



Guidance on How Districts Can Facilitate Conversations About Race-based Stress and Trauma

June 3, 2020

The following guidance was prepared by the Kentucky Department of Education's cross-agency Trauma and Resilience Team, in partnership with colleagues from the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. This document serves to help districts facilitate conversations about race-based stress and trauma. It comes as we are seeing an outcry of grief and anger across the nation with many of our students, families and staff speaking out about racial injustice.

KDE is committed to its core values of equity, achievement, collaboration and integrity. As educators, we must commit to listen to those seeking to be heard and ensure that our young people of color and staff members of color are valued and safe in school and in the community.

KDE believes that conversations about racial trauma and implicit bias are needed across Kentucky regardless of the racial makeup in our schools, districts or communities, because such events impact us all and we must address their emotional and traumatic consequences.

Here is guidance to start these conversations:

What Can You Do for Your School Community (Staff Members and Students)?

- Show people love and acceptance for who they are and recognize that many are hurting during this time.
- Acknowledge what has happened.
- Acknowledge the emotional response this creates for students and staff.
- Remind students and staff that it is OK not to be OK.
- Acknowledge that events in the community are not separate from the context of school.
- Create a safe space for dialogue; allow all voices to be heard and seek input and suggestions to make our educational settings safer and more equitable. **Further considerations for creating a safe space are below.**
- Learn about and acknowledge our own biases and seek to grow by participating in training in equity and diversity, implicit bias, cultural responsiveness, cultural humility and anti-racism. Provide these opportunities for others.
- Check in routinely with your staff and students (not just after a tragic event). Be willing to openly listen to how they are feeling and how you can help. Explore the emotions of staff and children and honor them; never dismiss.
- Teach how to be an [upstander](#) when racism is witnessed.
- Learn about [disrupting dehumanization for boys and young men of color](#).
- Teach resilience skills as a part of social and emotional learning and remind students and staff members of their character strengths. [Use this chart for adults](#). This [character strengths chart](#) is for students.
- Begin efforts to implement an [anti-racism framework](#) in your school and classroom.
- Be prepared to offer a multi-tiered system of support response:



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- There should be tier 1 instruction to students and staff members where we teach about cultural humility, equity, etc., as whole groups.
- The next step may be tier 2 intervention services for students and staff members who are struggling with understanding these concepts or for students and staff members who are victimized by events that have happened in their own lives, their own community or the world.
- Tier 3 intervention services with community agencies should be prepared for students and staff members who might have reached a point where they are a danger to themselves or others.

Considerations for Facilitating Conversations About Race-Based Stress and Trauma

- Prepare by reading and processing the [“Courageous Conversations About Race Protocol.”](#)
- Create agreed-upon norms that help keep the conversation respectful.
- Acknowledge what has happened and the pain many people are feeling at this time.
- Honor everyone’s participation and center on the humanity of those most impacted.
- There will be different opinions, but now might not be the time for perspectives that are hurtful and could trigger others.
- Use a [healing-centered approach](#). Instead of asking students what is wrong with them, ask them what is strong with them or what has happened to them.
- Openly discuss what racism looks like and might feel like for the victim. Remember that racism diminishes us all.
- Explain that microaggressions may not be overt displays of racism, but to the victim, they can feel like “death by a thousand cuts” because they happen so often and in so many ways and environments. Read this article from [The Atlantic](#) to learn more about microaggressions.
- Remember, when you are having these conversations, there will be a range of responses from students, families and staff, and even among people of the same race. Trauma is a unique experience. Never assume that one person represents or speaks for all members of their race or ethnicity; avoid tokenizing people for any reason, including race.

What Can We Do for Caregivers?

- Acknowledge the difficulty of raising children during this time and the emotional response this takes from families.
- Acknowledge the pain that parents are enduring as a result of either their own race-based stress and trauma or from witnessing graphic violence, excess negative messaging on the news and/or social media, or feelings of grief.
- Remind parents it is OK not to be OK. Ask them to remind their children of this.



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- Provide parents with resources about how to have difficult conversations about race. We suggest starting with this piece from Teaching Tolerance: “[10 Ways to Start a Conversation About Race.](#)”
- Offer parents a safe space at school to openly discuss their own concerns. Model courageous conversations.
- Remind parents to limit access to media for their children and themselves.
- Remind parents how to get outside help for children who may be at risk of hurting themselves or others.

What Can Staff Do to Take Care of Themselves?

- Acknowledge the pain of the current events.
- Acknowledge the pain that Black and African American staff especially have experienced as a result of their own race-based stress and trauma or from witnessing graphic violence, excess negative messaging on the news and/or social media, or feelings of grief.
- Remind staff that it is OK not to be OK.
- Provide staff with resources about the importance of taking care of themselves.
- Offer staff a safe space at school to openly discuss their own concerns and model courageous conversations.
- Remind staff to limit access to media for their children and themselves.

Race-based stress and trauma result from the cumulative effects of racism on mental and physical health. This psychological and physical injury results from direct or vicarious discrimination, micro- and macroaggressions, marginalization and dismissal based on one’s race. While the recent events are dramatic, they are not new, and we must acknowledge that reality and be prepared to face the pervasiveness of race-based stress and trauma.

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