

ADDRESSING RACIAL TRAUMA



A GUIDE FOR 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

Public services can mitigate trauma, or even help to reverse it. All public services, whether they are provided by public, private, or voluntary sector organisations, can become trauma-informed, and will benefit from doing so.

1. Adopt Trauma-informed approaches

Trauma-informed approaches recognise the prevalence and impact of trauma on people's lives, and aim to create **safe and supportive environments** that promote healing and recovery, while avoiding re-traumatisation or harm. When adopted, they benefit not only the people who have experienced trauma, but also those who work with them, by increasing their awareness, skills, and resilience.

2. Be flexible, respectful, and responsive

Trauma-informed approaches cannot be implemented successfully in a one-size-fits-all manner. They need to consider the specific **histories, cultures, and identities** of the people they serve, and the different ways trauma may affect people. They need to acknowledge the intergenerational experiences of injustice and oppression, as well as recognising and valuing people's and communities' strengths and resources. People from racialised communities are not passive victims or helpless survivors, but active agents and resilient thrivers, who have developed their own capacities, resources, and coping strategies to deal with trauma. Fostering opportunities for people who have experienced racial trauma to guide and participate in work to create trauma-informed spaces will bring about more effective solutions.

3. Promote diversity and inclusion

Fostering diversity and inclusion can boost the effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches. Employers should implement robust **recruitment and retention** strategies aimed at diversifying their workforce. Offering **mentorship and career development** opportunities can help in creating an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and respected and where longstanding barriers to progression are removed.

4. Support employee wellbeing

The wellbeing of employees, particularly those from racialised communities, should be a priority. Provide access to mental health resources, create spaces for open dialogue about racism and its impacts, and encourage a culture of mutual support. Employers should also consider the workload and stress levels of their employees, offering flexible working arrangements and support where needed. It is important that the **emotional labour** of addressing racism at work should not fall solely upon workers from racialised communities.

5. Collaborate and coproduce

People are the experts in their own lives and experiences, and they have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect them. Therefore, trauma-informed approaches should foster a **collaborative partnership** between racialised communities and the organisations who work with them, based on trust, respect, and mutual learning. Creating opportunities for learning, listening and dialogue between communities can help to bring healing and understanding.

Coffee Afrik CIC

Coffee Afrik CIC is rooted in the belief that healing is a collective process that requires culturally sensitive and community-driven solutions. Its community hubs and outreach services focus on creating spaces where individuals can connect, share experiences, and access support tailored to their cultural and social contexts. A healing-orientated approach aligns with Coffee Afrik's mission to empower communities to heal from within, addressing the root causes of trauma, such as systemic racism and social injustice.

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.

Anti-Racist Praxis Conference: Briefing paper, [London Borough of Hackney](#)

The Anti-Racist Praxis Conference briefing paper outlines strategies to address racial trauma in Hackney, focusing on unmasking, repairing, and preventing the hidden wounds of racial oppression in children and families.

Racism, Mental Health and Trauma Research Round Up, [UK Trauma Council](#)

This resource provides a roundup of research on how racism impacts mental health and trauma. It includes studies and findings that can help practitioners understand the profound effects of racism on development and mental health.

Working definition of Trauma-informed practice, [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#)

This document offers a working definition of trauma-informed practice for health and care practitioners. It outlines key principles and provides guidance on how to integrate trauma-informed approaches into services to improve accessibility and quality of care.



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