Racism and mental health

Racism is a mental health issue because racism causes trauma. Racial trauma is the ongoing result of racism, racist bias, and exposure to racist abuse in the media. Racial trauma can affect many aspects of a person's life, including their ability to have relationships, focus on school or work, and feel safe. People who experience racial discrimination and injustice can develop trauma that causes anxiety, chronic stress, depression and other mental illnesses.

How racism affects mental health

For those who are affected by racism, it is important to remember that you are not alone. The push for social change is strong and there are many things you can do to protect your mental health during this time.

4 things you can do for your mental health

The following strategies can help you gain a sense of strength, build resilience and stay healthy.

- **Share your feelings**—It is normal to be angry, to feel hopeless, to cover up your experience of racism or to pretend that it has not affected you. Talking about your feelings is not a sign of weakness, but part of taking charge of your well-being and doing what you do to stay healthy. The simple act of talking to someone who makes you feel heard and understood can trigger hormones that calm the nervous system, reduce stress and relieve the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

- **Embrace your ethnicity**—Racism is often used as a weapon to belittle you as a human being and lower your self-esteem. You can counteract this and help deflect the pain of racism by developing a strong sense of your ethnic identity and strengthening your attachment to the community. Closer ties with people who share your experiences can help reduce the sense of isolation that often stems from racism.

- **Channeling your anger**—No matter how justified your anger is, venting it uncontrollably will affect your judgment, reduce your chances of being heard and negatively affect your health. Use your anger and channel it in a constructive way to bring about meaningful change. Join a community or activist group, engage in creative activity, or create a journal.

- **Take care of yourself**—Because your body and mind are so closely linked, it is important to take care of yourself in times of overwhelming stress. You can improve your mood and your health by moving your body every day, learning ways to reduce stress such as deep breathing, making nutritious food choices, focusing on getting enough sleep and finding a safe place to rest and recharge.

There are no easy answers to dealing with the pain of racial trauma. To move forward we need to take care of ourselves and our communities. To learn more, visit MagellanHealthcare.com/BIPOC-MH.

Sources: Mental Health America, HelpGuide.org, Medical News Today, Mentalhealth.org.uk

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