

# COPING WITH THE IMPACT OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

When, once again, we face news that a person of color has lost their life at the hands of those charged with protecting the public, the impact is broad and deep. We may struggle with our emotions and deep concerns about injustice and discrimination against people of color that has persisted over many decades. How do we maintain our well-being as we try to come to terms with what we're seeing and feeling? Understanding your reactions and having strategies to manage the stress may help.

## Common/normal reactions

The intensity and range of reactions we might experience can sometimes be surprising or feel overwhelming.

- › **Emotional reactions** may start with a feeling of shock or numbness. As the experience begins to register, the floodgates open, and we may feel unfamiliar or deeper emotions, such as: profound sadness, anger, outrage, grief, anxiety, and fear. These feelings may build in intensity or perhaps ebb and spike with repeated news accounts and disturbing images.
- › **Our thoughts** can race and strain to find a place to land. Many people find that they can't stop thinking about what has happened or have trouble concentrating. We find ourselves constantly drawn to news reports.
- › **Physical reactions** may be less expected. People sometimes can't stop crying or are unable to sleep. There may be a strong feeling of restlessness, as if you can't sit still. You might experience an upset stomach or a pounding heart or trembling. Sometimes loss of appetite or feeling deeply exhausted can be a response.

These are just some examples; you may react differently. But know that it is normal to have intense reactions in a situation as impactful as this. It does not suggest mental or physical health problems. It is the way that our bodies and minds respond to a difficult event. It is okay to feel what you feel.

## Understanding reactions

These reactions are all part of a normal stress reaction. They tell you that this matters to you. For some people it can trigger memories tied to past traumatic experiences. You may find yourself reliving the emotions of those events.

While each person has their own lens, we're all affected. Whether we're connected by location, skin color, or just as people who honor the value and rights of every human life. Racial injustice can shake the core of our moral code and beliefs, especially when history shows a pattern of similar events. Those who live with systemic racism every day may feel buried by this undeniable, relentless truth. Destruction and disruption in the community can add another layer of difficult emotions.

For many, there is a push-pull between wishing the struggle and discomfort would go away and embracing the anger and sorrow as drivers of change. This tangle of thoughts, perspectives and emotions can be overwhelming.

It's important to honor these feelings and understand that they are challenging for a reason. While we can't control how we feel, we do have control over regulating our emotions. Doing this can help us to better manage what we're feeling and respond to it in meaningful ways. Targeted coping strategies can help.