

HOW TO TALK TO PATIENTS ABOUT RACE AND RACIAL TRAUMA

TRAUMA RESPONSE PROGRAM

George Floyd's tragic murder has triggered protests and demonstrations against police brutality and racism in 75 cities worldwide. Protests have largely focused on garnering attention for systemic racism at large, while promoting the message that Black Lives Matter. Additionally, protests often seek to gain support and educate White individuals that no one can be neutral or silent in situations of injustice. Neutrality and silence communicate that you have chosen the side of the oppressor. For this reason, many individuals in protests hold signs stating, "silence is compliance" or "silence supports violence."

As healthcare professionals, we cannot stay silent about experiences of stress or trauma as it relates to our patients' race or ethnicity. Our patients of color have unique internal experiences shaped by their race and ethnicity, as well as external experiences shaped by discrimination by societal institutions.



Race and ethnicity are important to discuss with patients to better understand their experiences, but can be difficult to implement into assessments and interventions due to lack of knowledge on how to respectfully discuss. Below, we have provided a few suggestions to assist you in incorporating assessment of discrimination into your treatment methods (the below suggestions are provided by the UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Survey (UnRESTS)):



TO BEGIN THE CONVERSATION:

"Sometimes people have very bad experiences that cause feelings of stress or even trauma. Some people have several difficult experiences over a lifetime that are manageable individually, but together they lead to feelings of stress or trauma. I want to talk to you about some of your experiences of stress or trauma as it relates to your race or ethnicity."

TO DISCUSS EXPERIENCES OF RACISM ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:

- "Are there other racial or ethnic groups that people assume you belong to based on your appearance?"
- "When was the first time you became aware of race or ethnicity?"
- "What sort of things, positive or negative, have you learned about your race and ethnicity growing up?"
- "Many people note that it can be difficult to be an ethnic or racial minority. Have you ever wished you were a member of the majority group?"
- "What is the ethnic/racial environment like in your place of work/school? How comfortable do you feel there as a _____ person?"

TO DISCUSS DIRECT EXPERIENCES OF RACISM:

- "Can you share with me a time you were impacted by racism? This could be something that someone else either said or did to you. I am especially interested in any experiences where you were concerned about your safety and the event was very upsetting."
- "What led you to believe this event happened due to your race?"