Racial Reckoning: A Healing Toolkit
Introduction

Over a year ago, we as a nation collectively watched the life leave George Floyd’s body as a police officer knelt on his neck for over 8 minutes. As details about his murder continue to emerge during the trial, we know that incidents of state-sanctioned violence — as well as over 400 years of historical racial violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and the increasing hate crimes against Asian/Pacific Islander communities — deeply wound each and every one of us. Every single act of discrimination and every single mass murder or killing targeted at members of BIPOC communities, coupled with systemic racism, are in fact acts of violence that traumatize and re-traumatize each of us. Proactively addressing racial trauma is a central component to eliminating racism and healing our communities.
As we proactively prepare for the verdict of the trial of Derek Chauvin, and beyond that, as we protect and prepare ourselves for the ongoing systemic violence against BIPOC communities, how we hold space to support one another and create space for healing from racial violence and trauma is critical.

This toolkit is an entry point — an offering — to help us think deeply and intentionally about how we care for one another during times of great racial crisis and how we center healing practices.

This toolkit is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of how to align our intention towards the elimination of racism with the proactive support, nourishment, and healing of BIPOC communities as a part of our racial justice strategies.

This toolkit is a commitment to our individual and collective well-being and a request for us all to commit to one another’s journey to racial healing.

This Toolkit was made for you.
What is Racial Trauma?

Living with race-related stress and ongoing racism and discrimination, in addition to the mass spread of hate-based and racial violence via social media, weighs heavy on the hearts, minds, spirits, and bodies of people.

Witnessing the indiscriminate murder of members of BIPOC communities, witnessing so much pain and anguish go unresolved, can result in psychological trauma, which often occurs from witnessing traumatic events over and over again.

Untreated racial trauma, like other forms of trauma, can result in:

- Disturbances in the sense of self, such as a sense of separateness.
- A loss of autobiographical memories.
- Disturbances of body image.
- Poorly modulated affect and impulse control.
- Aggression against self and others.
- Insecurity in relationships, such as distrust, suspiciousness, lack of intimacy.
- Isolation.

(Van Der Kolk & Fisler, 2015).

Trauma manifests in many different ways and if untreated, can be particularly debilitating.

Additionally, trauma impacts cognitive functioning and development, including difficulty with concentration and learning; increased risk for longterm physical illness, including impairment of the immune system; disruption of emotional and behavioral regulation and stress responses; decreased self-awareness; (5) diminished capacity for self-care; and (6) impairment of the ability to connect with others (Epstein & González, 2017).
Healing racial trauma is central to addressing racial justice because it requires each of us to center and focus on our own individual and collective healing from racial violence. But, in order to do that we must be able to tell the truth and name the ways that race—and specifically racism—matters and impacts us every single day of our lives. It also means that we must name the ways that it impacts our literal bodies and affects our ability to live healthy and productive lives.

Recognizing the size of this trauma is important.

**Reexperiencing**
- Thoughts and feelings pop into one’s mind.
- Reliving what happened feels like it’s happening again.
- Get upset at reminders.

**Avoidance**
- Try to block it out and not think about it.
- Try to stay away from reminders.
- Feel numb or no emotions.

**Increased arousal**
- Always afraid something bad will happen.
- More easily startled or jumpy.
- Trouble with sleep or concentration.
- Go into fight or flight mode.

**Dissociation**
- Things feel unreal like a dream.
- Trouble remembering parts of what happened.
- Freak out (disorganized and behavior no longer predictable or regulated).
Our responses to trauma may vary, but it is important to be aware of how, when, and what ways it shows up and manifests in our bodies.

Paying close attention to the ways that ongoing racial violence impacts us will help us find ways to better support ourselves and each other as we fight for racial justice within this country.
When we consider the impact of racial violence and ongoing systemic discrimination against BIPOC communities, addressing the ways that untreated trauma shows up and manifests is important to sustain ourselves for the enduring fight for racial justice.

As our communities come to deal with the trauma related to ongoing racial violence and systemic discrimination, we invite each and every one of us to engage in the work of protecting and preserving ourselves. Determining how to protect our own individual and collective peace not only requires commitment and intentionality, but also requires that we build our capacity and skills to create meaningful spaces for healing.
Do Not Pretend That We Are All Alright
Do Pause and Recognize the Significance of Racial Violence
Do Not Expect That Others Know You Are Not Alright
Do Be Prepared to Cancel Meetings or Even Work
Do Prepare an Individual and Organizational Self-Care Strategy

Healing and self-care are core components of racial justice. How we care for ourselves and others is impacted to some degree by our attention to trauma, and specifically, racial trauma and our commitment to treat those traumas. Therefore, developing a plan to identify the ways that trauma manifests within our bodies, and thinking deeply on the strategies that help bring us back into equilibrium and alignment is an essential racial justice practice.

Exploring how we can be centered, and what makes us feel whole and complete, are ways that we begin to determine the best ways to heal ourselves and potentially create a pathway to heal others. Additionally, proactively asking what the role your organization has in helping people feel more centered, valuable, and affirmed will also assure greater organizational alignment and accountability.

Everyone processes information and racial trauma differently. One way that trauma shows up is in avoidance and distancing strategies; for others it may show up as hyper-vigilance, as well as, visible anger and frustration.

As a result, what each person needs in the moment may be different and therefore, choosing one strategy or another without directly engaging with people may result in even greater conflict.

Therefore, understanding your own needs and wants, and then explicitly making them known, is critical.

The response to racial terror and the horror of racial violence is unpredictable. It requires flexibility, particularly in times of great national crisis.

Releasing people from certain responsibilities, providing them support, and encouraging staff to take time for themselves may be necessary to create space for reflection and healing.

- 5 Do’s
  & Don’ts
When Addressing Racial Trauma
Listening Circles
A Practice of Healing and Release

Listening circles is a traditional practice that is rooted in various grounding practices. It has also been used in other settings to help counteract the effects of traumatic experiences.

Given that racial trauma shares many of the same signs and symptoms as other forms of trauma, the listening circle serves as a tool and a practice that specifically helps people address those forms of trauma.
The intention of the circle is to provide participants an opportunity to openly share what they may be feeling at any given moment and time, explore the impact, and ultimately have time and space to make meaning of everyday life, particularly of traumatic events that collectively impact us as a nation. This is not about problem-solving or generating solutions; it is about allowing people the time and space to feel, express, and emote as a form of radical release, and as such requires skilled practitioners to help ensure the successful utilization of this practice.

Before you utilize this practice, it is critical to ensure you have the most skilled and experienced facilitators who have a racial justice lens to facilitate this experience. This might require an external facilitator, given that your “go-to” facilitators may also be experiencing and navigating their own racial trauma. Always check in with them, and never assume that they have the bandwidth simply because they are organizational racial justice champions or have facilitated an experience like this before.

As you prepare to host the circle, create intentional space to determine who you are inviting, and the composition of the space. In some instances, you may wish to open the circle only to a particular racial group, or hold space for multiple communities. However you choose to move forward, discuss how the racial dynamics in the room may shift the circle, and how you will shift the structure to realize your outcomes.

How to do it!

Listening circles is a traditional practice that is rooted in various grounding practices.

The purpose of the space is to create an intentional opportunity for participants to express, emote, release, and share their feelings to decrease the feelings of isolation, fear, and/or grief that arise from racial violence, and to increase connection and comfort.

Time:
60-90 minutes

Materials:
Kleenex
Timer
Soothing Music
Process & Instructions

- Welcome everyone to the space
- Ask people to share their names and pronouns
- Share the goal(s)/intention(s) of the time together
- Facilitator introduces themselves and their pronouns

Shared agreements

- No Interruptions
  Minimize interruptions like cell phones

- Privacy
  Do not share with others what anyone else shares during the session

- Paying Attention
  Be as present as possible (knowing that many people may be home and caretaking due to the pandemic)

- Listen Carefully
  Ask people to respect the person who has the “talking stick” or mic, and not interrupt

- Good Behavior
  Remind people that the space is about sharing and release, not about debate, arguing, judgement, or criticism

- Empathy
  Remind folks that silence is okay and welcomed

Be sure to explicitly name that this space is an open forum to share feelings, and not a space to troubleshoot or generate solutions.

What you need to explain?

01
Explain to everyone that each person will have 5 minutes, (which can be extended depending on available time and the discretion of the experienced facilitator).

02
Explain that while each person is talking, everyone else is listening (not responding or interrupting).

03
Explain that a timer will be used to help keep track of time.

04
Inform them that they get to use their 5 minutes how they want to, but that they should focus on naming their feelings and how they are being impacted by the current moment.
Facilitate Circle Session

Conversations starters could include asking people to share:

• The impact of events on their mind, body, spirit, and heart.

• If they have noticed any new things in their bodies as it relates to the moment (maybe tension, pain, etc., using the trauma symptoms to inform exploration).

• What feelings or concerns they have related to the moment.

• What support looks like and feels like for them, e.g. formal and informal resources.

• What individual and collective healing looks like for them and their impacted communities.

What to do After the Session

Invite them to consider the practices and rituals that help them feel most grounded, most seen, and most whole:

• Invited people to think about the ways in which they and their communities have resisted racial violence.

• Close out the session with gratitude and a focus on joy, resilience, and healing.

• Positive Thinking
  Do a quick share around the room to get responses about the practices that help them and their communities resist systematic oppression.

• Play Positive Music
  Play soothing music as people are exiting, and show gratitude.

• Activate Creativity
  Invite them to lean into their joy, inspiration, and creativity as tools for resisting systematic oppression and racial trauma.

• Encourage People
  Highlight those individual and collective practices and encourage people to access their cultural and traditional ways of knowing and being to help heal, sustain, and harness their power to resist hopelessness, isolation, and racial despair.
Supporting people through racial trauma is a journey that requires a commitment to fostering healing and nurturing environments, as well as helping people find ways to rebuild from ongoing racism, systematic oppression, and discrimination.

It not only takes commitment, but it also requires a different approach — one that centers people and their lived experiences in ways that some may be considered counterproductive. To truly sustain our fight for racial justice, we must take seriously and honor each and every one’s lived experiences, hold them, and create the capacity for organizations to serve as facilitators of the change and transformation work that racial justice requires.

This toolkit is an invitation to commit to not only fighting for racial justice, but to helping people endure as they work to achieve true justice and liberation within our communities and society at large.
PLEASE USE THIS TOOLKIT AS A STARTING PLACE AND AN ENTRY POINT TO COMMIT TO THE JOURNEY OF HEALING IN OUR FIGHT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE.
Tools and Resources:


Mental Health America: Racial Trauma: https://www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma

Self-Care Wheel: http://olgaphoenix.com/self-care-wheel/

Do Nothing Tool: http://www.donothingfor2minutes.com/


