



Tips for Providers When Addressing Racial Discrimination

The New York State Office of Mental Health promotes the mental health of all New Yorkers. This includes recognition of the unique needs of populations facing discrimination in our Country, including discrimination faced by African Americans.

The combined burdens of illness, structural racism, and overt violence highlight the enormous stress and behavioral health risks in the African American community. The New York State Office of Mental Health (NYS OMH) acknowledges these burdens and is dedicated to ensuring marginalized communities have access to supports and resources to mitigate mental health needs caused by racism, discrimination and racial tensions.

Discrimination leads to many stress-related emotional, physiologic, and behavioral changes. The added stress evokes emotional responses such as distress, sadness, and anger and often results in an increase in behaviors that harm health (i.e. alcohol use, tobacco, and other substance use). In turn, these emotional responses decrease healthy activities (i.e. sleep, physical activity, social interaction). Each of these common stress reactions increases the risk of individuals experiencing anxiety, mood, and other major psychiatric conditions.

What Can Providers Do?

Be Mindful Provide training and educational opportunities to increase awareness of [unconscious biases](#). Encourage all staff to take the [Harvard Implicit Bias test](#) and create opportunities to support staff with overcoming biases using with staff using available tools such as [The Space2 Model Of Mindful Inclusion](#) and [University of California, San Francisco's Strategies to Address Unconscious Bias](#).

At the organizational level - **use** the [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#) (CLAS) as a blueprint for creating and sustaining organizational change.

Utilize clinical tools such as the [DSM-5 Cultural Formulation](#) Interview (CFI) to gather and organize culturally-relevant clinical information from clients experiencing racial discrimination.

Assess how service users react to racial discrimination and its byproducts (i.e. community level violence), including how these events impact day-to-day functioning, relationships, symptoms and help seeking behaviors. Be aware that stress brought about by recent events may trigger reactions such as increased problematic substance use. Provide service users an opportunity to discuss these issues, noting individuals experience traumatic events differently and validate their reactions, feelings, and concerns.

Brainstorm ways to cope with their reactions, feelings, and concerns.

Support front line staff with prioritizing self-care around these issues as they experience by making a point of identifying their own reactions to these current and evolving events and seeking help from natural supports as needed.

Resources for Programs

[OMH's Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Think Cultural Health](#)

Resources for Service Users

OMH Emotional Support Hotline 1-844-863-9314

OMH's Customer Relations 1-800-597-8481

Contact:

Matthew Canuteson, MA

Diversity and Inclusion Officer

Director, Bureau of Cultural Competence

New York State Office of Mental Health

44 Holland Ave 2nd Floor

Albany, NY 12229

518-473-4548

matthew.canuteson@omh.ny.gov