



Black Mental
Wellness



Strategies for Discussing Race, Racial Discrimination, & Racial Trauma **with Youth** in 2020

A FREE Webinar
with Drs. Nicole Cammack & Danielle Busby





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Strategies for Discussing Race, Racial Discrimination & Racial Trauma with Youth in 2020

Welcome + Purpose



- **Black Mental Wellness Introduction
(Presenters: Dr. Busby & Dr. Cammack)**
- **Define terms & identify consequences**
- **Strategies & resources
Mental health and wellness resources**
- **Brief case example**
- **Questions and Answers**



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- **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





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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





Nicole L. Cammack, Ph.D.

President & CEO

- Licensed Clinical Psychologist
- B.S. in Psychology from Howard University, master's and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from The George Washington University
- Postdoctoral fellowship with the Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine
- Currently, a Program Director of a Primary Care-Mental Health Integration clinic, where she provides mental health services to veterans in a co-located primary care setting



Danielle R. Busby, Ph.D.

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- Licensed Clinical Psychologist
- B.A.in Psychology from the University of Michigan, master's and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from The George Washington University.
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What is Trauma?

A Traumatic Experience.....

Threatens the life or physical integrity of an individual or of someone important to that individual

Causes a sense of terror, helplessness, or horror

Produces intense physical effects such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, trembling, or dizziness

Definition of Trauma

Exposure to:

- Death or threatened death
- Actual or threatened serious injury
- Actual or threatened sexual violation

Exposure refers to:

- Directly experiencing the event(s)
- Witnessing the event(s)
- Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of traumatic events (other than tv, media, etc)



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For children 6 or younger

Definition of Trauma

- Witnessing, the event as it occurred to others, especially primary caregivers
- Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a parental figure



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What is 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)

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



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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



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Racial-Ethnic Group and Trauma Exposure



- The estimates of trauma exposure varies by racial-ethnic groups (Roberts et al., 2011)
- The prevalence of trauma exposure is higher among children and adolescents of color (e.g., African, Latinx, Asian, and Native American Indians (ALANA)) compared to White youth (Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007)





Racial Stress and Trauma for Youth



- One factor that may explain higher rates of trauma exposure for youth is racial stress and trauma (Williams et al., 2018)
- Racial trauma has similar criteria as PTSD and can lead to a PTSD diagnosis but is distinct:
 - Can be due to an Individual experience or ongoing collective experiences that can be traumatic (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019)



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Racial Stress and Trauma for Youth



Trauma may be more disabling for youth of color who contend with traumatic experiences that may be overlooked (e.g., racism), yet these experiences still pose a threat to youth's physical integrity and psychological health

Overlooked experiences include

- Humiliating and shaming events
- Threats of harm and injury
- Witnessing racial discrimination towards others

Impact of Racial Trauma and Youth

- There is evidence that historical, interpersonal, and vicarious encounters with racial discrimination can be traumatic
- Experiences with racial trauma may be misperceived, dismissed, or unacknowledged by clinicians (Carter, 2007; Helms et al., 2012)

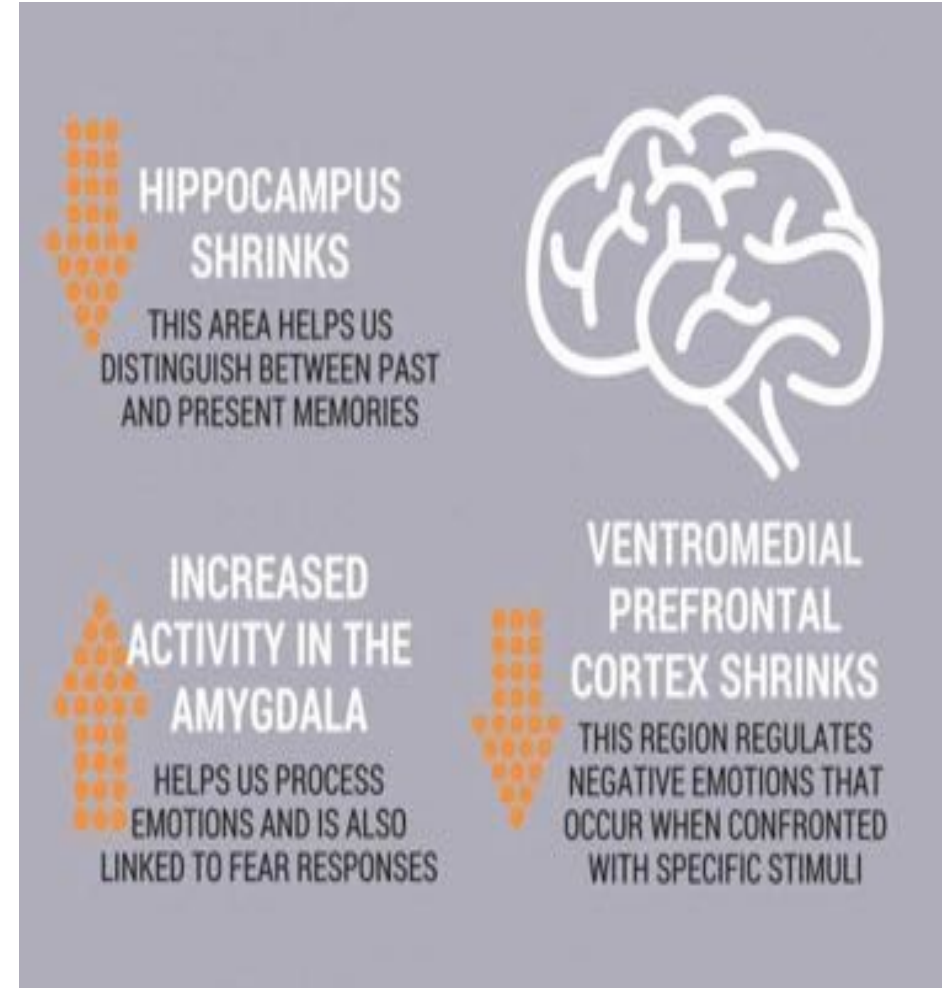
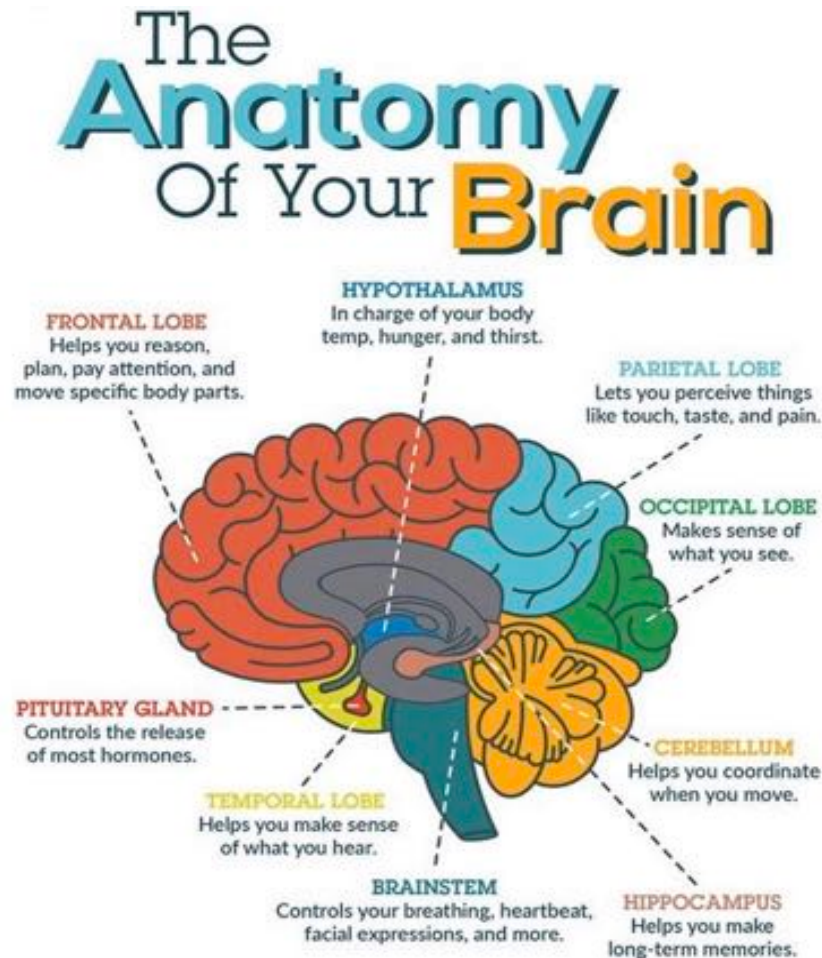


Significant evidence documents that racial stressors are associated with:

- Physiological problems
- Substance use
- Conduct problems
- Psychological symptoms, including trauma symptoms



REVIEW BACKGROUND





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Why Is it Important to Discuss Race?

- Experiencing a traumatic event is common
- The prevalence of trauma exposure is higher among children and adolescents of color
- Children as early as preschool age are able to identify their race
- Overlooked experiences (e.g., microaggressions, humiliation, witnessing)
- This may all lead to physical and emotional distress, negatively impact academic performance, and lead to physiological symptoms
- Impact on brain functioning (e.g., memory, heightened reactions to stressors, executive functioning, ability to pay attention)



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Factors to consider before
discussing race and race-
related experiences



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Discussing Racial Stress & Trauma with Youth

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- 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
- You can say we celebrate diversity BUT you also need to talk about racial inequality tied to racial diversity



- Acknowledge the history of racism
- Gain knowledge
- Consider developmental age and differences
- Acknowledge racial differences if present
- Build pride
- Discuss ways to prepare for racial stress





TALKING



ACTIONS



IMAGES

Racial Socialization

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"





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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, racial discrimination, and other race-related stressors in treatment
- Assess your personal understanding of your personal biases
- Consult with colleagues, read relevant books, and attend trainings to increase your cultural awareness



Mental/Behavioral Health Professionals

- Assess the needs of the youth
 - Is this something that the youth is even thinking about?
 - Are race-related stressors a source of stress?
- Understand where the youth is 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

- Allow youth to express their thoughts and experiences without minimizing
- Follow the lead of the youth and do not force discussions that do not feel authentic
- Listen and create a safe space for the youth to express
- 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 (dance, writing, music)
- 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 racial injustices recently, how are you dealing with it?”

“There has been a lot of media coverage about race and police brutality in the news, what are your thoughts?”

“Some people are reporting that they are having intense emotions related to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, how are you feeling?”



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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 (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 is able to 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



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Parents, Guardians, Trusted Family

- If appropriate share how you have dealt with similar experiences in the past
- If the youth 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?”

“I’m feeling angry/sad about what happened to Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, how are you feeling?”

“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?”

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 demonstrations to protest police brutality



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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 the youth as they share their personal experiences and challenges
- Acknowledge differences between your experiences
- Help youth 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



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Teachers/Community

- Culturally inclusive curriculum
- 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



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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)



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Case Example



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



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)



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



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

- American Psychological Association [RESilience Initiative](#)
- One talk at a time [racial socialization online program](#)
- Community Organizations / Connections
 - Embrace Race [resources](#)

- Utilize videos and books
 - Videos that build a positive racial identity – building pride and racial identity
 - Books (e.g., The Colors of Us, Something Happened in Our Town) and music that build pride, address racial discrimination, facilitate conversation
 - Video tips for parents



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

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