

Understanding and Addressing the Impact of Racism on Children's Mental Health

A guide for parents and professionals



Empowering families to succeed and thrive, while celebrating their diversity.

Why Racial Healing Matters

1

It restores individuals to wholeness by helping people share their stories, lean into difficult conversations, constructively engage in conflict and face conscious and unconscious biases.



2

It supports relationship building, trust, belonging, authenticity, constructive dialogue and repairs the damage caused by systemic bias.

3

It cultivates a culture of belonging that can advance racial equity and inclusion.



4

It deepens our understanding of the differences in opportunities, burdens, and needs relating to how people racially/ethnically identify.

Racism Impacts Mental Health

Persons from marginalized groups have poorer mental health, including...



Black adults are **20% more likely** to report serious psychological distress than white adults.

Racism can create

- acute and chronic toxic stress
- undue adversity
- intergenerational trauma



All of which can cause brain adaptations that can lead to mental health challenges.



Indigenous adults have the **highest** rate of mental illness of any race.

The link between **racism & negative mental health** is **strongest** for Asian Americans and Latin-Americans.



Marginalized populations tend to have more barriers to mental health services.

This is caused by...



Being in an unwelcoming and stigmatizing environment

Not being heard, understood or trusted

Being treated with hostility

Misuse of client-provider power dynamic

Being underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed

Providers are culturally insensitive and incompetent

Receive poor or ineffective services

Service Inadequacies

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Hierarchy of Racial and Cultural Needs of Transracial Adoptees by Dr. Chaitra Wirta-Leiker



If you do NOT share your child's race

You can **only** meet the **top 3 levels of need** in a **limited capacity**.



Self-Actualization
Supporting and motivating others.

What you CAN do!

1

Accept your natural limitations as a parent who does not share your child's race.

2

Connect your child with people who are racial/cultural mirrors & can fulfill those needs.

3

Engage in anti-racism work consciously & continuously.

Self-Esteem
Feeling that you matter to the world.

Love & Belonging
Daily access to racial and cultural mirrors.

Safety & Security

Understand the intersectional aspects of race, culture, and adoption.

Attend events that offer racial & cultural mirroring.



Seek out adoption-competent mental health providers.

Physiological

Access to medical and mental health providers, hygiene care, and basic survival resources.

Supporting Your Child

1 Prepare

- Give your child language to speak about their experiences.
- Provide a safe space for open conversation.
- Educate yourself on racial trauma.

2 Talk

- Address issues with empathy and cultural awareness.
- Open communication and active listening can help your child feel heard and supported.

3 Reassure

- Ensure they know you are on their side.
- Validate their feelings.
- Show love, understanding, and support.

Share

- Express your sadness, compassion, or outrage, but be sure to moderate your feelings so that your child doesn't feel obligated to step into a role of taking care of you.

Act

- Speak up against what is wrong and empower your child to do the same.
- Encourage self-care.
- Offer resources.
- Advocate for mental health services.



Courageous Conversations

There are no scripts for difficult conversations and tricky topics, so it's important to think about difficult topics before your child asks.

How do you respond when you hear someone using a racist/sexist/homophobic slur?

What would it look like to feel safe at school?

Who made you laugh today?

Who in your life are good listeners?

Do you want me to feel it or fix it?

Have you or your friends ever thought of hurting yourself or committing suicide?

Tell me how class/lunch/soccer practice went today.

QUICK TIPS

● **Use P.A.C.E.** ●
Practice using Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy before, during, and after your conversation.

● **Plan Ahead:** ●
Think about what you would like to achieve and what you would like to say.

● **Give your child time to think about it:** ●
Provide them a general idea of what you want to discuss and ask when might be a good time to talk.

● **Use Active Listening:** ●
Be patient, ask clarifying questions, and withhold judgment.

● **Know When to Press Pause:** ●
If the conversation is going in the wrong direction, take a breather and re-evaluate the situation.

● **If the chat didn't go as planned,** ●
remember that you gave your child something to reflect on.

What is it like being a Person of Color at your school?

What kind of worries do you have today?

