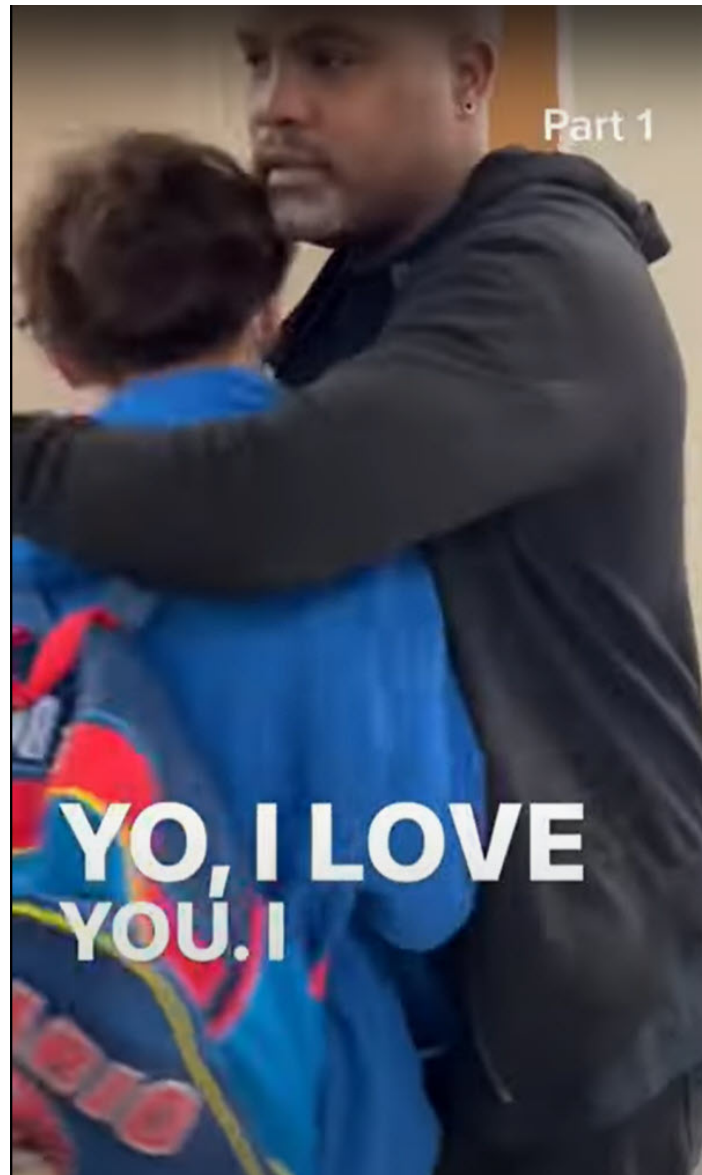
***“We are in a crisis. But I have a strong belief in Black youth,” he said. “We come from a legacy of surviving. We come from a legacy of healing. We just need to make room for them to practice their brilliance. ... Black youth just simply ‘being’ is the most beautiful thing I can think of.”***

-Leroy Mitchell, a mental health training manager, Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective

# #BlackBoyJoy







# Redefining Masculinity

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Link: <https://youtu.be/jXXcFLrOivU>

# Resources



# Therapy Resources

[Open Path Psychotherapy Collective \(Affordable Therapy\)](#)

[The LoveLand Foundation \(Vouchers for Therapy\)](#)

[Black Men Heal](#)

Black Men Heal is a nonprofit that provides FREE mental health treatment-both individual and group therapy to Men of Color.

# Therapy Resources

## [Therapy for Black Kids](#)

Dedicated to helping Black parents raise healthy kids in the 21st century.

## [Therapy for Black Men](#)

Aims to break the stigma that asking for help is a sign of weakness through a directory of close to 600 therapists throughout the US trained to provide judgment-free, multiculturally-competent care to Black men.

## [The Trevor Project](#)

The Trevor Project's mission is to end suicide among LGBTQ young people.

# Resources

## **BROTHER, YOU'RE ON MY MIND**

To help start conversations about mental health, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and NIMHD have launched *Brother, You're on My Mind: Changing the National Dialogue Regarding Mental Health Among African American Men*.

## **Black Boys OM, Inc.**

Aims to impact local communities, with a specific focus of serving the wellness practice of Black Boys and Black Men in Faith Organizations, Schools, Community Centers, and Yoga /Wellness Studios.

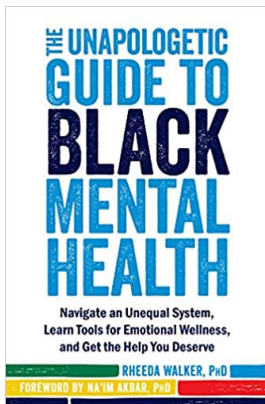
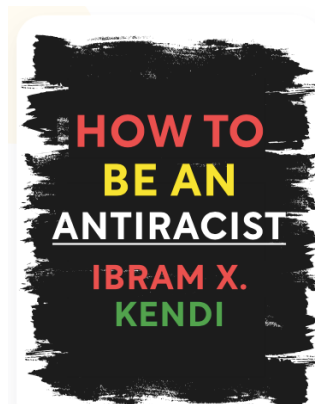
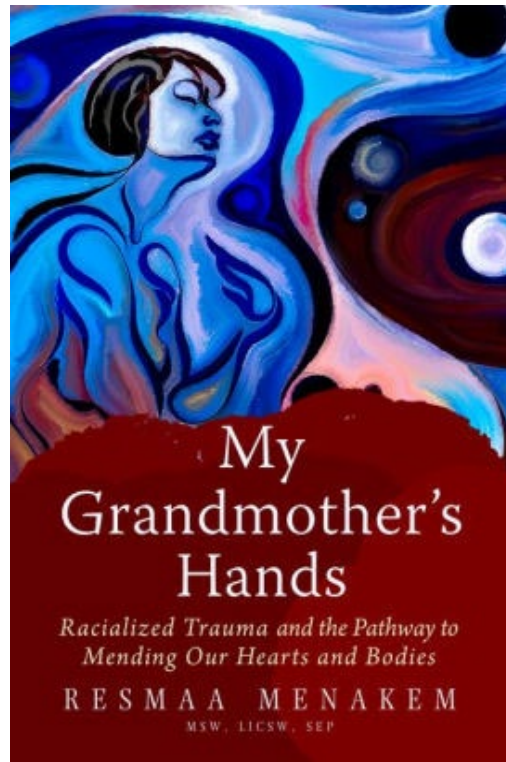
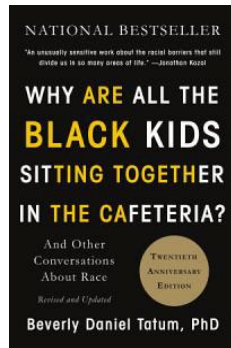
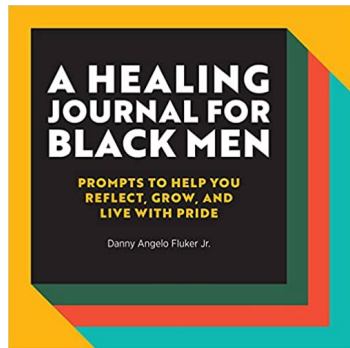
## **Embrace Race**

A multiracial community of parents, teachers, experts, and other caring adults who support each other to meet the challenges that race poses to our children, families, and communities.

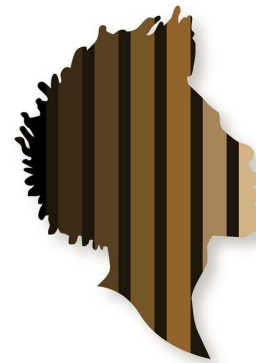
# Resources

- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [Racial Trauma Guide](#)
- [MHTTC Network](#)

# Books



brennan allan steele



**breathe.**  
a guided healing journal  
FOR BLACK MEN





# For More Information

[Black Mental Wellness Website](#)

## Email

[Dr. Nicole Cammack](#)

[Dr. Dana Cunningham](#)

## Social Media



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# Questions



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