MANAGING ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since the global spread of the COVID-19, the FBI and news outlets have reported an increase in anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. Although most individuals are not racist and these events are infrequent, these incidents can often be stressful and traumatic. To help manage, here are some resources and helpful information.

Common Reactions:

Experiencing racism and overall the impact of COVID for some people can lead to psychological distress, it can be viewed as a form of trauma. You might be experiencing:

- Increased anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Avoidance
- Alterations in mood and cognition
- Shame
- Anger
- Helplessness
- Denial
- Dissociation
- Propensity to self-isolate

Please know that these reactions are not uncommon in the face of racial trauma.

Managing and Coping:

- If you feel that you are in imminent danger, please contact local authorities or 911. Your safety is the #1 priority.
  - HUPD (Urgent): 617-495-1212 or HUPD (Longwood): 617-432-1212
- Research from historically marginalized groups has shown that these 3 tools are the most helpful in coping with racial discrimination.
  - Find pride in your community. When you experience racism, you can feel shame. You may wish that you weren't Asian, but remember that your ancestors likely went through similar or even worse incidents. They survived by recognizing the beauty and strength of their community. So, seek out or create literature, art, films, shows, music that highlight your community in a positive light.
  - Seek out support. When you experience racism, you can feel alone and isolated. It is easy to feel like the "other," but you are not alone, and you don't have to face it on your own. Reach out to family, friends, and other Asian/Asian-American communities who can relate to your struggles.
    - Examples: Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association, or Asian American Commission (http://www.aacommission.org/covid-19-resources/)
  - Process your feelings. When you experience racism, you can feel angry but also want to minimize or deny your feelings. You may also feel regret for not answering or doing something in return. But remember that during the event, your priority was your safety, and you did what you thought was best at the moment. Try not to judge your reactions. When you have returned to a safe environment, express your grief, anger, frustration, or any other feelings. Write it in a journal or call a friend. You need the time to heal from this trauma. Permit yourself to take care of you. If the emotions become to overwhelming, try these exercises

Grounding Exercise:
For use during a panic attack.
When you need to stay calm or anytime you feel "disconnected" from your body

Look around you. Identify + name:
5 things you see
4 things you feel
3 things you hear
2 things you smell
1 thing you taste

Belly Breathing:
Inhale Fully
Place your hands on your belly
Inhale as if blowing up a balloon in your belly
Feel your belly and lungs expand

Exhale Fully
Blow out all of the air in your belly & lungs slowly
Feel your belly deflate like a balloon
Repeat as need and notice how you feel

Loving Kindness Meditation
First, you turn your attention to yourself and say to yourself words like
May I be well and happy
May I be peaceful and calm
May I be protected from dangers
May my mind be free from hatred
May my heart be filled with love

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Managing and Coping:

Going through racial trauma, may shake your view of the world. Your initial assumption may be that the world is safe, and you are in control. Your experience may shatter these assumptions. To heal, you may have to rebuild your sense of safety, predictability, and control.

**Safety**
- Reduce unnecessary sources of toxic stress: such as set limits around television and social media viewing. As too much exposure, can increase fears.
- Take good preventative measurements.
- Provide a safe place for yourself to talk about your fears or any kind of emotion. Take a moment to notice what it is and how you can best to attend to it.
- Encourage healthy and safe coping strategies – self-compassion, mindfulness, meditation, relaxation exercise, cooking, reading, doing something you like/enjoy, etc.
- Try not to be alone outside, go on walks or store with family or friends (this includes virtual accompany), or prepare yourself for what might happen (steel yourself up mentally).
- If you are discriminated against, take a moment to think about what you might want to engage, remember to put your safety first.
- Racism and discrimination do chip away our sense of self-worth, please consciously and purposefully try to restore the pride and wholeness.

**Predictability**
- Provide a consistent/reasonable structure and routine that includes work and self-care as this helps to generate a sense of psychological safety.
- Create a designated space for work or self-care.
- Maintain social engagement, being creative about it.
- Stay organized in your own life, such as a to-do list or short term/feasible goals/expectations.
- Practice radical self-acceptance.
- Allow self to acknowledge what’s in your control vs. what’s not.
- Give people the benefit of the doubt, a situation like this might bring out the worst in people. This change is affecting everyone and can also impact one’s overall stress tolerance. Everyone is doing the best they can to get through this.

**Control**
- Promote a sense of agency and control by drawing two circles. On one circle, write aspects that are out of your control, and on another circle, write things that are within your control. Spend your energy changing what you have control.
- Dress for the social life you want can impact your mood.
- Take care of your body - sleep, eat, hydration, and exercise.
- Get some outdoor time for some fresh air and change of scenery, if not possible, even just opening the window, allowing fresh air to flow in can help with your spirits.
- Develop your self-care kits (art, play, music, dance, writing, etc.) or start a new hobby/skill that you always wanted to try (learning a new language, baking, playing an instrument, crocheting)
- Find humor through conversation, comedy, funny movies, etc. Add fun in different ways (Create blanket forts, channel your inner child)
- Engage in repetitive movement (knitting, coloring, painting, clay sculpting, jump roping, etc.) and left-right movement (running, drumming, skating, hopping), which help with self-soothing and maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress.
- Notice the good in the world, the helpers. It is essential to counter-balance the heavy information with hopeful information.
- Find purpose by helping others, big or small, through activate, donate, organize.

**CAMHS (Harvard University Counseling and Mental Health Services) Resources**

- Seek additional help. Individuals who feel an overwhelming worry or anxiety can seek additional professional mental health support.
  - Harvard Students: [CAMHS: 617-495-2042](tel:6174952042) or [HUHS Urgent Care: 617-495-5711](tel:6174955711)
  - Faculty and Staff: [Employment Assistance Program (EAP) - 877-327-4278](tel:8773274278)
- [CAMHS Workshops and Groups](https://camhs.huhs.harvard.edu/workshops-and-groups)
- [CPR for Mental Wellbeing](https://vimeo.com/showcase/6942447)
- [Managing Fears and Anxiety around Coronavirus](https://www.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/content/coronavirus_HUHS_managing_fears_A2%5B5%5D.pdf)
- [Academic Help](https://academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu)

**Other Resources**

- [Self-Compassion](http://www.self-compassion.org)
- [Mindfulness](http://www.mindfulness-solution.com)
- [Racial Self-Acceptance](https://medium.com/change-your-mind/practicing-radical-self-acceptance-1cf8502f1277)
- [Webinars for Wellness](http://www.mghstudentwellness.org/webinars)
- [Resources for Asian and AAPI individuals](http://www.aacommission.org/covid-19-resources/)
- [Resources to Relieve Anxiety](https://thecounselingteacher.com/2020/04/how-to-relieve-anxiety-during-times-of-uncertainty.html)
- Local outside services: [www.huhs.thrivingcampus.com](http://www.huhs.thrivingcampus.com)
- Services outside of the area, and within the USA: [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY Health Services**

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