Supporting Black LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

By: Tia Dole, Ph.D., Chief Clinical Operations Officer, The Trevor Project

Over the last several days, The Trevor Project has been supporting Black LGBTQ youth in crisis expressing a wide range of emotions over the senseless and unjust violence against Black Americans. No matter where you're located, it's possible that these current events are impacting your mental health in ways you might not realize.

Black LGBTQ young people hold multiple marginalized identities. Under the minority stress model, experiences of discrimination, rejection, threats, and violence are compounded, and can lead to negative mental health outcomes. In addition, we know from our research that despite Black LGBTQ youth having similar rates of mental health disparities to all LGBTQ youth, they are significantly less likely to receive professional care.

Common Feelings

The LGBTQ youth reaching out over the last few days have expressed a variety of feelings as they try to process current events. While The Trevor Project will always be here to support you, we also want to provide you with some ways to understand and cope with the anxiety and stress that has come up consistently across our phone, chat, and text crisis services. It's important to normalize and acknowledge that you may be experiencing some or all of the following feelings.

- **Grief.** You may experience sorrow because of the senseless deaths of so many Black Americans, including numerous Black trans women over many years. This grief isn't simply about recent events. For many, this grief has compounded over time. Working through this feeling is an ongoing process–one that may result in many conflicting desires.
- **Sense of helplessness.** You might feel like there's nothing you can do because you're only one person. This helplessness can be rooted in the sense that you are a single person, with a single voice. We want to emphasize many people are feeling this as well. Being open and candid about it can make you feel vulnerable. This is something we understand very well.
- **Sense of hopelessness.** It's possible that the long history of systemic racism can make you feel as though things will never change. As a person who may hold multiple identities, sometimes it seems like we as a country may not do the work that needs to happen for there to be equality.
- **Disconnecting from white allies.** You may distance yourself from white allies who are supportive of the Black community. This may be because it can seem burdensome to share your experience or put your complex thoughts into words. Or it may be that you are feeling anger towards people who share that identity, in this moment.
- **Rage.** On social media and in the news, people are seeing coverage of Black Americans who were unjustly killed, and it can leave you feeling rage. This rage could be directed towards individuals or to institutions.
- **Desire to escape.** As certain towns experience unrest and protests, it's possible you may feel a desire to leave your area or change your life completely. We hear a lot of people talking about going to another country simply because circumstances here have become unbearable.

- **Fear.** You may be experiencing a great deal of fear. The things that are happening right now are scary. Fear is a normal reaction to these events; in fact, fear is a protective emotion that is your body's warning symptom that something is dangerous. Based on what is happening in the world right now, if you are feeling fear, that means that your body's warning system is working.
- **Numbness.** You may be feeling nothing. For some people, feeling nothing is worse than feeling intense emotions. The events of recent months and years may be too much to process. Numbness can be your body's reactions to being overwhelmed.

I want you to know that all of these experiences are valid. All of them. I also want to emphasize that whatever you are feeling is true to your experience. I ask that you do not judge your own experience (or others!) and try to find some support in your community.

What Can I Do to Take Care of Myself?

The biggest question on many minds is "what can I do to take care of myself?" Discovering what helps you feel cared for and relaxed can help people cope with everything that's going on, and centers you.

- **Allow yourself to feel your emotions without judgement.** This is probably the most challenging one, because it can be difficult to not be judgemental towards oneself but also because of a lack of space and time to do so. You may have obligations that do not allow you to process all of your emotions, prohibiting them from decreasing on their own.
- **Work to decrease your emotional intensity.** Some people may not have the space or time to allow these intense emotions to run rampant. [You can use some tools to decrease your intensity](#) so you can simply make it through the day. When you have more time, you can process some of the recent events.
- **Pivot to action.** Feeling out of control or feeling a lack of control can lead to negative emotions. If you engage in action you will likely experience a decrease in negative emotions. These actions could involve activism, donating to organizations, lending an ear to others or simply being helpful to someone else.
- **Seek support.** We also want to emphasize that we at The Trevor Project are here for you, 24/7 and for free. Visit [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](#) to connect to a trained crisis counselor.

Supporting Black & Brown Youth

The Trevor Project serves diverse communities across the country, and takes an intersectional approach to supporting the mental health of LGBTQ youth. We encourage you to use the following tips to support yourself, and to care for the Black LGBTQ young people in your lives.

- **Check-in with Black LGTBQ youth.** Ask the Black LGBTQ youth in your lives what their support system looks like during this time. In some cases, you may want to explore whether they have access to therapy or professional support. You can also tell them

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about online peer support, like TrevorSpace.org, which can be a great way to build connectivity and community.

- **Use your platform.** While it might be difficult to translate your complex thoughts and feelings, it's okay to use your platform to speak out against racism and racial violence. Your feelings and experiences are valid, and can help educate others about current events. However, it is also important to know when to let others speak, and when to raise others' voices.
- **Center Black experiences and voices.** Black lives matter, and amplifying their voices is an authentic way to share their unique experiences with the world.
- **Educate yourself.** Learning information about current events directly from reliable sources can put your mind at ease. It's also important to educate yourself about racism, violence against the Black and LGBTQ communities, and police violence.
- **Take a break from news and social media.** While it can be great to stay informed, the world might seem like too much right now. Ask yourself how it would feel to unplug for a bit, or minimize the amount of information you're taking in. Check-in with yourself around your mental health, set boundaries, and be honest about when you need to take a break.
- **Learn the difference between sympathy and empathy.** Empathy has the power to bring people together, connecting them over difficult emotions. Sympathy, while recognizing hardships in others' experiences, can drive disconnection. (Watch: [Brené Brown on Empathy](#))

We know that some days can be tougher than others, and want to acknowledge that experiencing a range of emotions at this time is normal. But no matter where you are, you are not alone. The Trevor Project's crisis counselors are trained and always available to support the unique needs of Black LGBTQ young people, 24/7 and for free.

If you or someone you know needs help or support, The Trevor Project's trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386, via chat [www.TheTrevorProject.org/Help](#), or by texting START to 678-678.

Warmly,

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