

# Understanding Racial Trauma

Racial trauma is the result of ongoing exposure to racial stressors such as racism, racist bias, discrimination, violence against people of color, and racist abuse in the media that creates an environment in which a person of color feels unsafe simply because the color of their skin. It is widespread among all marginalized or stigmatized racial or ethnic groups (Villines, 2020).

There are many triggers for a person to experience racial trauma. These triggers include:

- Direct or indirect exposure to racist abuse or discrimination
- Media depictions of racism, such as police violence against unarmed Black people
- Exposure to racial or ethnic stereotypes
- Others not taking experiences of racism seriously.

A person experiencing racial trauma can experience both psychological and physical symptoms. Psychological symptoms have been recorded in children of color as young as 12 years old. Both psychological and physical symptoms are exacerbated by the common lack of access to mental health care and medical care resulting from systematic racism (Coping with Racial Trauma, 2020).

## Psychological Symptoms caused by Racial Trauma:

- PTSD-like symptoms
  - ✓ Distress relating to trauma
  - ✓ Avoiding things that remind the person of the trauma
  - ✓ Intense anxiety or depression relating to the trauma
  - ✓ Feeling distracted by memories or thoughts of the trauma
  - ✓ Negative thoughts about self, other people, or the world
  - ✓ Increased sensitivity and reactivity
- Dissociation – Feeling numb or disconnected from themselves or others
- Low self-esteem

## Physical Symptoms caused by Racial Trauma:

- Physical pain
- Cardiovascular disease
- Hypertension
- Higher allostatic load – the wear and tear of the body caused by chronic stress
- Digestive issues

Causes of racial trauma can be found everywhere, so it is important a person knows their treatment options and develop coping techniques (Villines, 2020).

## How to Cope (Coping with Racial Trauma, 2020):

- Take part in activism against racial injustice
- Avoid relationships with people who dismiss the seriousness of racial trauma
- Make a list of situations, people, or places that trigger your symptoms and create a list of ways to cope for each one; avoid these triggers when in times of high stress
- Role play how to respond to negative racial encounters
- Employ self-care by doing things that you enjoy and make you happy
- Limit your exposure to news media and viral videos

While a person may never feel “cured,” finding the right support system can make the ongoing trauma more manageable.

## Treatment Options:

- Trauma-informed psychotherapy
- Taking medications, such as antidepressants
- Connect with family, friends, and community members for support
- Connect with other people who have experienced racial trauma
- Make lifestyle changes, such as changes in diet and exercise, to address allostatic load

## Racial Trauma Support and Diversity Resources

### Resources for Finding Mental Health Professionals:

**Call Blackline (1-800-604-5841):** A 24-hour hotline for Black, Black LGBTQI, Brown, Native and Muslim communities, but will never turn anyone away, to provide a place to anonymously and confidentially report negative, physical, and inappropriate contact with police and vigilantes. The group then shares the information with local organizations and officials to respond to the negative individual/s. Additionally, they provide immediate crisis counseling to those who need to talk to someone immediately. They are able to give referrals if necessary. People can call or text the hotline. <https://www.callblackline.com/>

**Inclusive Therapists:** A database of inclusive therapists with the core value that “all identities and abilities in all bodies deserve equal access to quality mental health care.” They even offer reduced fee teletherapy. <https://www.inclusivetherapists.com/>

**Melanin & Mental Health:** This website promotes growth and healing to Black and Latinx/Hispanic communities through their online directory of therapists and monthly events. <https://www.melaninandmentalhealth.com/>

**Therapy for Black Girls:** A database to find culturally competent therapists that know how it feels and how to navigate the world as a black woman. <https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>

**Therapy for Black Men:** A database of licensed mental health professionals who provide judgement-free, multiculturally-competent care to Black men. <https://therapyforblackmen.org/>

**Trauma Response and Crisis Care (TRACC) for Movements:** A group of healing care providers that respond to social movements by providing community care, triage trauma and crisis response on the frontlines, and healer training and education to support activists and social movements.

<https://www.tracc4movements.com/>

### **Informative Resources on Mental Health and Racism:**

**Anti-racism resources:** A list of resources for White people who want to engage in anti-racism work. [bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES](http://bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES)

**Black Emotional and Mental Health:** A group of advocates who use education, training, advocacy, and the creative arts to break down barriers to Black healing. <https://www.beam.community/>

**Coping with Racial Trauma:** Provides information on the definition, causes, symptoms, and treatment for racial trauma. <https://www.psychology.uga.edu/coping-racial-trauma>

**Mental Health Resources for the Black Community:** Mental health resources for the Black community and upcoming events regarding mental wellness. <https://www.brुकout.media/blackmentalhealth>

**National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI):** Provides information on the difficulties facing Black Americans trying to receive mental health treatment. Additionally, it provides resources for Black mental health, self-care for people of color, treatment directories, and educational resources. <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Black-African-American>

**Race, Racism, & Mental Health Resources from PsychHub:** A variety of resources for Black mental health, racism and trauma, and taking action against racism.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AGLEOINitQ1JI7MvQXZxrpEbAvr42r5RewjO\\_iXaKtE/edit?fbclid=IwAR1rk26gvjzSRLairdasq741v\\_KDMKfleOOe5MPD6RhgOnY6FnlitTAMcp0#heading=h.ecej0olt3gjp](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AGLEOINitQ1JI7MvQXZxrpEbAvr42r5RewjO_iXaKtE/edit?fbclid=IwAR1rk26gvjzSRLairdasq741v_KDMKfleOOe5MPD6RhgOnY6FnlitTAMcp0#heading=h.ecej0olt3gjp)

**Systems of Trauma:** Provides information on racial trauma, historical trauma, the consequences of historical trauma on American Indians and African Americans, current systems of racism, and xenophobia.

[www.fact.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Racial-Trauma-Issue-Brief.pdf](http://www.fact.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Racial-Trauma-Issue-Brief.pdf)

**What to know about racial trauma:** Provides information on the definition, causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and coping of racial trauma. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/racial-trauma>

### **Articles:**

**5 Self-Care Practices Black People Can Use While Coping With Trauma:** This article provides tips on how to practice good mental and emotional habits online while coping with race-related trauma.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/self-care-black-coping-with-trauma\\_n\\_577e76a9e4b0c590f7e839ed](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/self-care-black-coping-with-trauma_n_577e76a9e4b0c590f7e839ed)

**12 Ways to Be a White Ally to Black People:** This article provides advice for how a White person can be an ally. <https://www.theroot.com/12-ways-to-be-a-white-ally-to-black-people-1790876784>

**Advice for White Folks in the Wake of the Police Murder of a Black Person:** In this article, the author provides advice to White folks who are trying to be good allies after a Black person is murdered by the police.

<http://www.justinccohen.com/blog/2016/7/6/advice-for-white-folks-in-the-wake-of-the-police-murder-of-a-black-person>

**How to respond to “riots never solve anything!”:** This article provides responses to give to people who are more worried about property damage caused in riots than the racial inequality that caused them in the first place. <https://soletstalkabout.com/2020/05/28/how-to-respond-to-riots-never-solve-anything/>

**Tips for Self-Care: When Police Brutality Has You Questioning Humanity and Social Media Is Enough:** This article provides seven options for self-care including taking a break, exercise, and playing with animals. <https://www.theroot.com/tips-for-self-care-when-police-brutality-has-you-quest-1790855952>

**Racism’s Psychological Toll:** This article explains what racial trauma is. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/magazine/racisms-psychological-toll.html>

**When Black death goes viral, it can trigger PTSD-like trauma:** In this article, the author explains how Black deaths played out in the media can cause PTSD-like trauma in people of color. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/black-pain-gone-viral-racism-graphic-videos-can-create-ptsd-like-trauma>

**Your Black Colleagues May Look Like They’re Okay – Chances Are They’re Not:** This article explains how Black Americans are suffering disproportionately during the pandemic and months of racial violence. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/05/9841376/black-trauma-george-floyd-dear-white-people>

## **References:**

Coping with Racial Trauma. (2020). Retrieved October 28, 2020, from <https://www.psychology.uga.edu/coping-racial-trauma>

Villines, Z. (2020, July 22). What is racial trauma? Causes, symptoms, and how to cope. Retrieved October 28, 2020, from <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/racial-trauma>