

# Psychological First Aid for Ourselves

## General Guidelines for Addressing Mental Health Needs in the School Environment

PFA is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident, disaster, or terrorism. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning.



## RESPONDING TO RACIAL TRAUMA

Racial trauma is defined as the mental and emotional injury caused by race-based traumatic incidents and other forms of violence towards African Americans and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Staff may experience race-based traumatic incidents in various ways, including direct impact, indirect exposure, or through media outlets. Research shows that members of the African American or Black community, as well as people of other BIPOC groups may identify with the people being hurt and may wonder if they will also be hurt or killed. This guide has been adapted to help support staff impacted by acts of racial violence and aggression that may result in racial trauma. As personal well-being is essential in the ability to effectively attend to daily roles and responsibilities, the following strategies are offered to help you with supporting and nurturing yourself and each other.

## LISTEN TO YOURSELF AS YOU EXPERIENCE OR BEAR WITNESS TO RACIAL TRAUMA.



- Pause to check-in with yourself. Pay attention to your body, mind and spirit to become aware of how race-based incidents may be impacting you holistically. Rest if needed.
- Make time (even if it is only for a few minutes) to do things that help you feel better (e.g., listening to music, deep breathing, stretching, etc.).
- Recognize that your thoughts and feelings are valid; find a safe space to discuss racism or racial justice with a trusted friend, family member or colleague.

## PROTECT YOURSELF BY PROVIDING SPACE FOR COMFORT AND STABILITY.

- Protect yourself by getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising your body and mind.
- Seek support from groups that share your values such as faith-based communities or support groups.
- Engage in mindfulness activities such as meditation, breath focus, and prayer.
- Increase exposure to positive representations of African Americans and members of the Black community to guard against internalizing oppression (e.g., negative views of oneself and/or other Black people).
- Find healthy ways to express your feelings through creative arts, drama, dance and other forms of self-expression.
- Find gratitude and remain in the present moment. Reflect on positive examples of people supporting one another and advocating for social justice during this challenging time.

## CONNECT THROUGH INTERACTION, ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES TO BUILD YOUR RESILIENCE.

- Maintain regular, supportive contact within your personal circle of family and friends. Maintaining a sense of belonging requires that we sometimes make the telephone call or reach out ourselves, rather than waiting for others to do so.
- Connect with your inner aspirations or drive. Create opportunities to connect to others through activities that you value and find meaningful.
- Give yourself permission to seek help from a mental health professional with expertise in providing culturally-grounded services for adults. While there may be a stigma of mental health and mental health treatment, it is a sign of courage to seek and obtain resources for yourself if you are having difficulty performing daily life functions.
- If you are experiencing bullying, harassment, discrimination and/or any other threatening incidents due to your race, connect with resources for safety and support.

## MODEL CALM AND COMPASSIONATE BEHAVIOR.

- Give yourself the same compassion and understanding that you lend to others.
- Identify role models in your community that model how to maintain calm during stressful times.
- Respond to negative behaviors and comments in a way that honors your character and values.

## TEACH YOURSELF NEW STRATEGIES FOR COPING, HEALING AND RECOVERY.

- Race-based incidents might often leave you feeling disempowered. Educate yourself about laws, policies, groups and movements taking place to facilitate change.
- Reach out to elders who have lived through and managed to persevere in the aftermath of race-based incidents to learn how you may persevere as well.
- Learn about positive images and stories of members of the Black community, their resilience and contributions, to improve feelings of hope and esteem.



The PFA: Listen, Protect, Connect Model and Teach was created in partnership by UCLA Center for Public Health and Disasters, LAUSD Trauma Services Adaptation Center and the National Center for the School Crisis and Bereavement. The authors M. Schreiber, R. Gurwitch, and M. Wong have authorized this adaptation. For more information or to obtain resources, please contact School Mental Health at (213) 241-3840.



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