

TRAUMA-INFORMED MEETING GUIDELINES

prepared by
The Commons Consulting



the commons



Community Agreement

- **RESPECT**
It is okay to challenge others by asking questions, but do not attack anyone personally. The goal is not to agree – it is to gain a deeper understanding.
- **TRIGGER WARNING**
If possible, use a trigger warning before raising sensitive topics.
- **BE PRESENT**
Please put away your phone, close/mute tabs, and any other distractions.
- **THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS**
Are welcome throughout the session.
- **CONFIDENTIALITY**
Respect the confidentiality of sensitive information shared within the group and do not disclose anyone's identifying information or personal stories.
- **SELF-CARE**
If you need to get up or take a break, please feel free.

Guidelines for Respectful Dialogue

- **SOCIAL POSITIONALITY**
Recognize how your own social positionality informs your perspectives and reactions to the discussion topics.
- **MAKE SPACE**
If you hold a dominant viewpoint, step back and make space for marginalized perspectives.
- **ASSUMPTIONS**
Avoid making assumptions about pronouns/gender/knowledge based on someone's name or appearance.
- **CHALLENGE**



Challenge your own opinions and knowledge. For example, if you find yourself thinking “I already know this,” ask yourself, “How can I take this deeper?” or “How am I applying in practice what I already know?”

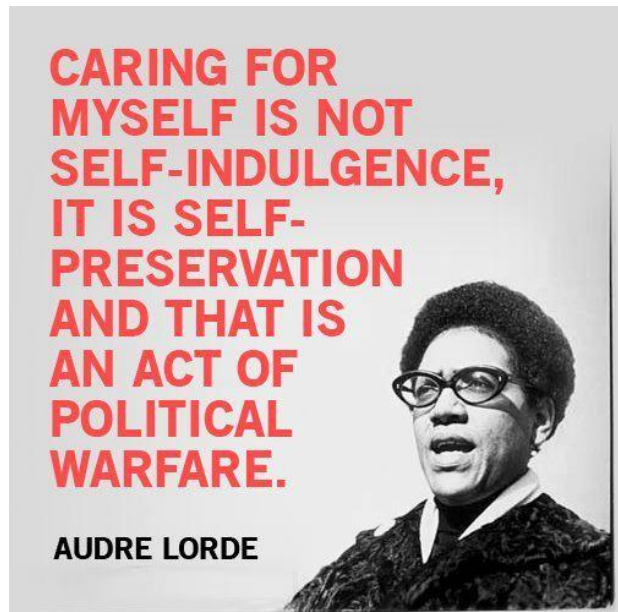
Additional Guidelines:

Maintaining Confidentiality

- **Respect the confidentiality** of sensitive information shared within the group and do not disclose information to members outside the group.
- **Do not disclose** someone else’s identifying information or personal stories.
- **You are not required to share** anything. If you are asked a question or asked to participate in an activity that makes you uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse, and your decision will be respected.
- **Anything said between any two or more group** members at any time is part of the group and is confidential.
- **If you would like to share** something personal but would like to remain anonymous, please privately message one of the facilitators and they can share for you.

Self and Community Care

Self-care is about meeting your basic needs so you can be physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy. Self-care practices are as unique as each of us – there is no one size fits all solution. There is no right or a wrong way to engage in self-care – the key is to make sure you are being intentional with these habits and helping yourself in some way by doing them. The more we practice deliberately caring for our well-being, the more resilient we become, which ultimately helps strengthen our ability to cope with and manage whatever comes our way in life. Self-care is an essential practice for all areas of life, including conversations around heavy topics like racism.



Although self-care is incredibly important, it is not enough. Self-care alone will not solve systemic problems like racism. We don't all have equal access to the time and money needed for self-care. We need **community care** to thrive and build a more equitable society. Some ways to practice community care can include: checking-in with each other; making a specific offer to help someone who needs it; intervene and use your privilege to point out a microaggression; use empathetic active listening skills during the focus group discussions; and as an organization prioritize taking time off.

Some folx may find that some of the dialogue during these discussions are upsetting or triggering to them. Please listen to your body and your needs throughout the discussion group. The feeling of being overwhelmed or stressed is your mind and body telling you that something is wrong, that you need to attend to your needs and rebalance yourself.



Check in with yourself, and each other, frequently throughout the focus group discussion and try to listen to what your mind and body tells you that it needs. If at any point, if you feel like you need a break, please feel free to leave the meeting for a few minutes. You can rejoin at any time.

There will also be an **Active Listener** present during our conversations who will be there to support you if you require it. Just make a request privately in the chat

to the Active Listener and they can provide support via chat or move into a breakout room with you to talk and listen.

After each discussion group, a support person from The Commons Consulting will be available to meet with anyone for one-on-one debriefing. If you feel upset in any way, whether about a general topic that was discussed or a personal story shared, and you think you may need additional support to process the situation, please don't hesitate to ask for support.

You may also find that you don't experience being overwhelmed, stressed, or angered by the group discussions until well after the workshop – perhaps later that day, or in the days following. It's important to be informed of individual and community resources available to you. Some examples are reaching out to a friend or colleague about your feelings and accessing a private counsellor. The following resources are a great starting point for self-care after the workshops.

Symptoms of Racial Trauma

Psychologically, racial trauma can cause symptoms that mirror those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

- Re-experiencing of distressing events: reporting of discrimination in higher numbers
- Arousal: higher reports of somatization when distressed (e.g. stomach aches, headaches, rapid heartbeat), greater perception of behavioral problems



- Chronic Stress
- Negative emotion: depression, anxiety, Black/Latinx middle school students have higher rates of depression in context of discrimination
- Hypervigilance
- Avoidance: less willingness to take academic risks, higher school drop-out rates after racial discrimination is perceived.

The Four Bodies: A Holistic Toolkit for Coping With Racial Trauma

By Jacquelyn Ogorchukwu



As a society, we often talk about racism, but rarely ever do we talk about how it affects the health of our people. I call racism “the multifaceted abuser” because it has emotional, physical, mental and spiritual effects on our community. Research [shows](#) that racism can lead to anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, chronic stress, chronic fatigue, bodily inflammation, internalized racism and symptoms similar to post traumatic stress disorder. This is called *racial trauma*.



In the world of psychology, there is no way to assess, diagnose or treat racial trauma. Definitions of trauma are based on eurocentric experiences, and so it makes sense that racism is not recognized as a form of abuse. Black people have been dehumanized for centuries. When you are able to strip an entire community of its human qualities, it becomes that much easier to neglect the fact that the community experiences pain. In truth, our experiences are real, our trauma is real, and the healing we deserve is real.

I often think about what it would look like to create and activate a holistic strategy that enables our people to rest, rehabilitate and rebuild. I believe that one way to realize this strategy is to work with our [Four Bodies](#). Our ancestors knew that our health was more than just about the physical, that our bodies are made up of four distinct parts: the mental body, the emotional body, the physical body and the spiritual body. Trauma can be stored in these different parts of our being, and so by working with our four bodies, we remind ourselves of our full humanity. Below is what a holistic approach to coping with racial trauma can look like:

The Mental Body: Easing Our Minds After a Racially Traumatic Incident

The mental body is where we house our thoughts, beliefs, opinions and our sense of value. After experiencing racial trauma, it is possible to be anxious, stressed, and frantic. In order to create space for healing in the mental body we can:

1. **Unplug.** Take some time away from viral videos and media. Vicarious trauma can create more anxiety and stress.
2. **Pause:** Take time off from work or school if you can. This will help reduce the mental load you have to deal with during the day.
3. **Talk:** Release the thoughts in your mind to a licensed therapist who knows how to make space for your racial trauma. This is key.

The Emotional Body: Releasing Emotions After a Racially Traumatic Incident

The emotional body is where we house our lived experiences and the feelings attached to them. After experiencing racial trauma, it is possible to feel sadness, anger, resentment and depression. In order to create space for healing in the emotional body we can:

1. **Feel:** Allow yourself to express sadness, anger and fear so that they do not remain trapped in your body. Trapped emotions can lead to bodily inflammation.
2. **Gather:** Surround yourself with people who give you a safe space to express your emotions. Your emotions deserve a soft landing place.



3. **Write:** Take the time to journal about your experience and accept the emotions that emerge as you do so. You may feel a sense of relief.

The Physical Body: Transforming Tension After a Racially Traumatic Incident

The physical body is the tangible part of our bodies that we see and feel. Racial trauma can lead to chronic fatigue, body inflammation and other physical ailments. In order to create space for healing in the physical body we can:

1. **Rest:** Take a moment to sleep and take naps. Rest is a reparational practice for our people whose bodies have been exploited.
2. **Move:** Walk, dance, stretch, run or shake your body. Allow your body to release the pent up energy within you. You may feel the pressure decrease.
3. **Self-Massage:** Release tension stored in the muscles and tissues in your body. You may get emotional, that just means the energy is being released.

The Spiritual Body: Returning to Ourselves After a Racially Traumatic Incident

The spiritual body houses your essence. After experiencing racial trauma, it is common to feel hopeless, demoralized and low vibrational. In order to create space for healing in the spiritual body we can:

1. **Meditate:** Take a moment of reflection to remind you how divine you are. It is easy to forget how special you are when you experience racism.
2. **Reclaim:** Read, listen to, watch, or go to events that can help you regain a sense of pride in your racial identity.
3. **Organize:** Engage with and support local anti-racist organizations that can help you feel hopeful and empowered.

While the only way for us to truly heal from racial trauma is for racism to be dismantled, my hope is that this toolkit can offer some guidance on how we can cope as we work towards this mission. We are so often expected to take on the role of dismantling racism that we forget that the main job of a survivor of abuse is to heal. Centering healing in our narrative is a radical act because it reminds us that we are human — something that society has tried to make us forget. Now is the time to lean into practices that our ancestors set aside for us.