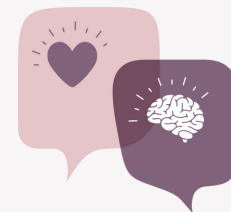


HOW RACIAL DISCRIMINATION DECAYS MENTAL HEALTH, AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT



The Center for Health Communication works to create [toolkits and briefings](#) that help content creators spread evidence-based health information on social media. The information provided is meant to be educational and is not a substitute for medical advice.

This toolkit provides creators with evidence-based strategies for changing the conversation around racism and mental health.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

We all want to live in a world where everyone can achieve the best version of their health through fair opportunities, regardless of their race. We can do this by making sure that everyone has access to high quality healthcare, work and education opportunities, and communities and housing that support health. Low income persons of all racial backgrounds face reduced access to opportunity in our society. However, Black people, Native people, and other people of color face additional barriers that create unequal opportunities and harm their mental health. To remove these barriers, we need to work together to create the equal world we believe in. To move the needle on conversations about racism and mental health, work to infuse these evidence-based perspectives:

1 RACISM CAN TAKE THE FORM OF NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR OF INDIVIDUALS, SUCH AS HARMFUL COMMENTS. BUT IT IS ALSO VISIBLE IN STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN THE WORKPLACE, HEALTHCARE, HOUSING, AND MORE

Racism is often discussed as the harmful actions and comments of individuals. These one-on-one actions matter and are [harmful to health](#), including mental health. They also exist in a larger societal context that upholds racism through [laws, customs and systems](#). Examples of these laws and systems include redrawing political district boundaries to make votes count less, residential segregation, discriminatory lending practices, environmental injustices like putting hazardous waste disposal in communities of color, and discriminatory policing and sentencing practices that target communities of color.

2 YOU CAN'T JUST 'BRUSH-OFF' RACISM, IT IS CLINICALLY HARMFUL TO MENTAL HEALTH

For people of color, racism is an incredibly common experience. For example, black teens average [over five experiences of racism a day](#). Experiencing racism can harm people both [in the moment](#) and also [over time](#) as these stressful experiences add up and [dysregulate the systems](#) that our body uses to manage stress. These experiences are linked to a number of bad mental health outcomes, including increased risk for [depression and anxiety and more severe mental disorders like psychosis](#). The stress also leads to bad physical health outcomes, including increased risk for [early death](#).



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3

WE ARE ALL HEALTHIER WHEN WE LIVE IN PLACES WITHOUT RACISM

Though racism is undoubtedly most harmful to people of color, living in areas with high amounts of pro-white/anti-Black bias also hurts the health of [white people](#). In other words, racism against people of color [hurts everyone](#). It is important to both center people of color in this conversation and remind people that every person has a stake in ending racism, because we are all healthier and freer in communities with less prejudice.

4

PEOPLE CREATED THE LAWS AND SOCIAL NORMS THAT UPHOLD RACISM, SO WE CAN REDESIGN THEM FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The racism that people of color are subjected to is not inevitable. It is essential to emphasize to people that racism is not simply the ‘state of the world’, it is a man-made system that we can dismantle through policy changes and education. For example, scientific estimates have shown that if racial segregation were eliminated in the US racial differences in income, education, and employment would [also cease to exist](#). And through our personal behaviors every day, each one of us can also engage in the battle to dismantle racism.

A note on language – Many of the words and phrases we use to talk about race and racism were created by people with racist biases. Updating our language is an important part of identifying and eliminating racism. When talking with your community about language, make sure they understand that their word choices matter, and encourage them to engage with [resources](#) that help them to make informed choices. For example, when talking about slavery, calling someone a ‘slave’ frames the experience of slavery as an identity, while calling someone an ‘enslaved person’ frames slavery as a [forced condition](#).

TAKE ACTION

1

ADVOCATE FOR INCLUSION OF RACIAL CONTENT IN SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND WORKPLACES

We are currently experiencing a wave of [national attacks](#) on racial curriculum in schools and DEI programs in the workplace. Many of these actions are motivated by the idea that these programs are hurting and disadvantaging white people. In reality, as a society, we have made much less progress in reducing racial gaps in income, education and wealth than most people think. Accordingly, urge your community to advocate for racial curriculum in their local school districts and in their own workplaces so that we can get all have the correct information. You can also urge them to [advocate to their state legislature](#) against laws that ban education about racism.

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2

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY TO GET INVOLVED WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS FIGHTING RACISM, AND TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES OWNED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR

People have power to change things in their own communities by investing their time, money, and other resources into people of color in their communities. Encourage your online community to move the conversation offline and get involved in a local chapter of [Showing Up for Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#), the [NAACP](#), [Color of Change](#), or research other organizations working on racial justice issues in their community. You can also encourage your communities to search-for and support businesses in their area owned by people of color.

3

NOTICE WHERE RACISM IS TAKING PLACE ONLINE, AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE, CALL YOUR COMMUNITY IN

Racial stereotypes [harm people of color](#) and increase belief in negative stereotypes for white people. [Harmful tropes](#) to watch out for (and counter) include:

Asian people being portrayed as economic ‘threats,’ socially awkward, unassimilated/foreign, tech-savvy, or as a ‘model minority’ – which portrays Asians as the ‘ideal’ minority that is polite, hard-working, and high-achieving.

Black people being portrayed as violent, unintelligent, poor, sexualized, athletic, and aggressive.

Hispanic/Latino people being portrayed as criminals, less intelligent, sexualized, aggressive, and threats to the safety of US citizens.

Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim people being portrayed as terrorists, extremists, oppressors, and being victims/subjugated (women).

Native people being portrayed as passive, poor, warriors, wise elders, princesses, and less articulate but respected.

White people being portrayed as victims in situations where people bring attention to their racist behavior, or having their voices elevated above people of color when [speaking about racism](#).

Across the board, it is also important to notice and draw attention to the harm caused when people of color are [expected to educate](#) white people on the harms of racism.

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ADVOCACY FORMULA

When advocating for these causes, remember that focusing on shared values is usually more effective than only sharing data, and that focusing on solutions sparks more hope than only focusing on the problem. Use [this formula](#) when advocating to audiences with a wide-range of knowledge about racism:

1

MAKE A SHARED VALUES STATEMENT

Example: We can all agree that we want to live in a world where everyone can access equal opportunities for education and advancement at work.



2

SHARE A POSITIVE VISION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Example: To do well in school and at work, people need to feel safe, accepted, and celebrated for everything that they offer their communities. That means opening up spaces for people to more fully understand one another and learn more about how our shared history informs the way we all live our lives today. Part of this is understanding the history of racism, and how it currently affects people of color. Unfortunately, we are seeing national attacks on efforts to educate people about racism in workplaces and in our school systems.



3

MAKE A CALL TO ACTION/UNITY STATEMENT

Example: We are all better off learning and working in places where we understand one another and our shared history. We can make this a reality together by advocating to our state legislators to make sure that racial education isn't outlawed in our schools and workplaces. ([Link to action alert in bio](#))

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STATS TO KNOW



[75% of registered voters](#) either see that there is a connection between structural racism and health (31%) or would be open to conversation and learning more about the connection (44%)



Less than [2 in 10](#) psychologists are people of color, though people of color make up roughly 4 in 10 people in the US



High amounts of racial discrimination [more than double](#) the risk of suicidality for Black youth



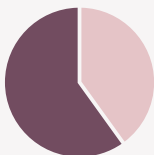
Mothers to young people who are stopped by the police are [twice as likely](#) to report sleep difficulties related to anxiety and depression



Black teens average [over five](#) experiences of racism a day.



[1 in 4](#) Black and Hispanic employees experienced discrimination at work in 2021



[6 in 10](#) hate crimes reported to the FBI in 2022 were racially motivated



[3 in 4](#) Americans think it is important for students to be taught about the current impacts of racism.

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CONTENT RESOURCES

Here's a short selection of resources that you can use to create content about racial discrimination:

- [Reimagined \(formerly Anti-Racism Daily\)](#) – Newsletter with actionable, timely, anti-racist insights and tangible ways to make a difference.
- [Mental Health American BIPOC Mental Health Toolkit](#) – Toolkit with list of resources for supporting the mental health of people of color.
- [The Conscious Language Newsletter](#) – Newsletter covering the latest insights from the world of conscious language.
- [Therapy for Black Girls](#) – Webpage with resources for Black women's mental health, including a podcast, tools to find a therapist, and more.
- [NAACP take action section](#) – Webpage with action alerts for supporting anti-racist work.

DEEPER DIVES

For a deeper dive on racial discrimination and how to talk about it, check out these resources:

- [Structural racism and health messaging guide](#) – Report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation summarizing research on the best messaging to inspire broader understanding and action on racial discrimination.
- [Resource library for framing racial justice](#) – FrameWorks' library of resources on the most productive ways to frame racial justice topics for social change.
- [The 1619 Project](#) – Initiative by The New York Times Magazine that reframes United States' history by placing the contributions of Black Americans and the harms of slavery at the center of the national narrative.

