

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**



# 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.

When racial violence occurs in our communities, **that violence produces forms of trauma that live deep within our bodies.** 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.



# This Toolkit:

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.*

**T**his 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.

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**This Toolkit  
was made  
for you**

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# 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.

Witnessing the pain and suffering of BIPOC communities, and the absolutely inability of people to receive real justice and restitution in the face of ongoing forms of violence, reinforces the belief that Black, Indigenous, and people of color do not matter and that our lives do not have value.

**T**rauma manifests in many different ways and if untreated, can be particularly debilitating.

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).

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).



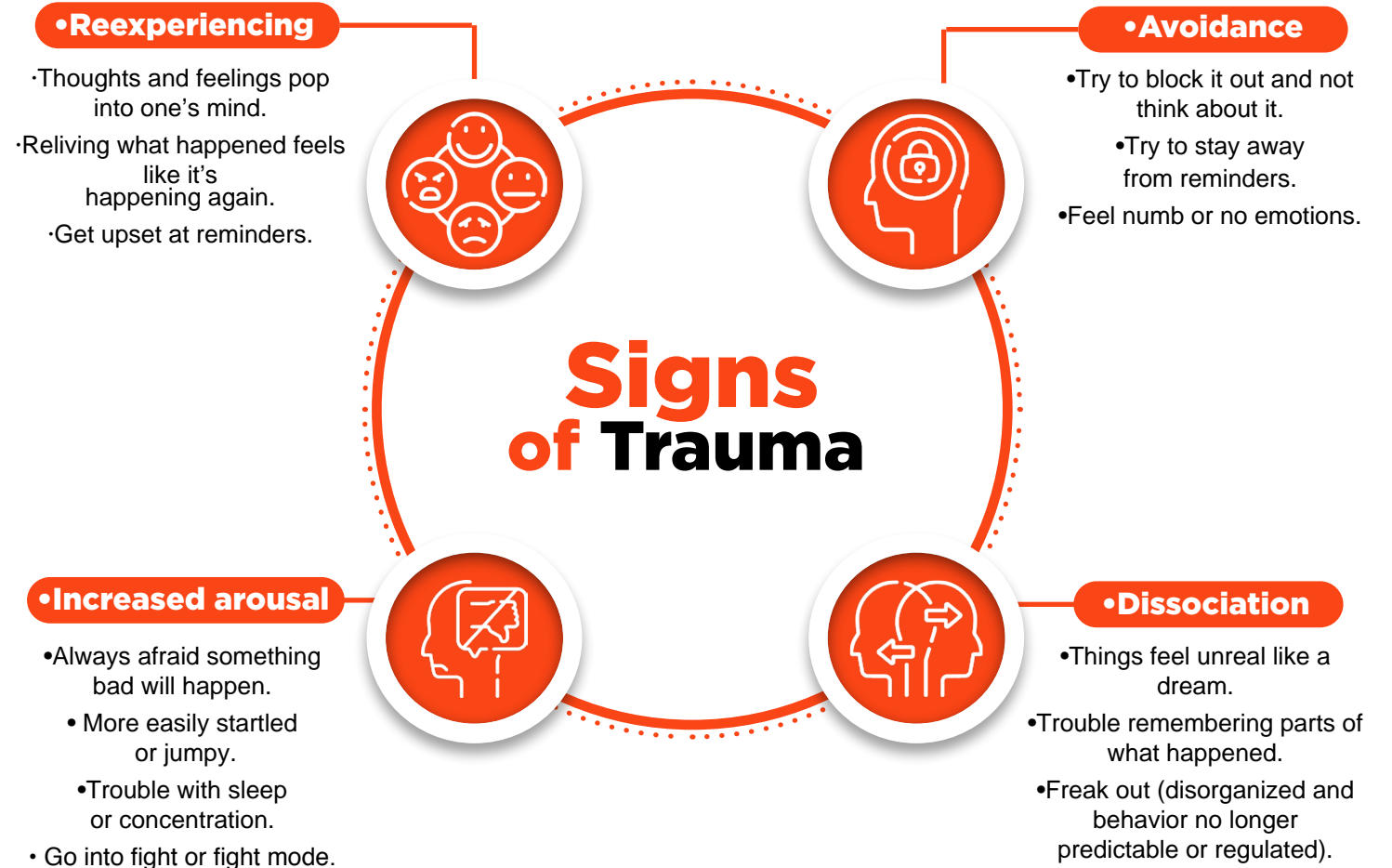


# Recognizing

## the Signs of Racial Trauma:

**H**ealing 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.**



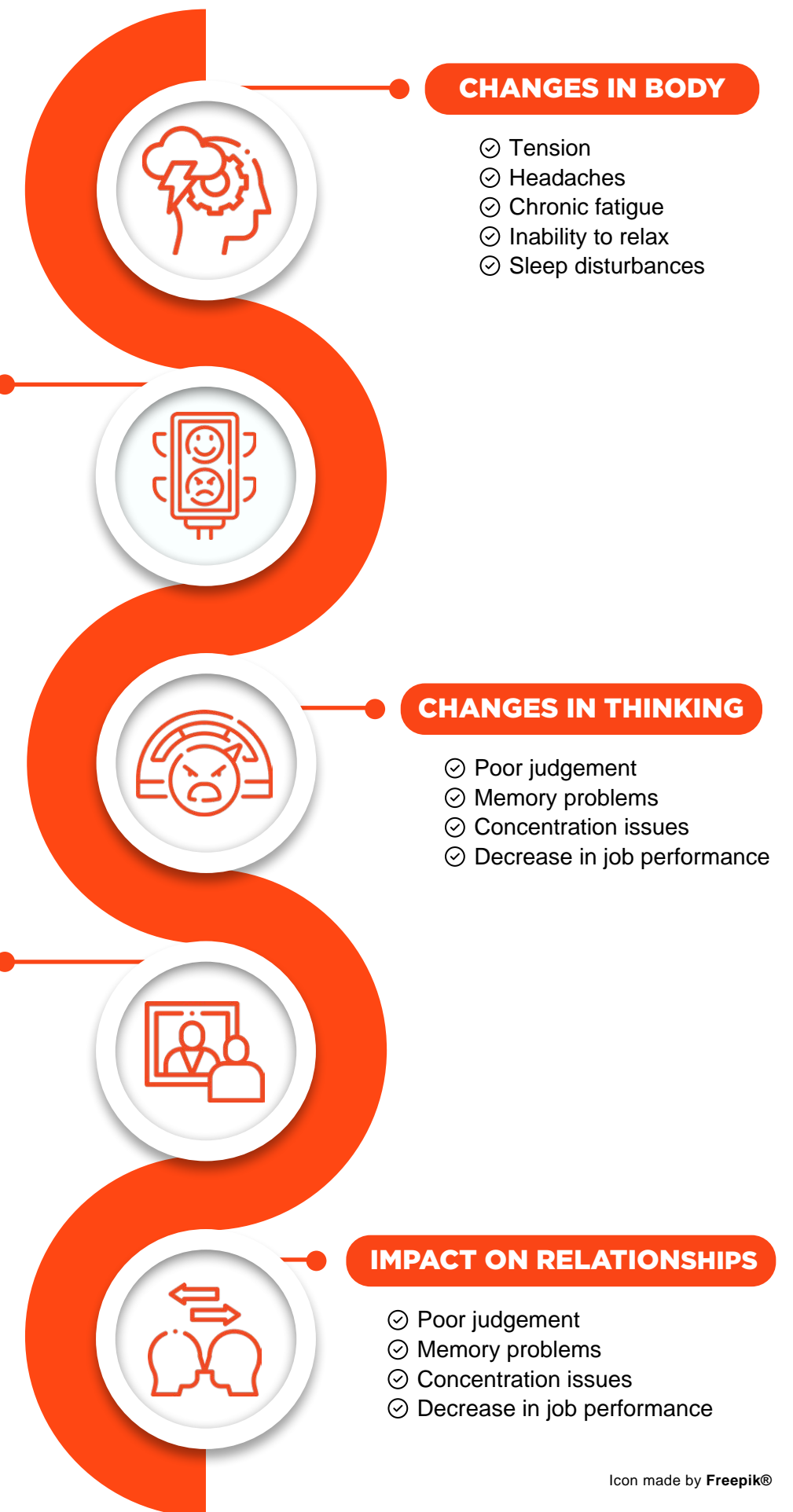
# Trauma Responses

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.



**Resources:** Adapted from CMHS, 2004. Center for Mental Health Services. (2004). *Mental health response to mass violence and terrorism: A training manual.*



WE STAND  
AGAINST  
RACISM

I STAND

FOR

JUSTICE

# 5 Do's & Don'ts

## When Addressing Racial Trauma

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**W**hen 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.

01

### 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.



02

### Do Pause and Recognize **the Significance of Racial Violence**

Every single day we learn of another incident where a member of the BIPOC community has been the target of racial violence.

**Our social context impacts and our ability to show up and even operate.** The resulting trauma makes it difficult at times to function, and knocks us out of equilibrium with ourselves.

To not acknowledge that truth and attempt to do “business as usual” ignores the impact that historical and contemporary violence has on the lives of BIPOC communities.

Therefore, pause, and **take a moment to acknowledge the context in which we live**, and check in on people by asking them, “is there anything in this moment that you need from me?” or by asking “how might I best support you in this moment?”



03

### Do Not Expect That Others Know You Are Not Alright

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 wconflict.

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



04

### Do Not Pretend That We Are All Alright

**Racial trauma impacts each and every one of us differently.**

We do not process racial violence the same ways, and we do not have access to the same tools and resources to treat our traumas. Therefore, there is no “right” way to deal with the pain and grief that results from ongoing discrimination, racism, and racial violence.

This requires that we name the truth in the moments when our communities experience and/or witness racial violence, and **acknowledge that we are not alright.**



05

### Do Be Prepared to Cancel Meetings or Even Work

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

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**L**istening 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.**



Photo from Pexels®

## How to do it!

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

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.

## Purpose:

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



Photo from Pexels®

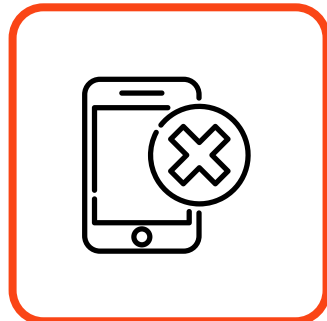
# Process & Instructions

- 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



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

## Shared agreements



**•No Interruptions**  
Minimize interruptions like cell phones



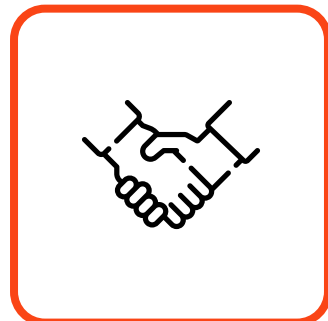
**•Privacy**  
Do not share with others what anyone else shares during the session



**•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

# 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.

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

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

# 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:



## •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.**



# Shifting Toward Healing-Centered Work In Racial Justice:

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**S**upporting 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.



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**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:

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M.D, B. van der K. (2015). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Reprint edition). Penguin Books.

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/>

Restoring To Wholeness:  
<http://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Restoring%20to%20Wholeness%20WKKF%20Racial%20Healing%20Publication.pdf>

Ginwright, S. (2018, May 31). *The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement*. Medium:  
<https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c?fbclid=IwAR1zcNP-CVKwMX4pLaNHhzQgFFn-4bXr9hL4sBloEmgxOoPa0Dv57mDZrcYE>

# Research:

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Carter, R. T., Mazzula, S., Victoria, R., Vazquez, R., Hall, S., Smith, S., Sant-Baraket, S., Forsyth, J., Bazalais, K., & Williams, B. (2013). Initial development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale: Assessing the emotional impact of racism. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5(1), 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025911>

Carter, R. T., Johnson, V. E., Roberson, K., Mazzula, S. L., Kirkinis, K., & Sant-Baraket, S. (2017). Race-based traumatic stress, racial identity statuses, and psychological functioning: An exploratory investigation. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 48(1), 30–37.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000116>

Bryant-Davis, T., & Ocampo, C. (2005). *The Trauma of Racism: Implications for Counseling, Research, and Education*. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33(4), 574–578.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000005276581>