

How to Talk to Youth about Race and Racial Trauma

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Black Mental Wellness

May 25, 2022, 1:00 PM



Central East (HHS Region 3)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

MHTTC Network

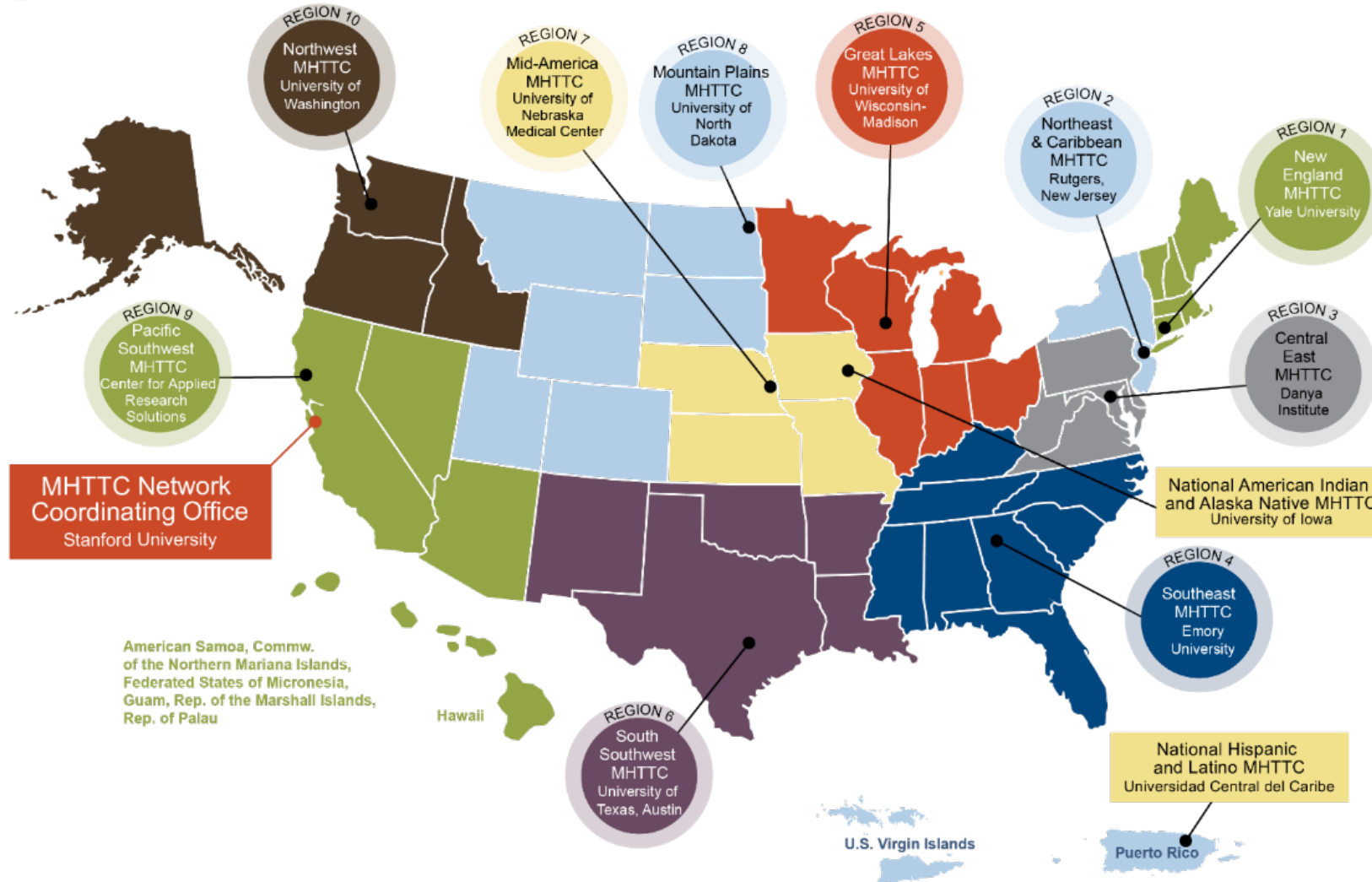


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MHTTC Purpose

The MHTTC Network vision is to unify science, education and service to transform lives through evidence-based and promising treatment and recovery practices in a recovery-oriented system of care.

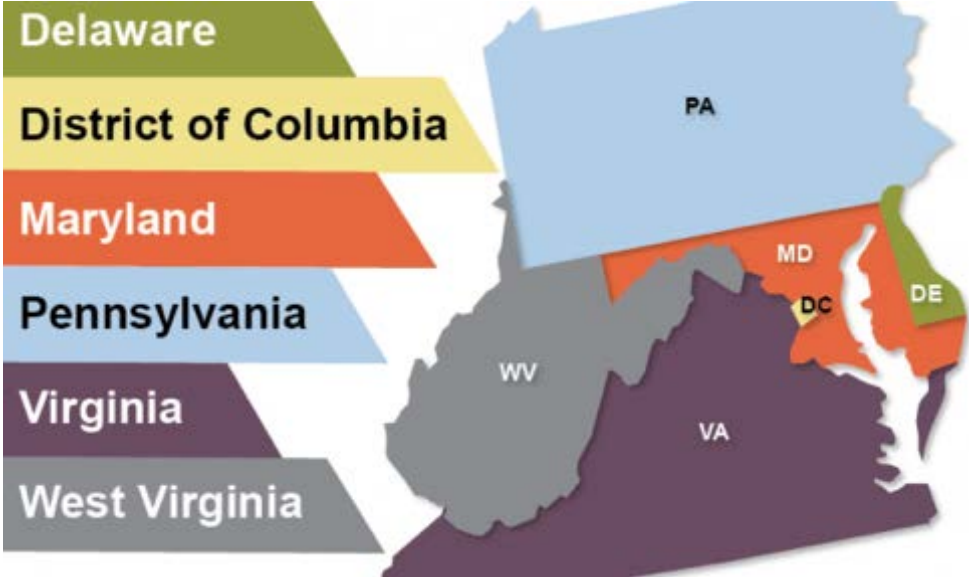


Central East MHTTC Goals

Funded by SAMHSA to:

- **Accelerate** the adoption and implementation of mental health related evidence-based practices
- **Heighten** the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the behavioral health workforce
- **Foster** alliances among culturally diverse practitioners, researchers, policy makers, family members, and consumers
- **Ensure** the availability and delivery of publicly available, free of charge, training and technical assistance

Central East Region 3



Central East (HHS Region 3)

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At the time of this presentation, Miriam Delphin-Rittmon served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use and Administrator of SAMHSA. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by SAMHSA/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Black Mental Wellness, Corp.

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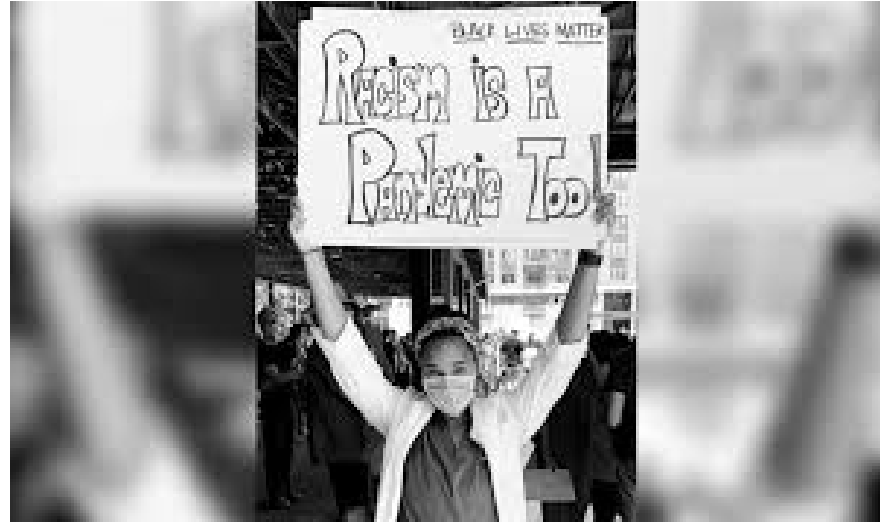
Black Mental Wellness, Corp.

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](#)







What is Racial Trauma?

Racial Trauma

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, & horror...”

(Carter, 2007)

Photo: Courtesy Burlington School District



Racial Discrimination among Youth

- Children as early as preschool age are able to identify their race, but perceptions associated with race often sharpen beginning in early adolescence
- Several studies indicate that more than two-thirds of African American and Latinx youth report exposure to racial discrimination as young as age 8
- One factor that may explain higher rates of trauma exposure for youth is racial stress and trauma (Williams et al., 2018)

Racial Stressors and Youth

- Microaggressions
- Cultural insensitivity
- Vicarious (e.g., witnessing a peer experience prejudice)
- Interpersonal (e.g., racial teasing, bullying, humiliating and shaming comments)
- Discrimination and/or witnessing discrimination of another person
- Institutional racism (e.g., disproportionate discipline practices in a school)



The Impact Of Racism On Mental Health:

Feeling disconnected / lonely

Increase risk of
depression and anxiety

Second-guessing things

Decreased hope
(in the future, justice,
the government etc.)

Trauma
(both from the present and
triggering past instances /
generational trauma)

Increased
"Survival Mode"

Existential
questioning
"How can the world
be so cruel?"

Decreased trust



Worry

Feelings of powerlessness
(You can do the right thing and still
end up with a horrific outcome)

Panic

#BlackLivesMatter

@RealDepressionProject






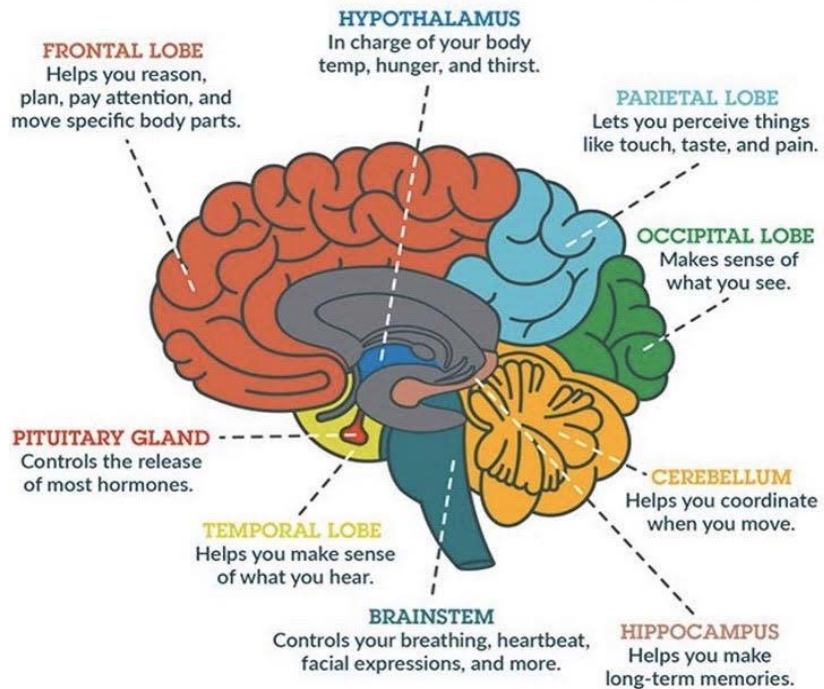
Black Mental
Wellness

Impact of Racial Trauma on Youth

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

REVIEW BACKGROUND


The Anatomy Of Your Brain



HIPPOCAMPUS SHRINKS
THIS AREA HELPS US DISTINGUISH BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT MEMORIES

INCREASED ACTIVITY IN THE AMYGDALA
HELPS US PROCESS EMOTIONS AND IS ALSO LINKED TO FEAR RESPONSES

VENTROMEDIAL PREFRONTAL CORTEX SHRINKS
THIS REGION REGULATES NEGATIVE EMOTIONS THAT OCCUR WHEN CONFRONTED WITH SPECIFIC STIMULI



Factors to consider
before discussing race
and race-related
experiences

Discussing Racial Stress & Trauma with Youth

- While some adults may prefer to downplay race to minimize differences and promote family unity this can have negative consequences for youth
- Part of the existence in America is based on race, and to ignore this is to ignore a key part of a child's identity and experiences
- Consider the developmental age of youth
- Acknowledge racial differences between you and the youth if present
- Discussing race and racial trauma with goal of also building racial pride
- Discuss strategies to manage any potential encounters of racial stress



Racial Socialization



TALKING



ACTIONS



IMAGES

Cultural Pride ✓

“You should be proud to be Black”



Preparation for Bias ✓✗

“You have to work twice as hard as Whites in order to get ahead in this world”



Promotion of Mistrust ✗

“Keep your distance from kids and adults who do not look like you”



Egalitarian ✓✗

“Everyone is the same and race does not matter”



We need to
have a talk...

How you start
the
conversations
depends on
who you are

Mental/behavioral health
professionals

Parents, Guardians,
Trusted Family members

Teachers, Community

Mental/Behavioral Health Professionals

- Before having the conversation assess your personal understanding related to addressing race and racial stressors in treatment
- Assess your personal biases
- Assess the needs of the youth. Is this something that the youth is even thinking about?
- Understand the youth's level of understanding before determining how to intervene
 - Level of understanding of race, racism, discrimination?
 - Personal experiences?
 - Concerns about current racial injustices?
 - Is it a personal source of threat to the youth?
 - Does it trigger previous experiences of danger?

Mental/Behavioral Health Professionals

- Follow the lead of the youth and do not force discussions that do not feel authentic
- Provide empathy
- Acknowledge that the experiences are unjust
- Do not try to create an answer or explanation if there isn't one. Listen
- Encourage creative expression of emotions (e.g., dance, writing)
- Discuss the importance of relying on healthy coping strategies, social supports, family, and other trusted friends and adults
- Return to the conversation as indicated

Mental/Behavioral Health Professionals

Start the conversation with a direct question

“I know that there have been a lot of discussions related to race/racial injustices recently, how are you dealing with it?”

“Some people are reporting that they are having intense emotions related to (name the recent/current event), how are you feeling?”

“How does your identity as a (insert known identities here) influence how you feel? How you cope? Your relationships?”



Parents, Guardians,
Trusted Family

Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

- Start conversations about race and racial pride at a young age
- Be creative and create opportunities that allow you to begin and continue discussions authentically (museums, toys, family traditions, books)
- Have conversations that are age appropriate and that reflect your child's level of maturity. Also take into consideration what your child can emotionally handle
- As your child gets older, the questions, concerns, and connections to racial stressors will change
- Prepare yourself for these conversations. Think about your own experiences. Consult with friends and others on different approaches to having difficult conversations

Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

- If appropriate share how you have dealt with similar experiences in the past
- If your child asks questions, be honest and answer in an age-appropriate manner
- Have you noticed any behavioral or emotional changes? Discuss it!
- Listen without minimizing their experiences
- These conversations are continuous, you don't have to discuss everything at one time.

Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

Be intentional with the conversation. Set aside a time to talk and be sure to minimize distractions and ask questions directly

“How are you feeling about all the racial injustices that are being replayed on the news?”

“Do you ever worry about being harmed by the police?”

“Have you ever felt that someone treated you differently based on your race (or other identities)?”

Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

Additional Questions

“What is your understanding of what is happening?”

- This is an opportunity to correct any misperceptions or misinformation
- “How are you feeling about what happened?”
 - Validate the youth’s feelings
 - Acknowledge similarities in how you may be feeling
- “What do you need from me? How can I support you?”
- “Do you want to do something together to make a change?”
 - Think about volunteer opportunities, connecting with organizations that dismantle racism, and/or family-friendly activities

Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

How do I prepare my Black child for racism and keep them safe if I do not have the same lived experiences?

- Start the conversations at a young age and continue those conversations over time
- Make tools available to increase a positive connection to Black legacies, people and history
- Listen to your child as they share their personal experiences and challenges
- Acknowledge differences between your experiences
- Help your child identify different types of racism and how to cope and manage
- Join organizations that contribute to dismantling racism
- Connect with other friends or family who can help you build knowledge and positive experiences to build racial pride



Teachers/Community

Teachers/Community

- Implement a culturally inclusive curriculum if possible
- Fill the classroom with culturally diverse books, pictures, and discussions
- Lead discussions on current events related to race and racial stress
- Invite community speakers to classrooms to enhance student exposure and collective knowledge and understanding
- Provide resources specific to coping with related to race-related stress to students if needed
- Name the thoughts and feelings you may be having related to race- related current events. Model for students the importance of naming feelings

Teachers/Community

- Assess needs (e.g., parent focus groups, community surveys, community town hall meetings)
- Assess school and community policy and procedures for potential biases
- Consult with other appropriate professionals regarding best strategies for culturally inclusive teaching and school structure
- Model for youth and families the importance of diversity and inclusivity through staff and teacher diversity
- Community wide acknowledgement and celebration of a diverse range of holidays (e.g., Juneteenth)

Additional Questions

What is your earliest experience dealing with race and/or racism?

What makes you who you are?

Do you remember the first time you were aware of your racial identity?

Did you become aware of your race because of something someone said to you?

How much racism do you face every day?



Reflection:

What does your racial identity mean to you?

ACTIVITY

IDENTITIES

- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Identity
- Class
- Biological Sex
- National Origin
- Immigration Status

Statements

- 1) The part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis is _____
- 2) The part of my identity that I am the least aware of on a daily basis is _____
- 3) The part of my identity that I wish I knew more about is _____
- 4) The part of my identity that provides me the most privilege is _____
- 5) The part of my identity that I believe is the most misunderstood by others is _____
- 6) The part of my identity that I feel is difficult to discuss with others who identify differently is _____
- 7) The part of my identity that makes me feel discriminated against is _____



Reflection:

What are your goals related to understanding your racial identity and racial stress and trauma?



Reflection:

Identify the trusting adults and friends in your life with whom you can discuss your experiences with racial stress.

Someone I can trust to share my feelings is _____.

Someone I can trust to help me talk about my feelings is _____.

Someone who will support me if I feel overwhelmed is _____.

Case Example

Racial Trauma: Middle School Aged Children

Ages 12-14

- Rapid physical growth, which may contribute to further stereotyping
- Cognitive and psychological changes associated with increased exploration of autonomous identity and autonomy
- Identity development including racial-ethnic identity development
- Youth may internalize racial stress trauma as they are developing sense of self

Racial Trauma: Middle School Aged Children

Symptoms Related

- Youth may not connect experiences with their negative mood, behavior, and self-image
- Those who have directly, or vicariously experienced trauma may become preoccupied with the safety of self, peers, and family members
- Trauma experiences may lead to distractibility in classroom or group settings which can be misinterpreted as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), phobias, or other anxiety disorders (e.g., Thompson and Massat 2005)

Racial Trauma: Middle School Aged Children

Family Factors

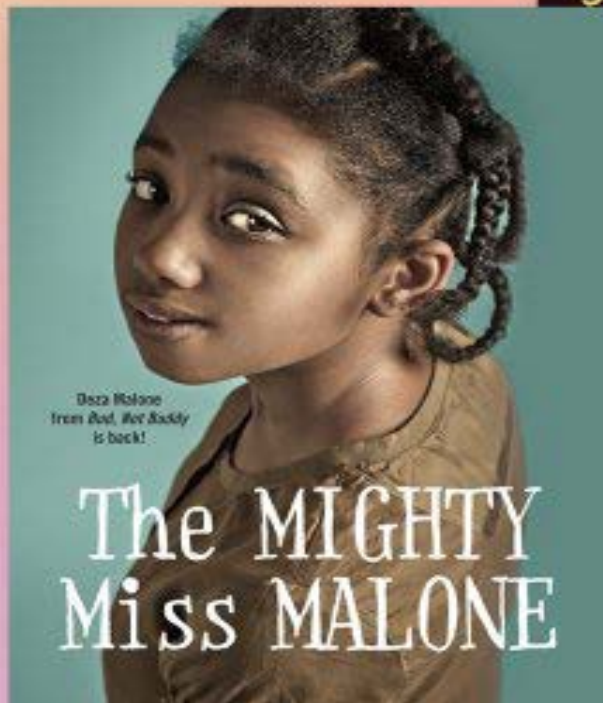
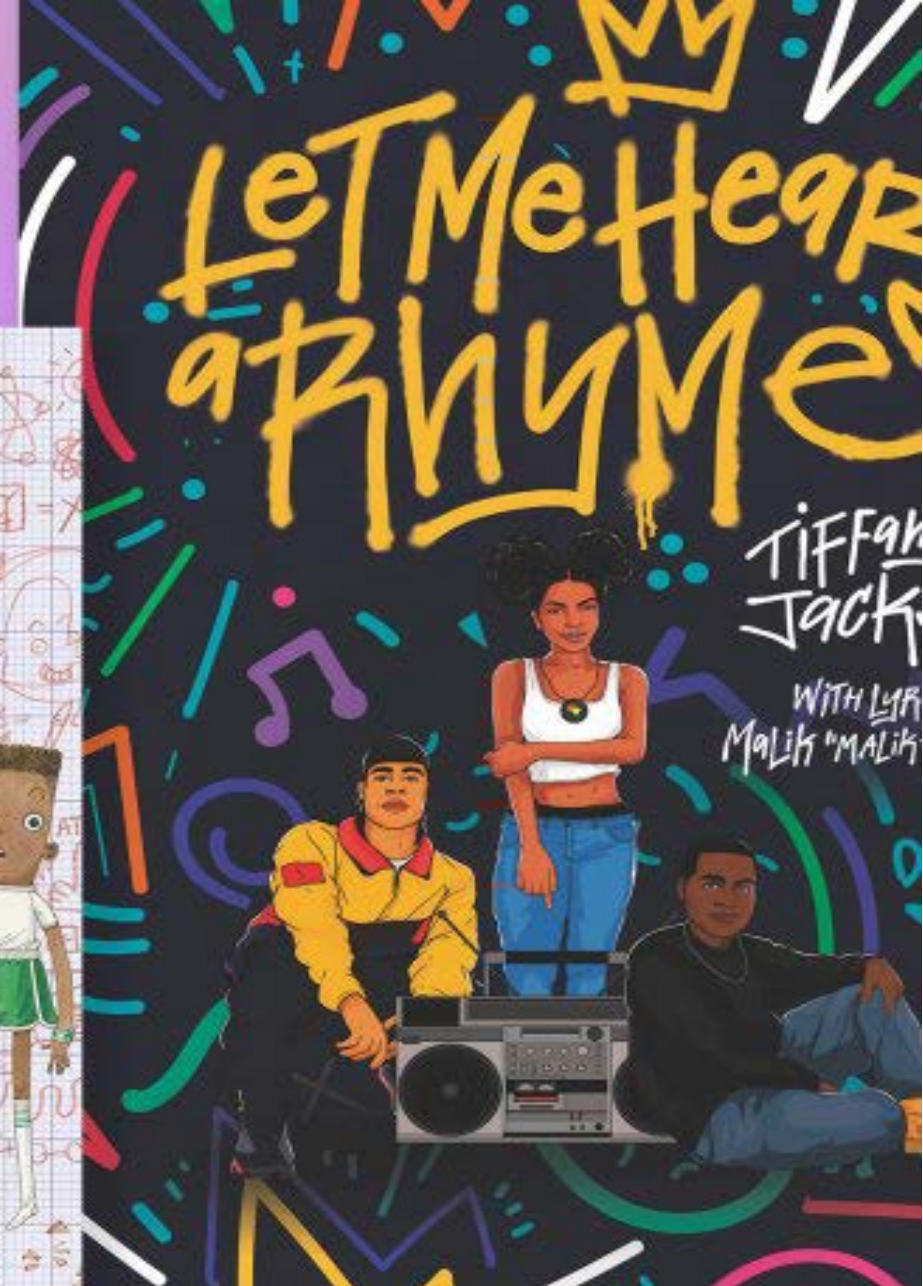
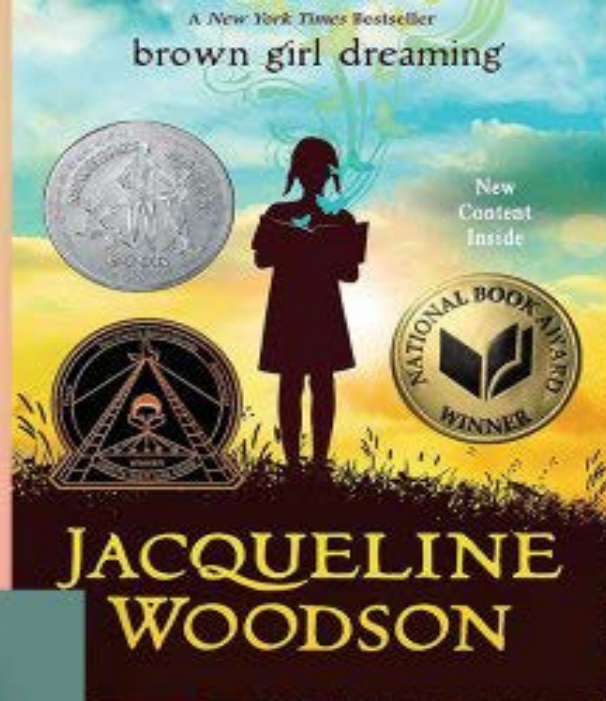
- Parents may begin to adjust the content and frequency of conversations regarding preparing for racial bias and managing racial stress (Hughes and Chen, 1999)
- In parallel parents must contend with, reflect on, and resolve their own experiences with racial stress trauma on their own experiences of racial discrimination
- Contending with this stress can influence parents' messages and lead to feelings of incompetency in assisting their children in managing racial stress trauma

Racial Trauma: Middle School Aged Children

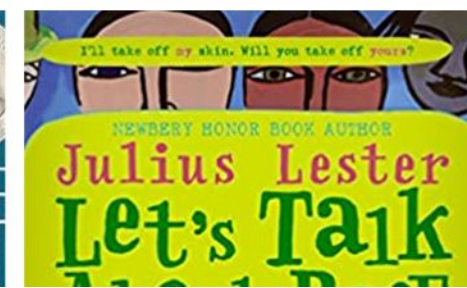
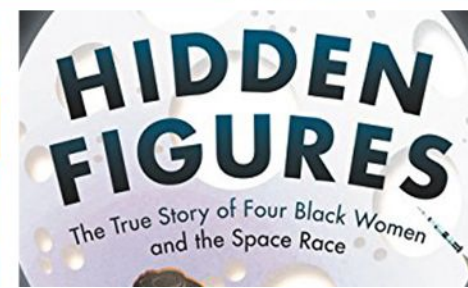
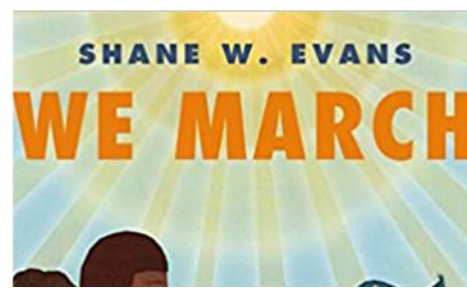
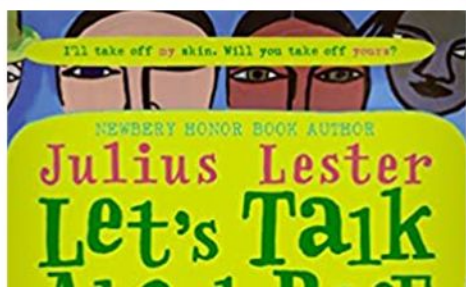
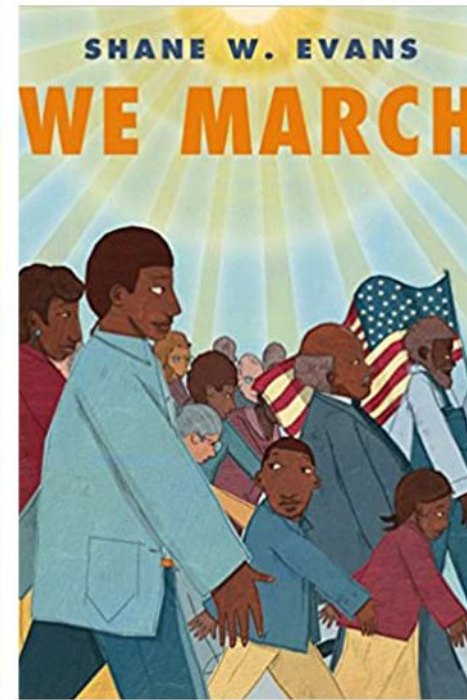
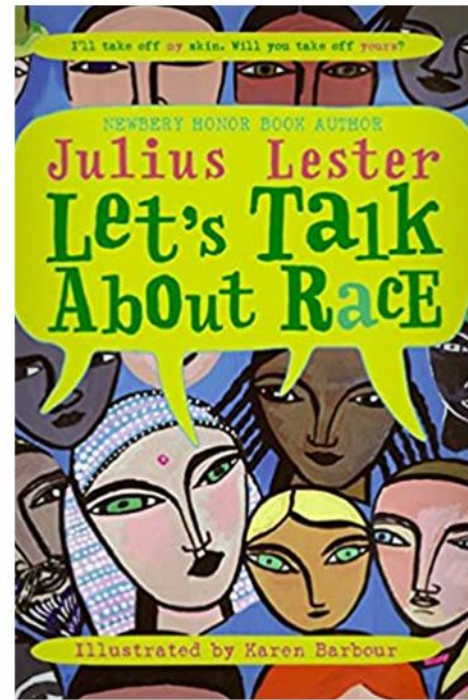
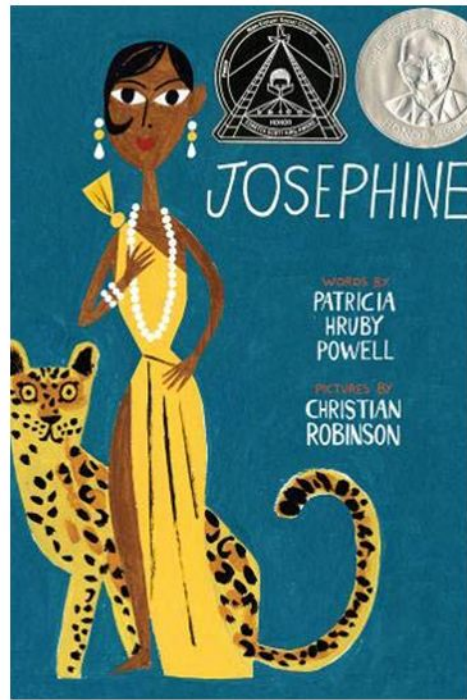
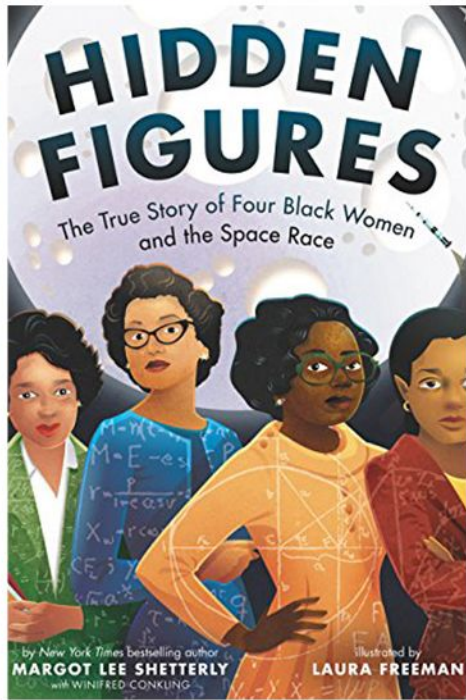
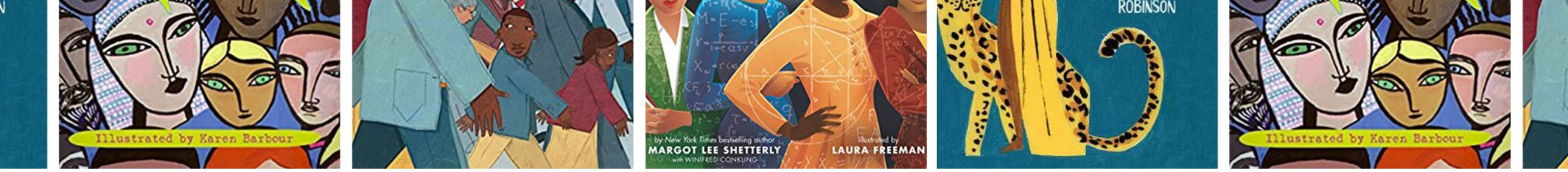
Community Factors

- The influence of social media - racialized messages
- Loss and grief in communities of color contributes to racial stress trauma
 - Communal trauma (e.g., weakened social structures, social malaise)
- To combat these losses and to cope from grief, communities of color may protest or call for acts of justice in different forms
 - Some youth may feel unmotivated, numb, or hopeless immediately after following or being exposed to these tragic losses

Resources



[10 Powerful Inclusive and Anti-Racist Books for Kids and Teens](#)



[30+ Books to Educate Kids and Teens About Race](#)

Strategies and Resources

RESilience

- Uplifting youth through healthy communication about race.

One Talk at a Time

- Providing support for Latinx American, Asian American, African American, and Black youth and their families to have conversations about race and ethnicity.

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.

Strategies and Resources

Videos

- [Sesame Street: Song -- I Love My Hair](#)
- [Helping Your Child Cope with Media Coverage of Community Racial Trauma: Tips for Parents](#)

Books

- [Read Aloud: The Colors Of Us By Karen Katz](#)
- [37 Children's Books to help talk about Racism and Discrimination](#)

Strategies and Resources

[These Books Can Help You Explain Racism and Protest to Your Kids](#)

[Helping Kids Process Violence, Trauma, and Race in a World of Nonstop News](#)

[I Am An Educator: I care about my students' racial consciousness and want to develop their racial awareness://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/audiences/educator](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/audiences/educator)

[First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversations](#)

For More Information

[Black Mental Wellness Website](#)

Email

[Dr. Nicole Cammack](#)

[Dr. Danielle Busby](#)

Social Media



Black Mental Wellness



Black Mental Wellness

Black Mental Wellness Series

Caring for the Caregiver

June 8, 2022. 1:00pm - 2:00pm ET

[Register](#)

Exploring Racial Stress and Intergenerational Trauma

June 23, 2022. 1:00pm - 2:00pm ET

[Register](#)

Appreciation



Contact Us



a program managed by



[Central East MHTTC website](#)

[Oscar Morgan](#), Project Director

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Let's connect:

