



How to Cope with Racial Trauma and Racial Battle Fatigue

What is Racial Trauma?

Racial trauma, or race-based stress, refers to the physical and psychological symptoms that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) experience after exposure to particularly distressing and/or life-threatening racist experiences by white supremacist people, policies, and systems. Traumatic experiences can be real or perceived, directly experienced or witnessed, interpersonal or systemic.^{1,2,3} The effects of racial trauma can be passed down within communities and across generations.⁴

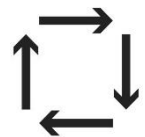
What is Racial Battle Fatigue?

Racial battle fatigue (RBF) is the *cumulative* psychological, social, physiological, and emotional *impacts* of racial micro- and macro aggressions and racist abuse on racially marginalized groups – particularly Black individuals. Attempting to cope with these persistent hostile, violent, demeaning, dismissive, and toxic race-based stressors completely depletes one's physical, emotional, and mental energy.^{5,6,7}

How can I cope?

Continue to take action and engage in social justice and advocacy, but implement calming practices before, during, and after.⁸ Traumatic events and trauma triggers activate our threat response (fight-flight-freeze). Centering and grounding practices help to settle the nervous system.

- Learn the 4-7-8 breathing technique to engage our body's calming response. Inhale through the nose for the count of 4, hold the breath for the count of 7, and exhale slowly through the mouth for the count of 8. Doing 5 sets can quickly help you feel more relaxed. Count on your own, or follow along with one of these [gifs](#).
- Try the "box breathing" method. While you imagine drawing the lines of a box, inhale through the nose to the count of 4, hold for the count of 4, exhale through the mouth to the count of 4, and hold again for the count of 4. Repeat for 5 sets. Watch this [video](#) or get an [app](#) to help you practice.
- Practice the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique to help anchor yourself into the present moment. In your immediate surroundings, identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Screenshot this [infographic](#) as a helpful reminder.



What are some common signs and symptoms?

Academic disruptions
Anger
Anxiety
Apathy
Defensiveness
Depression
Detachment
Emotional numbness or suppression
Escapism
Exhaustion
Frustration
Helplessness
Hopelessness
Hypersensitivity
Hypervigilance
Internalization of racist attributions
Irritability
Low motivation
Muscle tension
Physical avoidance
Psychological or emotional withdrawal
Resistance
Sadness
Shock
Sleep disturbance
Social isolation
Verbal, non-verbal, or physical combativeness

- ✓ Practice intentional self-care.^{2,9,10} Engage in activities that attend to your “four bodies” – your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual self.¹¹



- Learn healthy relaxation and coping strategies like yoga, mindfulness, journaling, movement, and creative and expressive arts to help restore emotional balance and well-being. Download some mindfulness and mental health [apps](#) to help establish a daily practice.
- Engage in spiritual or meditative practices: attend a religious or faith-based event, listen to this “Black Lives Matter Meditation for Healing Racial Trauma” [meditation](#), get out into nature, or try one of these [brief meditations](#).

- ✓ Take pauses from social media.^{8,12} It is important to stay informed, yet we all need to take regular breaks from the 24-hour news cycle and social media posts. Give yourself permission to periodically disengage and set digital boundaries¹³ when you return.
- ✓ Develop a positive racial and cultural identity and improve your self-worth. Read, listen to, watch, or go to events that help you regain a sense of pride in your identity.¹⁰ Make a list of and celebrate your positive attributes, talents, and accomplishments.
- ✓ Enhance your social support system and regain a sense of community.^{8,12} Now more than ever is the time to lean on trusted others for support, validation, allyship, and encouragement – and a reminder that you are not alone.
 - Remember you do not have to fight every fight or battle it alone. Step back when you need to, take care of your own wellbeing, and enlist the help of others.
- ✓ Learn more. Understanding racial trauma and racial battle fatigue and how it is impacting your life can be the key to knowing how to address it. See the [References](#) and [Additional Resources](#) listed at the bottom of this handout.
- ✓ Seek professional help. Trauma-informed individual therapy and/or group counseling are beneficial avenues to exploring these concerns, processing your experiences, and taking steps toward healing.
 - Minnesota State Mankato African American Affairs [Black Mental Health Matters](#)
 - Minnesota State Mankato [Counseling Center](#)
 - [Free or Low-Cost Mental Health Care](#) for the Black Community
 - [Therapy for Black Girls](#) – podcast, blog, and resources
 - [Therapy for Black Men](#) – blog, resources



Additional Resources

- Greater Mankato Diversity Council: <https://www.mankatodiversity.org/>
- Mankato Area Voices for Racial Equality: <https://mavre.carrd.co/#>
- YWCA Mankato: <https://ywcamankato.org/>

References:

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12. Quaye, S. J., Karikari, S. N., Okello, W. K., & Carter, K. D. (2019). Strategies for Practicing Self-Care from Racial Battle Fatigue. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 5 (2), pp. 95-131.
13. 5 (Digital) Self-Care Practices Black People Can Use While Coping With Trauma: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/self-care-black-coping-with-trauma_n_577e76a9e4b0c590f7e839ed