

Psychological First Aid for Parents/Caregivers of Black Students



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). Children and youth may experience race-based traumatic incidents in various ways, including direct impact, indirect exposure, or through media outlets. Research shows that African American or Black youth, as well as youth 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 parents/caregivers with supporting youth impacted by acts of racial violence and aggression that may result in racial trauma. The following strategies are offered to help you with supporting and nurturing your child.

LISTEN TO VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION



Encouraging conversations with your child about what they may have experienced or been exposed to lets them know that you care about their feelings and are available to listen to their concerns.

- Provide a designated time to discuss racism or racial justice as a family, that includes listening to one another and clarifying any questions your child might have.
- Validate your child's responses by reflecting what you heard them say.
- Ask your child if they believe they have been insulted, put-down, harassed, or bullied at school or in the community due to their race.

PROTECT BY MAINTAINING STRUCTURE, STABILITY, AND CONSISTENCY

Witnessing acts of violence or aggression toward African American and/or BIPOC groups may cause stress that can be reduced by offering a setting that provides comfort, stability, and routine.

- Monitor conversations around race and culturally related issues and limit media coverage that might trigger fear, pain, sadness, anxiety, anger, or a negative self-image.
- Support your child when they say that they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment, or bullying due to their race, and inform the school site principal.
- Increase exposure to positive representations of African American and Black individuals to guard against a negative self-image or a negative image of the Black community.



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CONNECT THROUGH INTERACTION, ACTIVITIES, AND RESOURCES

A positive relationship with a healthy adult at home and at school is one of the most important factors that helps build resilience.

- Help your child find healthy ways to express their feelings through creative arts, drama, dance, and other forms of self-expression.
- Encourage participation in age-appropriate activities and organizations that foster leadership skills through action and activism.
- Foster mentoring relationships with African American or Black individuals for your child.
- Ensure your child has access to counseling services if their ability to learn or connect with others is impaired.

MODEL CALM AND COMPASSIONATE BEHAVIOR

Children and youth take their cues from adults and are influenced more by what adults do than what they say.

- Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and reactions regarding reports of racism, discrimination, or community racial violence.
- Express empathy and hope for the future when your child shares their experiences following race-based incidents, such as "You are not alone. Many have faced and overcome similar pain. I will help you through this."
- Model and practice self-care, which includes getting help when needed, getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and maintaining an exercise regimen.

TEACH ABOUT THE NORMAL REACTIONS OF RACIAL TRAUMA

Teach that it is common to experience feelings of anger, sadness, fear, and a sense of a shortened lifespan for themselves, friends, and/or loved ones.

- Teach your child that asking for help is a source of strength and an opportunity to learn new coping strategies, such as exercise, relaxation, mindfulness, or faith-based activities to buffer the impact of racial trauma.
- Encourage your child to identify at least one safe adult at their school that they can ask for help if they experience distress, harassment, or bullying.
- Encourage involvement in the community whether it is a peaceful protest, fundraising drive for victims' families or other helpful activities.

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.