

ADDRESSING RACIAL TRAUMA



A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS IN PUBLIC SERVICES

TERMINOLOGY

Trauma is a term used to describe a range of psychological and emotional responses to distressing or life-threatening events, such as violence, abuse, or discrimination, including those experienced in childhood. Its effects on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, families and, on occasion, entire communities are wide ranging, and can be severe.

Racial trauma is created by prolonged or repeated exposure to racism which harms the way people see themselves, undermines their worth, and disconnects them from others. People from racialised and minoritised communities, who are treated differently because of their perceived racial, ethnic, cultural or religious differences, are at risk of trauma because of their exposure to racism in its many different forms.

Racism causes trauma and creates poor mental health. The traumatic effects of racism are not exclusively rooted in catastrophic events but also the day-to-day grind of interpersonal racism and so called microaggressions. Racism also stops people who experience trauma from getting the help they need.

Culturally competent services are those that respect and respond to the values, beliefs, and preferences of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and that acknowledge the impact of racism and discrimination on their mental health.

Trauma informed services are those that recognise the prevalence and consequences of trauma in people's lives, and that provide care that is safe, respectful, and empowering.

Culturally competent and trauma informed services are essential for meeting the mental health needs of people from racialised communities, who often face multiple barriers to accessing appropriate and effective care.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Practitioners in all kinds of public services can use these practical tips to address racial trauma and provide better, more effective, more compassionate, and more equitable support.

1. Understand the impact of trauma

It is crucial to **recognise the profound effects trauma can have** on people from racialised communities, including for practitioners who have experienced racism themselves. Trauma can manifest in various forms including physical, emotional, and psychological stress. Understanding how trauma affects you and the people you work with may help bring about healing and create safer and more compassionate services.

2. Build trust and safety

Creating an environment of trust and safety in everyday interactions is essential. Be mindful of both **historical and present-day experiences** of discrimination and oppression. It is important to communicate transparently, listen actively, and respect each individual's experiences and perspectives. Establishing a consistent and reliable presence can help in building trust.

3. Collaborate and empower

Seek to **share decision-making** and offer people choices whenever possible. This collaborative approach not only respects the autonomy of the individual but also fosters a sense of agency and control.

4. Integrate anti-racist perspectives

Anti-racism is not simply the absence of racism. It is about **actively seeking to overturn racism** and its effects on all of us. Being anti-racist means taking steps to end racism and its manifestations, including within public services and the organisations providing them. White supremacy culture affects all of us. It has influenced the societies we live in and the institutions we work for, so dismantling it is a collective endeavour we can all play a part in.

5. Practise cultural humility

Being trauma-informed means being **open, curious, and respectful** towards people's cultural backgrounds and preferences, and being aware of your own assumptions, biases, and limitations. Actively listening and seeking to understand what helps people can be effective in responding better to an individual's needs.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

How racism affects health, [The Health Foundation](#)

This briefing note sets out clearly and simply how racism makes it harder for people to be healthy.

The Cloak of Silence: Understanding the impact of racialised trauma, [Beacon House](#)

This training module offers a deep dive into the impact of racialised trauma on physical and mental health. It covers how trauma affects Black and Brown bodies, hearts, and minds, and provides strategies for addressing these impacts in therapeutic settings.

List of Mental Health Services and Organisations, [Community Trauma UK](#)

This comprehensive list includes mental health organisations and services that provide culturally sensitive counselling and support for racialised communities. It covers various services aimed at helping people of colour work through racialised and transgenerational trauma.

A Constant Battle: Exploring the intergenerational consequences of racism in the UK, [Centre for Mental Health](#)

This policy briefing summarises evidence about the intergenerational consequences of racism in the UK. It discusses the impact of both parents' and children's experiences of racism, and how these experiences influence parent-child interactions, mental health, and wellbeing.



ADDRESSING RACIAL TRAUMA

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS IN PUBLIC SERVICES

Published March 2026

Image: [istockphoto.com/portfolio/AmberNFord](https://www.istockphoto.com/portfolio/AmberNFord)

Centre for Mental Health is an independent charity and relies on donations to carry out further life-changing research.

Support our work here:

www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/donate

© Centre for Mental Health, 2026

Recipients (journals excepted) are free to copy or use the material from this paper, provided that the source is appropriately acknowledged.

Charity registration no. 1091156. A company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 4373019