

# Exploring Racial Stress and Intergenerational Trauma

Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D. and Danielle R. Busby, Ph.D.  
Black Mental Wellness

June 23, 2022, 1:00 PM



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.

# MHTTC Network

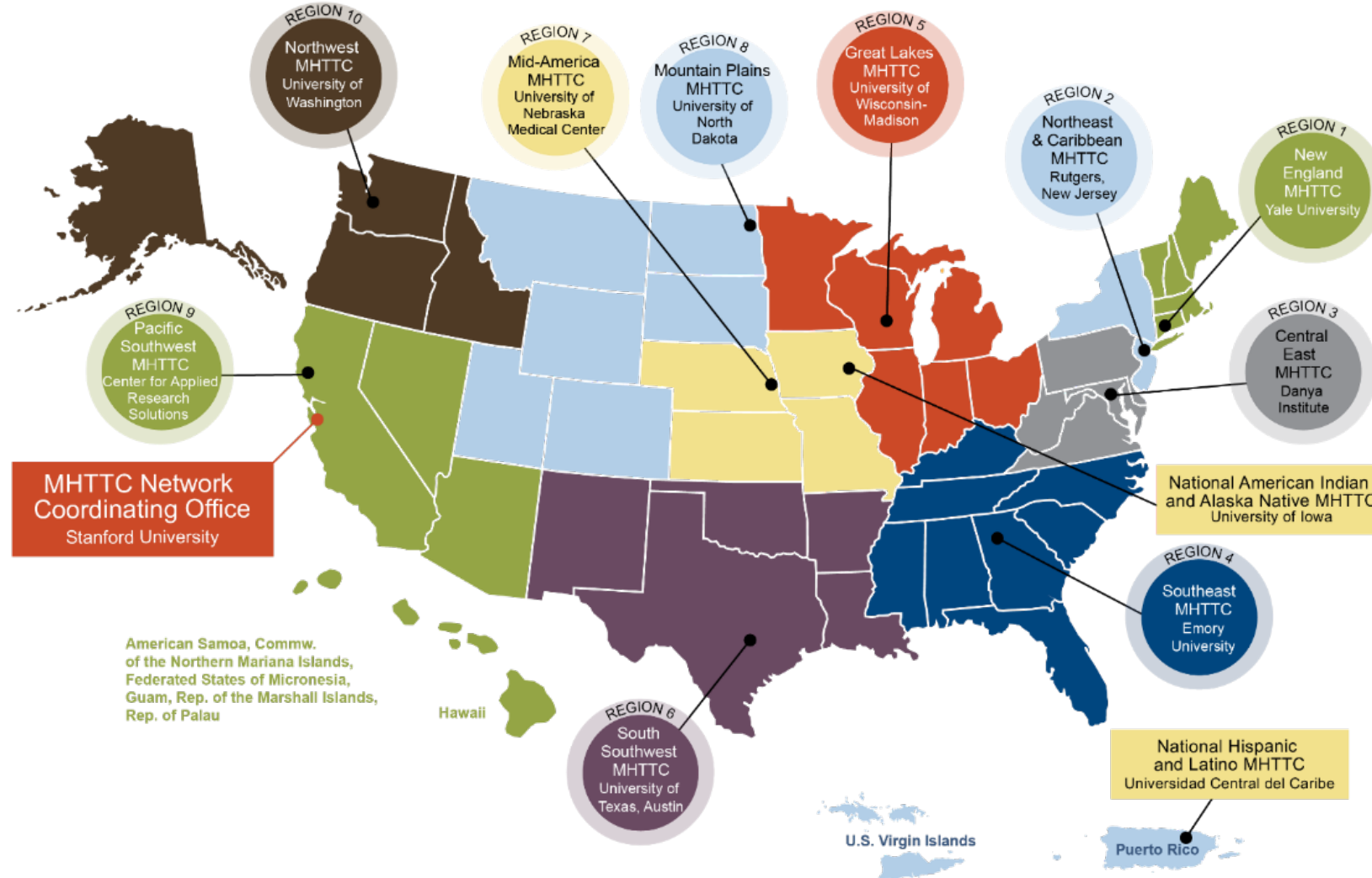


MHTTC

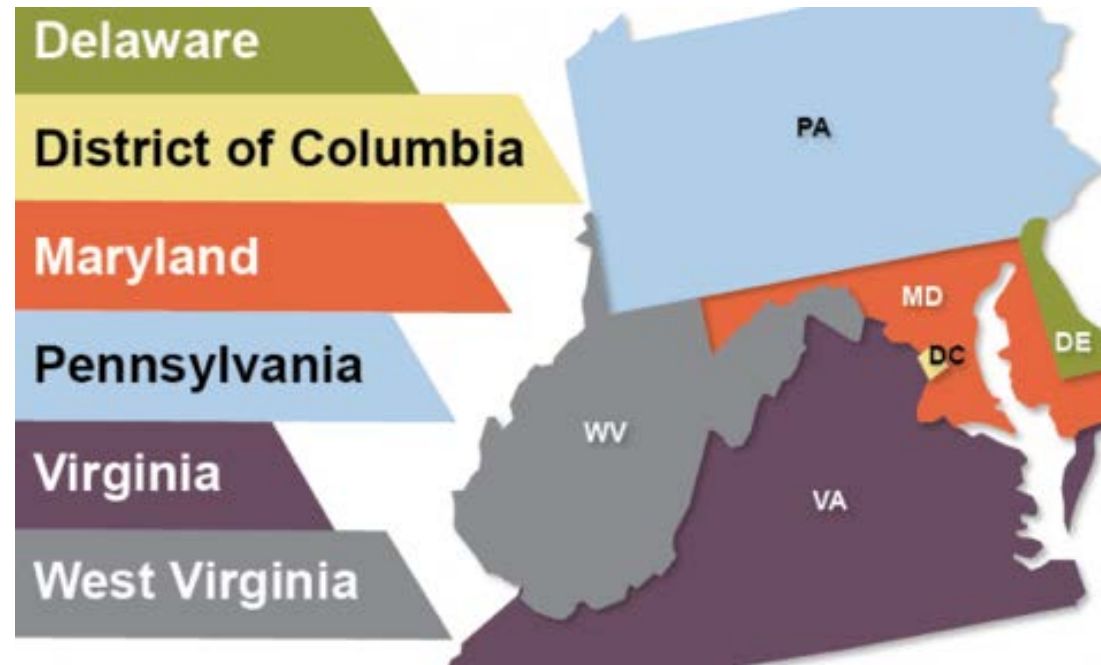
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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**

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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

# Acknowledgment

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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.

This work is supported by grant SM081785 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Presented 2022

# 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](#)







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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





# Overview

## Goals:

- Participants will be able to define racial stress and intergenerational trauma
- Participants will be able to describe the impact of racial stress and trauma on mental and physical health
- Participants will be able to identify strategies to manage experiences of racial stress and trauma



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[Source](#)

## **Understandings & Agreements:**

- Discussing race-related topics is difficult
- You might experience negative emotions
- Eliminate distractions
- Take care of yourself



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# STOP

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- **STOP** when you notice heightened emotions
  - **S**low Down
  - **T**ake some deep breaths
  - **O**bserve what you are feeling in your body
  - **P**rocess and proceed





[Intergenerational Trauma Video](#)



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# Definitions



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# Racial Discrimination & Racial Stress

## 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, & horror...”*

(Carter, 2007)

Photo: Courtesy Burlington School District



# Intergenerational Trauma

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*Intergenerational trauma is the theory that a trauma that is experienced by one person in a family—for example, a parent or grandparent—can be passed down to future generations because of the way that trauma epigenetically alters gene expression.*

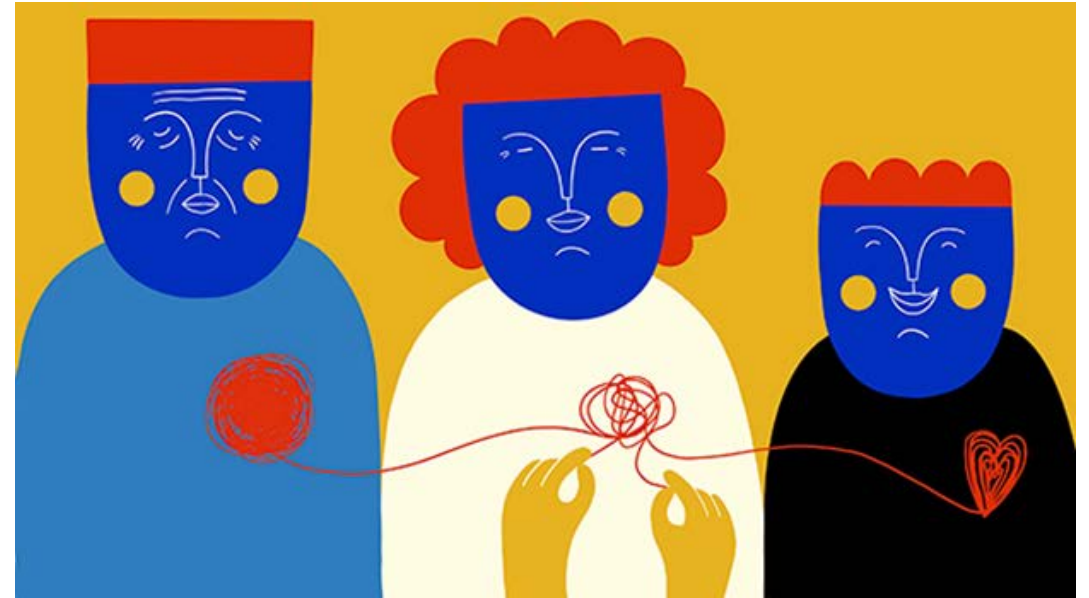


# Historical Trauma

- Historical trauma is a collective and compounded wounding that is experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group as a result of a massive trauma experience
- Historical trauma impacts multiple generations
- Passed on through communities and families

## Can impact:

- Mood
- Behavior
- Guilt
- Coping Skills
- Parenting



Illustrated by Helena Pallarés

[Source](#)





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# What is the impact of racial stress and intergenerational trauma?

# Epigenetics

The study of how the environment can influence our genes. Specifically, changes in gene expression in response to behavioral and environmental factors that does not change the DNA sequence

Trauma can leave a chemical mark on a person's genes, which can then be passed down to future generations.

This mark doesn't cause a genetic mutation, but it does alter the mechanism by which the gene is expressed. This alteration is not genetic, but *epigenetic*.





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# Epigenetics

- Rachel Yehuda led a genetic study of 32 Jewish men and women who had either been interned in a Nazi concentration camp, witnessed or experienced torture or who had had to hide during the second world war
  - Her team analysed the genes of their children, who are known to have increased likelihood of stress disorders, and compared the results with Jewish families who were living outside of Europe during the war. The gene changes in the children were solely attributed to Holocaust exposure in the parents
- Girls born to Dutch women who were pregnant during a severe famine at the end of the Second World War had an above-average risk of developing schizophrenia
- Prior research has found that stress during pregnancy is one way intergenerational trauma can be passed down. Parental stress during pregnancy is associated with children who have greater emotional distress
- The field of epigenetics is still young. More research is needed and is important because epigenetic changes are reversible





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# Impact of Racial Stress & Intergeneration al Trauma

- 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)



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# STRESSORS AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulty “getting going”
- Helplessness-Hopelessness
- Isolation
- Resentment
- Sadness
- Fatigue
- Increased alcohol use
- Disrupted sleep
- Irritability
- Digestive issues
- Headaches/Migraines
- Body pains
- Crying
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Compassion fatigue

# Impact of Trauma on Parenting

- Cortisol = “stress hormone”
- Pregnant women can pass cortisol through the placenta to the infant
- Higher cortisol levels can result in constant state of “flight” “fight” or “freeze”
- Difficulty bonding and developing attachments with children
- Maternal stress and trauma associated with negative health consequences from infancy to adulthood
- Children model caregivers



# Impact of Racial Stress and Trauma on Parenting

- Racial discrimination is associated with increased parenting stress (Condon et al., 2021)
- Racial discrimination is related to higher levels of parental depression which have an impact on parenting practices (Anderson et al., 2015; Heard et al., 2018; Holloway & Varner, 2021)
  - Higher reactivity
  - More laxness
  - Less positive parent-child relationship
  - More harsh parenting practices
  - Negative affect in the caregiver
  - More vigilant parenting
  - These parenting practices associated with increased depression and anxiety in children and adolescents

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

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***Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one or more of the following ways:***

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Directly experience the event

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Witness the event

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Indirect exposure – learning that a traumatic event occurred to a close family member or friend

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Repeated or extreme exposure to the aversive details of the traumatic event

# Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

“A condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this condition is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them.”

– Dr. Joy DeGruy



# Impact of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

- **Vacant Esteem**

- Belief that one has little to no worth
- Results from influence of society, community, and family

- **Ever Present Anger**

- Anger that lies “just below the surface”
- Anger can be a response to frustration of blocked goals

- **Racist Socialization**

- Adoption of slave master’s value system
- Programmed to believe in White superiority/Black inferiority

# Systemic Racism in Mental Health

Date created: October 29, 2021

APA apologizes for longstanding contributions to systemic racism

NASW apologizes for racist practices in American social work

*Jun 17, 2021*

APA Apologizes for Its Support of Racism in Psychiatry

January 18, 2021

# Systemic Racism in Mental Health

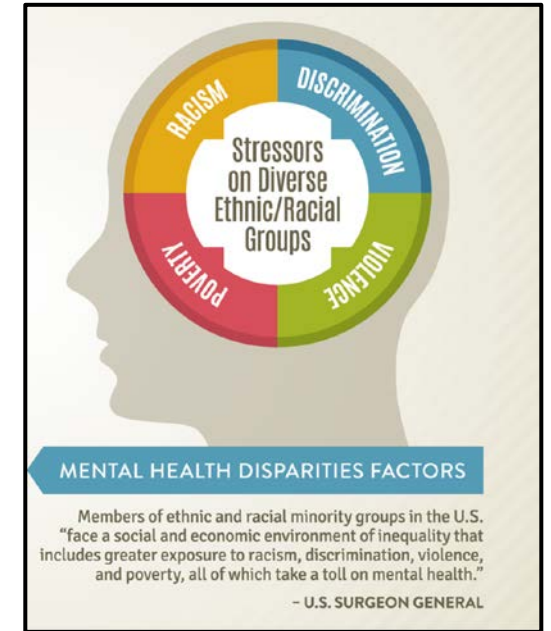
- Mental health professionals helped to remove Native American children from their families and place them in boarding schools
- Mental health professionals helped recruit Black men into the Tuskegee Experiment
- Support and promotion of eugenics and racial hierarchies
- Enslaved people who had the desire to be free were diagnosed with “drapetomania”

(American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, National Association of Social Workers)

# INEQUITIES IN CARE

## Marginalized Communities:

- Less access to mental health services
- Receive a poorer quality of care and are more likely to end services prematurely
- Over-represented in restrictive levels of care



[Image Source](#)



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# Managing Racial Stress & Intergenerational Trauma



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## Journal Reflections – 3 minutes



# Diversity of Coping Skills in “Coping Tool Kit”



- Mindfulness (helps with self-awareness and encourages self-reflection)
- Music
- Muscle relaxation
- Exercise
- Stretching
- Writing (journal, poetry)
- Write in your journal
  - Write a list of things that are within your control
  - Practice positive affirmations
  - Write positive coping statements
  - Practice gratitude
- Coloring

# Get to Know Yourself

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- Become aware of triggers and shifts in your mood and emotions
- Acknowledge your feelings and feel them!
- Embrace healthy thoughts
- Separate your self-worth from your career
- Accept circumstances that cannot be changed and redirect your focus
- **Learn from your past**
  - What helped you get through past challenges?
  - Where did you find strength?
  - What did you learn from those experiences and how can that help you now?



# Boundaries

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- Establish realistic expectations for yourself and others
- Eliminate draining tasks and activities and establish healthy habits
- Before committing to a new task, ask yourself:
  - Is this aligned with priorities?
  - Assess the time commitment
  - What will be missed or not done if you take it on?



[Image Source](#)



# Refuel Your Body

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- Get active. Exercise helps to decrease your levels of stress
- If you're sitting for long periods of time, get up and walk/stretch
- Healthy eating habits and nutrition
- Get the optimal amount of sleep
- Adequate downtime helps to improve and increase productivity



[Source](#)



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# Action Plan: Workplace/Allies



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# Moving from Awareness to Action

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- Recognize your power and privilege
- How do you address the imbalance of power and privilege that show up in your interactions with others?
- How can you help create a more equitable environment?
- How can you create a safe place to discuss these issues?
- How can you invite and accept the discomfort required to address power and privilege in your role?



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# Workplace Strategies

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- Assess policies and procedures for potential biases
- Employers must enforce strict anti-racism policies and acknowledge that any form of racism creates a hostile work environment
- Consult with other appropriate professionals regarding best strategies for culturally inclusive workplace environment
- Model the importance of diversity and inclusion through hiring diverse staff
- Community wide acknowledgement and celebration of a diverse range of holidays

# Daily Opportunities to Practice Allyship



Acknowledge the existence of systemic racism



Be curious - seek out perspectives of Black and Brown people that are different from you



Speak up



Be proactive about inclusion



Use your privilege to support antiracist movements



# Pathways to Healing

If trauma can be passed down, so can healing.

# Liberation and Healing

## **Honor Resilience & Fortitude** by:

- Listening & Validating
- Family Healing
- Loving Connections

## **Build Beloved Community** by:

- Healing Spaces
- Arts & Expression
- Celebration and Affirmation
- Power Building

## • **Lead with Love & Justice** by:

- Healing-Centered & Restorative Practices
- Collective Care
- Power Sharing
- Listening Campaigns

Adapted from RYSE Center (2017).  
[Retrieved from PACEs Connection website](#)

# Radical Healing



Challenging, changing and resisting oppressive conditions while envisioning justice and liberation and moving toward freedom and wellness

Being or becoming whole in the face of identity-based "wounds"

Focuses on addressing the root causes of the trauma

Fostering agency, solidarity, and resilience

BIPOC voices are centered

Builds on individual strengths and utilizes culture-specific practices that promote resilience

# Cultivating Radical Healing

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- Develop pride in your racial/ethnic/indigenous group
- Share your story
- Educate yourself and get involved
- Maintain radical hope
- Practice self-care
- Make space and time for your healing
- Find a place where you feel a sense of belonging
  - and community
- Engage in small acts of empowerment
- Cultivate joy



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# Healing From Racial Stress and Trauma

- Know your family history
- Learn about the history of systemic racism and oppression
- Racial socialization
- Enhance self-esteem
- Talk about and model how to respond to racism





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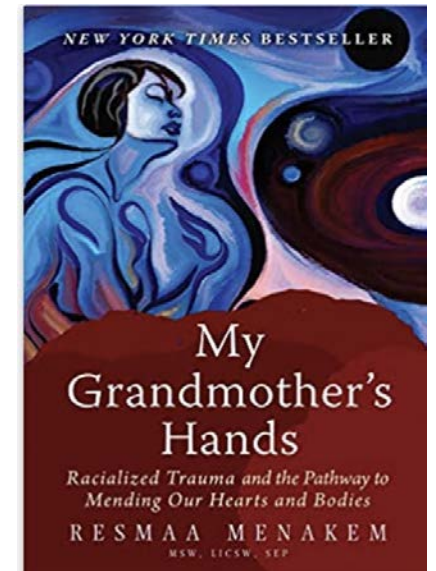
# Mending Our Collective Body

## Body-centered Activism

Healing begins with the body, but does not end there. We also need social activism that is body-centered (e.g., emphasizing the importance of settled bodies, rest, and self-care prior to and after engaging in activism).

## Creating Culture

Culture is how our bodies retain and reenact history. Culture involves elders, symbols, uniforms, displays, rules, stories, mentoring, roles, titles, awards, codes of behavior, and a shared history. Create a sense of belonging. We must create new expressions of culture that call out, reject, and undermine white-body supremacy.



# Opportunities for Healing and Growth

- **Healing on your own**

Individual activities and reflection that center your body

- **Healing with another trusted, caring person**

Talking with a friend, partner, or family member about your experiences, concerns, your family and ancestors, and/or your hopes for the future. Listen and support one another.

- **Healing in community**

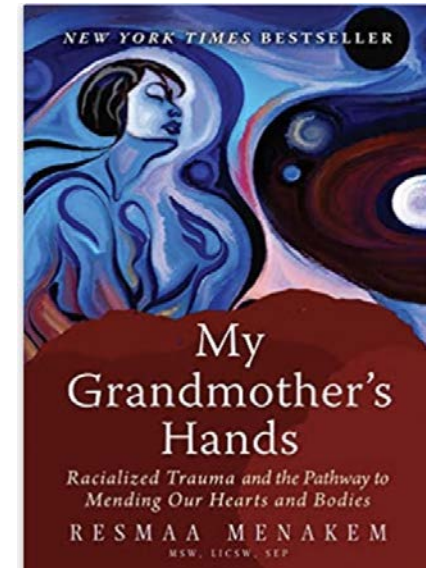
You may ask a trusted community figure such as an elder, spiritual leader, or community activist to listen, support you, and offer their guidance

- **Healing with the help of a body-focused healing profesional**

This may be a massage therapist, Reiki practitioner, acupuncturist etc.

- **Healing with the help of a trauma therapist**

Work to learn a range of tools and strategies to heal from trauma through evidenced-based interventions that are the best fit for your experience





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# Find Joy!

#BlackBoyJoy  
#BlackGirlMagic  
#BlackManJoy  
#BlackExcellence  
#frolicking



[Frolicking video](#)



“Trauma is historical, structural,  
political, intergenerational,  
interpersonal, and embodied.

So then must be our healing.”

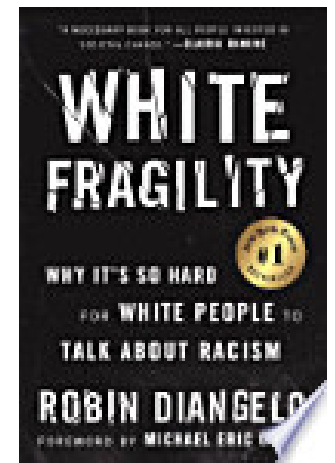
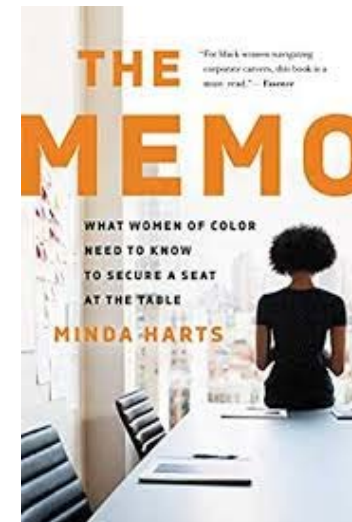
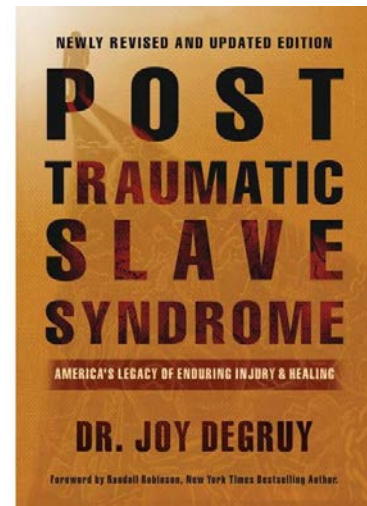
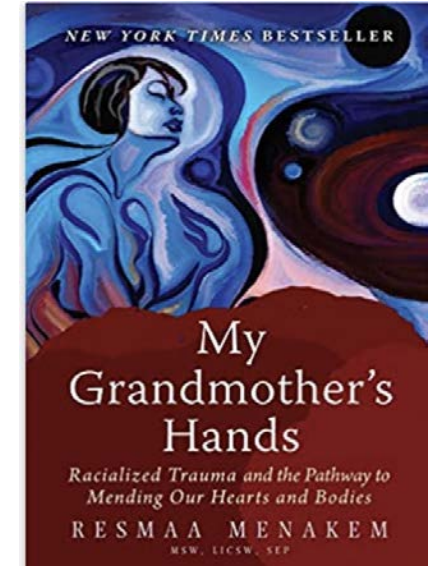
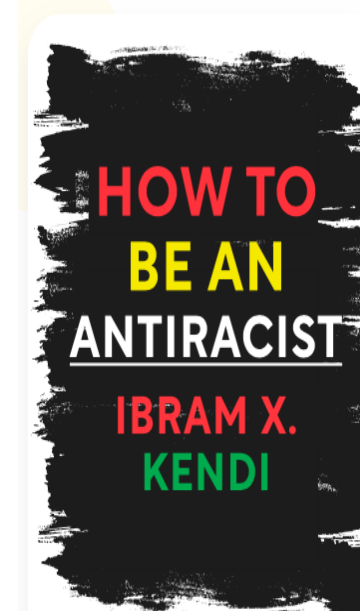
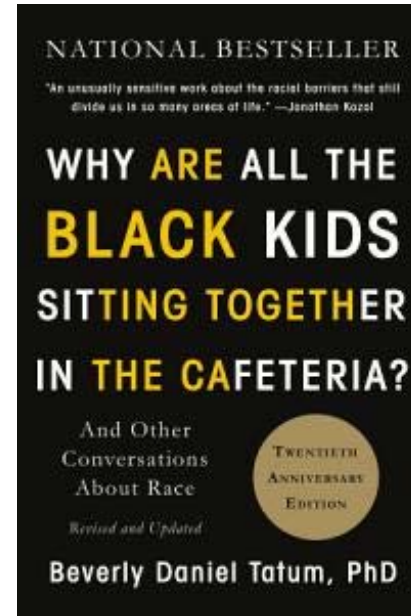
- *RYSE Center*



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# LEARNING RESOURCES

- [Rachel Cargle](#) conducts antiracist work and offers a [free 30-day course](#)
- [Strategies for Discussing Race, Racial Discrimination & Racial Trauma with Youth in 2020](#)





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# Mental Health Support

[Therapy for Black Girls](#)

[Therapy for Black Men](#)

[Psychology Today](#)

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

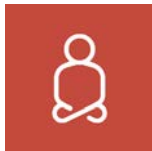
[The LoveLand Foundation \(Vouchers for Therapy\)/](#)

[SESH](#)

**Employee Assistance Program**  
**University Counseling Center**

# Mental Health & Wellness Apps

Apps that can be useful in providing additional mental health support, coping skills, and resources



- **Liberate**



- **Headspace** (e.g., Acknowledging Our Privilege, Breathing in Hope, Breathwork for the Moment, Connecting to Ancestral Wisdom)



- **MindShift**



- **Alarmy** (an alarm app that includes small activities that need to be completed in order to turn the alarm off; perfect for low motivation and seasonal depression)



- **CALM**



SAVE THE DATE!

# Heal + Liberate.

Elevating Through Community Support and Knowledge  
November 5, 2022 at 1pm EST

SAVE THE DATE



BLACK MENTAL WELLNESS PRESENTS...

**HEAL +  
LIBERATE**

ELEVATING THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND KNOWLEDGE  
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 5, 2022  
1:00PM EST



Black Mental

<https://bit.ly/BlackMentalWellnessConference>



# For More Information

## [Black Mental Wellness Website](#)

### Email

[Dr. Dana Cunningham](#)

[Dr. Danielle Busby](#)

### Social Media



Black Mental Wellness



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# Questions





# Appreciation



# Contact Us



*a program managed by*



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240-645-1145

Let's connect:

