

ROADMAP TO BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

Race is central to identity and lived experience. It touches much more than skin pigment; it plays a role in our societal norms, values, and traditions. Today, because of the historical enslavement of people from Africa, Black people live in every part of the globe. This dissemination of a large group of people with the same origin is referred to as the African/Black Diaspora. While all Black people are unique, this shared history explains why some experiences are common across the Black community. Although everyone experiences mental health, given the notable history and culture of the Black community in the U.S., it is important to acknowledge the specific strengths, methods of healing, and challenges faced by those who are part of it today. This Roadmap will do just that.

Whether you are Black or want to be more aware of the experiences of Black people, read on to learn more about Black mental health.

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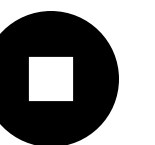
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**THE MENTAL
HEALTH
COALITION**

WHAT IS BLACK MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health refers to your psychological, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing. Mental health status can be impacted by cultural and societal group identities such as race, ethnicity, religion and social class. Holding multiple marginalized identities puts you at increased risk for discrimination and other forms of oppression, which impact mental health. Focusing on Black mental health allows us to highlight these unique experiences.

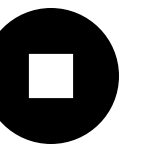
It is important to note that **the mental health of Black people is not challenging because of that identity itself** but because of the systemic issues faced by this community. Because of the enslavement of Black people, racialized oppression, marginalization and large-scale immigration throughout history, Black people live in a diaspora across the globe in and outside of Africa today. Black people are often impacted by racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Many hold more than one marginalized identity and may also experience classism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia. Despite these challenges, there are countless examples of thriving within Black communities across the Diaspora, which we will discuss here.



MENTAL HEALTH IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Black people experience common stressors in everyday life. Consider which of these daily nuisances in the chart below impact you the most. Awareness of these stressors can be the first step to resistance and healing. Over time, if not addressed, these can lead to mental health concerns like the ones discussed in the following section. If any of these feel familiar to you, that's okay — we've included tips in this Roadmap for fostering mental wellbeing.

DAILY NUISANCE	EXPLANATION
Code-switching	Let's face it: navigating a Eurocentric world can be difficult. You might feel it is necessary to change important aspects of yourself just to be seen. Doing this repeatedly can make you feel like your authentic self is not good enough.
Microaggressions	Do you find yourself giving people the side-eye? This could be due to microaggressions, which are everyday, indirect, and subtle slights directed at individuals from a marginalized community. Someone's comment might be well-intentioned, but that doesn't mean it isn't offensive.
Avoiding Stereotypes	Ever feel yourself not doing things you enjoy in public? There is a long list of stereotypes that have been imposed on the Black community which takes away Black people's individuality. Stereotypes are harmful and can make you worry about being judged.
Fear of Systems	You might feel anxious when dealing with educational, legal, judicial, health, and/or other systems. These systems have a long history of overlooking and discriminating against Black people. It can be stressful to continuously worry about not being treated fairly or listened to by systems that are meant to support and protect you.
Internalized Racism	Have you ever caught yourself perpetuating an anti-Black stereotype? Yikes! It is important to question the views you hold about your own racial and cultural group and whether they might be rooted in racism.



MENTAL HEALTH IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

DAILY NUISANCE

Intersecting Identities

Self-Doubt

Mental Health Stigma

Adultification

EXPLANATION

When you hold multiple marginalized identities, sometimes it feels like discrimination is all-consuming. Facing multiple systems of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, classism) can leave you feeling hopeless and less trusting.

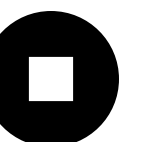
It can sometimes feel as if society at large questions whether you're good enough every chance it gets. It's hard not to let that get to you on some level. You might even believe that you aren't good enough, which can cause you to avoid opportunities to shine and succeed.

It can be a challenge to open up about your mental health when those around you don't seem to be having those conversations. The mental health stigma that exists within the Black community can leave you feeling like you're the only one in need of support.

Black children are often viewed by adults as more aggressive, adult, or sexually aware than their peers. This translates into Black girls being less nurtured, comforted and protected than their peers and Black boys facing more frequent and severe consequences than their peers.

Yes, these can feel daunting, especially when thinking about them simultaneously. Luckily, there are many coping strategies and healing methods to manage these, and we have some tips for fostering mental wellbeing further in this Roadmap.

More information: [Trevor Project](#), [Vibrant](#), [Georgetown University](#)

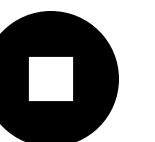


MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

It is important to note that much of the psychological pain that exists within Black communities is due to systemic inequities. While changing these structures will take time and collective effort, it is not only possible but crucial to practice joy as a form of radical healing! Keep reading to learn more about how you can foster this for yourself.

Today in the U.S., more than seven million Black and African American individuals are living with a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. Yet, Black people are less likely to seek mental health support. Many Black people have learned to write off symptoms as ordinary or not mental health-related, which stems from a long history of stigma and fear of further discrimination. Understanding the warning signs of a mental health concern can help you find the appropriate care before symptoms get worse. If you or a loved one are experiencing these symptoms, follow the links below for more information.

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION	RISK	WARNING SIGNS
Depression	Black folks account for almost 20% of people with depression in the United States, yet they're less likely to receive treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, or worthlessness• Persistent low mood• Noticeable changes in appetite or weight• Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy• Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much More Information: CTL and Psychiatry.org
Anxiety	Black adults are exposed to more risk factors for anxiety (i.e., racism, discrimination) than their white counterparts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive worrying• Feeling nervous, tense, or unable to relax• Having a sense of dread• Not feeling like yourself More Information: ADAA



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MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

Substance Use

Trauma or PTSD

RISK

Black adults living with a mental illness are at risk of using substances such as alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, and pain relievers.

Exposure to trauma is highest among Black Americans compared to all other racial groups. Due to socioeconomic disparities, Black people are more likely to be exposed to traumatic experiences. Some examples of traumatic experiences faced by the Black community are racism, discrimination, poverty, police brutality, and violence.

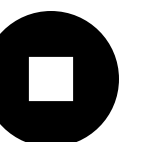
WARNING SIGNS

- Substance use feels uncontrollable
- Getting into legal trouble
- Experiencing withdrawal
- Inability to reduce or eliminate substance use
- Neglecting responsibilities

More Information: [Recovery](#)

- Flashbacks or panic when reminded of the trauma
- Becoming easily upset or angry
- Extreme alertness
- Avoidance of things related to the trauma
- Nightmares or disturbed sleep

More Information: [MHA](#)



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MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

Suicidal Thoughts

Schizophrenia

Intergenerational Trauma

RISK

Black youth, age 5-12, are 2x as likely to die by suicide than their white peers. Suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts have been rising among Black and African American young adults, age 18-25, since 2018.

Black Americans are 2x more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than white Americans. Many believe this is due to racist bias in the mental health field.

The Black community faced and continues to face trauma both personally and systematically. Unfortunately, that trauma can be passed down through generations.

WARNING SIGNS

- Thinking or talking about harming yourself or taking your life
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, or feeling like you are a burden
- Experiencing severe psychological pain

If you or someone you know is in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988, or contact Crisis Text Line by texting "COALITION" to 741741. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if there is an immediate safety concern.

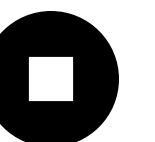
More Information: [AFSP](#), [JED](#)

- Experiencing delusions or hallucinations
- Disorganized thoughts or speech
- Decreased ability to express emotion
- Lack of motivation

More Information: [Fountain House](#)

- Constant heightened state of awareness
- Severe or intense feelings of grief that affect everyday functioning
- Hopelessness
- Fear of trusting others

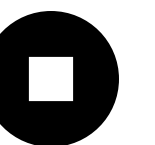
More Information: [APA](#)



BLACK MENTAL WELLBEING

Black mental wellbeing refers to the cognitive, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of those who identify as Black. The Black community embodies countless strengths, but this list includes the top strengths supported by research findings. Awareness of these can help you recognize these strengths within yourself to both honor and foster them.

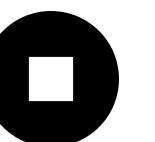
STRENGTH	EXAMPLES IN ACTION
Teamwork	Group advocacy, political activism, civic engagement
Perseverance	Resistance to systemic oppression, overcoming stigma
Creativity	Music, art, dance
Love	Closeness of relationships, unconditional support
Humor	Comedy, roasting one another, bringing joy
Social Intelligence	Being aware of unfair treatment
Self-awareness	Development of socialization and protective strategies to survive
Innovation	Scientists, inventors, pop culture
Spirituality	Gospel, faith community, astrology, prayer



TIPS FOR FOSTERING BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

Whether you are beginning your mental health journey or are looking for new ideas, here are some tips on ways to foster Black mental wellbeing.

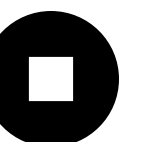
THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Celebrate Black Joy	Black joy has always been used to shift negative experiences and heal from trauma. Joy can also promote feelings of pride and help foster community.	Black joy can look like laughing, dancing, exploring nature, creating, or praising. It is anything done freely without the deterrence of societal structures.
Lean into Community	Having others around you who have had similar experiences can remind you that you're not alone.	Foster community, whether it's online or in-person. You can do this by finding people with similar interests, attending community events, and interacting more with people you see daily.
Bring Others with You	Mental health journeys can feel scary, but you don't have to walk that path alone. A part of building community is finding people to grow alongside you.	Talk about your mental health journey when appropriate. This can look like a weekly mental health check-in with a friend.
Strengthen Your Pride	We all know Black History Month is not long enough to celebrate everything the Black community has accomplished. Embracing Black history, people, and heritage is essential.	Lift every voice and sing! Read, watch, and share entertainment that recognizes the vibrant aspects of Black culture and its contributions to art, literature, music, and film.
Engage in Self-care	It can be exhausting to face the daily nuisances discussed above; sometimes, you must take time to recharge. Remember, you can't pour from an empty cup.	Engage in activities you enjoy, spend time with loved ones, and, most importantly, rest your mind and body.



TIPS FOR FOSTERING BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Express Your Feelings	When you're a member of a marginalized group, you often receive messages that showing emotion is a sign of weakness, but the ability to be vulnerable with those close to you is actually a sign of strength!	Once you identify your emotions, express them to others using "I feel" statements. You might be surprised that your loved ones want to listen to and support you.
Lean into Authenticity	Allowing yourself to take up space, even in predominantly white settings, can feel empowering.	When safe, consider speaking and living your truth, whether that's in your appearance, your behavior, or your mannerisms.
Seek Professional Support	Sometimes seeking mental health support can be scary, especially if it's for a clinical mental health concern. Just know that mental health professionals are there to support you, and there are accessible ways to connect with them.	Finding a licensed mental health clinician can be an overwhelming process, so take it one step at a time. You might start by looking up local mental health organizations, the mental health departments of hospitals, or online therapist directories. If you are looking for a Black provider, you also may want to check out directories specifically for the Black community.

Black mental health is a vast topic with many intersecting issues and vital conversations. Here, we wanted to highlight key elements that make up Black mental health to serve as an introduction to your mental wellbeing journey.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

While this is just a starting point on Black mental health, there are so many resources out there, and you can find more information specific to the Black community here...

Resources:

The Mental Health Coalition: [How to Support & Advocate for Black Mental Health](#)

Active Minds: [Black Individuals and Organizations You Should Know in the Mental Health Field](#)

ADAA: [5 Meaningful Ways to Embrace Black Mental Health](#)

APA: [The Legacy of Trauma](#)

Black Girls Smile: [Mental Wellness Toolkit](#)

Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation: [Mental Health Provider Directory](#)

Health Central: [Why Do Black Men Hide Mental Illness?](#)

National Council For Mental Wellbeing: [Black Mental Health Matters](#)

NAMI: [Mental Health Resources for Black Americans](#)

MHA: [BIPOC Mental Health](#)

CMI: [List of Orgs Tailored for BIPOC Youth](#)

One Mind: [Black Mental Health Matters: A Resource Guide](#)

One Mind: [Mental Health Apps Created by & for Black People](#)

On Our Sleeves: [Self-Care for Black Families](#)

The Trevor Project: [Supporting Black LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#)

The Trevor Project: [Approaching Intersectional Conversations](#)

Trans Lifeline: [Support Groups](#)

Vibrant: [Supporting Black Mental Health](#)

AAMC: [The Tragedy of Black Youth Suicide](#)

ROADMAP TO BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

VIA Character: [Strengths in the Black Community](#)

NIH: [Mental Health Care Among Blacks in America: Confronting Racism and Constructing Solutions](#)

Safe Horizons: [Five Ways to Celebrate Black Joy](#)

VeryWellMind: [7 Strategies to Help You on Your Anti-Racism Journey](#)

The Peace & Prosperity Podcast with Jason Phillip, LCSW

[Couched in Color Podcast](#) (by MHC Board Member Dr. Alfiee)

Organizations:

[ABPsi](#)

[Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective \(BEAM\)](#)

[Black Mental Wellness](#)

[TheBlackManCan](#)

[The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation](#)

[NAMI](#)

[MHA](#)

[The Steve Fund](#)

[Silence the Shame](#)

[Center for Healing Racial Trauma](#)

[Loveland Foundation](#)

[Therapy for Black Girls](#)

[Therapy for Black Men](#)

[Open Path Collective](#)

[Black Mental Health Alliance](#)

[Mental Wealth Alliance](#)

[The Defensive Line](#)

[Black Girls Smile](#)

[AAKOMA Project](#) (Founded by

MHC Board Member Dr. Alfiee)

Books:

[Ain't I a Woman](#) - bell hooks

[Women, Race, and Class](#) - Angela Davis

[Sister Outsider](#) - Audre Lorde

[The Fire Next Time](#) - James Baldwin

[Between the World and Me](#) - Ta-Nehisi Coates

[In my Grandmothers House](#) - Yolanda Pierce

[Unearthing Joy](#) - Dr. Gholdy Muhammad

[Black Boy Joy](#) - Kwame Mbalia

[The Color Purple](#) - Alice Walker

[The Hate U Give](#) - Angie Thomas

[The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health](#) -

Rheeda Walker

[Black Mental Health Matters](#) - Aaren Snyder

[The Strong Black Woman](#) - Marita Golden

[My Grandmother's Hands](#) - Resmaa Menakem

[Owning Our Struggles](#) - Minaa B.

[Break the Cycle](#) - Dr. Mariel Buqué

[Decolonizing Therapy](#) - Jennifer Mullan

[Drama Free](#) - Nedra Glover Tawwab

[Set Boundaries, Find Peace](#) - Nedra

Glover Tawwab

[Silencing "MY" Shame](#) - Shanti Das

