

Racial Trauma and Coping/Healing

Raced-based traumatic stress injury is an “emotional or physical pain or the threat of emotional or physical pain stemming from racism in the form of harassment, discrimination, or discriminatory harassment” (Carter, 2007). The events of danger can be associated with hate crimes, other overt forms of unfair treatment due to race, as well as threats of harm and injury or humiliation and shame. The severity may be the consequence of the cumulative effect of racism associated with personal, vicarious, collective, and historical racial injuries.

The reactions reflect injury and NOT a mental health disorder. Racial trauma causes wounds to individuals, groups, and communities (Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019).

Race-based traumatic stress can be expressed as:

- Intrusion, such as when someone has recurring thoughts, images, etc.
- Avoidance, such as when someone utilizes strategies to numb or push away triggering societal events (e.g. using video-games, substances, etc.)
- Arousal, such as when someone experiences hyper-vigilance and irritability.

Coping looks different to different people and coping could look different at different times. It is important that you explore what your needs may be and that you attend to those needs with respect and self-compassion.

The following could be needs you may experience and coping mechanisms you may find helpful:

- Connect/talk/debrief/process events with other POC, your community, friends, family or allies.
- Embrace communal support.
- Talk to a therapist.
- Limit social media or the news cycle for some time.
- Engage in activism (e.g. letter writing, peaceful protests, etc.)
- Express your feelings of sadness, anger, rage, hopelessness, helplessness, grief, loss, in a safe manner (e.g. talking to others, journaling, through artistic expression, writing on social media, exercising, etc.)
- Rest, sleep.

Symptoms often include:

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Rage
- Depression
- Hypervigilance
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Somatic experiences
- Guilt/shame
- Helplessness

References:

Bryant-Davis T, Ocampo C. (2005). Racist incident-based trauma. *The Counseling Psychologist*. 33(4), 479–500.

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