WEBINAR

Black mental health matters

SPEAKERS

Kat Hall, LCSW
Emotional Wellness Manager
Harlem Children’s Zone
Meet today’s expert

Kat Hall, LCSW
Emotional Wellness Manager
Harlem Children’s Zone

☑️ Non-Profit Manager with years of both clinical and program development experience focused on improving mental health outcomes for the community at large.

☑️ Areas of focus include building organization wide initiatives to improve staff resilience and prevent burnout, improving public understanding of Mental Health and its impact, and creating healing spaces for racial trauma and the effects of various types of oppression.
Today we’ll explore

- Gaining an understanding and awareness of unique challenges to Black mental health since beginning of COVID
- Developing an understanding of contextual factors surrounding mental health care in the Black community
- Building an awareness of the signs of stress
- Developing some first steps in creating a more supportive atmosphere for Black staff members
LET’S REFLECT

Timeline of our Shared Experiences

DEC 2019
COVID-19 IN THE U.S.
First cases of COVID-19 were reported in the United States.

COVID-19 ABROAD
The first cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Wuhan, China.

MAY 2020
RACIAL JUSTICE MARCHES AND PROTESTS
The Black Lives Matter movement gains traction with protests in response to ongoing police brutality

MAY 2020
GEORGE FLOYD MURDER
George Floyd is murdered by one of four police officers who knelt on his neck for over 8 min.

NOV 2020
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
Biden won in an election that had the biggest voter turnout to date, but false claims of widespread voter fraud left the U.S. highly polarized.

FEB 2021
CAPITOL RIOT
The U.S. Capitol building is violently stormed in response to the electoral college certification from the 2020 presidential election.

TODAY
2020 IN REVIEW

Universal stressors

- Fear of contracting COVID
- Isolation
- Sadness
- Worry about the news
- Difficulty with focus
- Managing remote work
- Managing remote work WITH KIDS!
- Significant routine changes
- Challenges with sleep
- Challenges with eating
- Changes in activity level
- Difficulty accessing usual pleasant activities
- Changes in access to in person faith-based practices
- Uncertainty
Why Black mental health matters

- **One in three** Black Americans in need of mental health support actually receives it.
- When Black Americans receive mental health care, it is less likely to be guideline consistent/evidence-based.
- Black Americans are less likely to be included in research studies.
- Stigma – one study showed up to 63% of Black Americans see mental health as a sign of personal weakness.
- When Black Americans do seek out services, they have significant difficulty finding culturally supportive options.

(National Association of Mental Illness, 2021)
The Black community has been disproportionately affected by COVID in infection rate, hospitalizations, and death (Oppel et al. 2020).

Black families are highly represented in the essential worker category and lack choice of how to respond to fear of contamination (Kinder & Ford, 2020).

Racism in the media and on social media (Fowers & Wan, 2020).

Pressure at work to “show up” and “be responsive” during George Floyd protests (Jan, 2020).

Fear of being targets of retaliatory violence and police brutality (Fowers & Wan, 2020).
Stress

Stress is something that happens in a person's environment that is overwhelming and that the person believes will stretch their ability to cope in a healthy way (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003).

Crisis

Crisis causes an imbalance in an individual/system. A "hazardous event" disrupts the person/system's ability to stay balanced. This makes it difficult for them to cope in healthy ways and makes the person/system particularly vulnerable (Roberts, 1996).

Trauma

Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert (2011) define trauma as a scary situation that threatens a person's safety to the point that they are extremely afraid and their body and mind enter survival mode.

Chronic Stress/Allostatic Load

Allostasis is the brain and body's process for stabilizing itself in the face of stress and change (McEwen & Wingfield, 2003). While allostasis helps people survive, if it is used too much can cause significant health issues such as heart disease or death.

Racial Trauma

Trauma as a result of a specific event (direct or indirect) of racial discrimination. The mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes (Helms, J. E., Nicolas, G., & Green, C. E. (2010).
Stress is unique and each person may respond differently. The key is to notice if behavior has shifted significantly from baseline.

**THINGS YOU MAY NOTICE**

- Hyperarousal
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty with focus and staying engaged
- Irritability/Anger
- Increase in sick days
- Mood instability
- Poor work/life balance
- Distracted
- Judgment errors/tasks taking longer
Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach to Mitigate Consequences of Racial Stress and Trauma

Organizations can help improve resilience and create nurturing, predictable environments that counteract the consequences of racial trauma and stress; at HCZ we do this by adopting trauma-informed, healing centered practices.

**Empathy**
Radical empathy: Actively striving for awareness, to understand the feelings and experiences of others.

**Collective Perspective**
Healing is a process for everyone, and healing happens in the context of a supportive relationship.

**Distress Tolerance**
Distress Tolerance: the ability to manage actual or perceived distress. Modeling and allowing processing space.

**Resilience**
Resilience Promotion: Connection, MH Hygiene, Feelings of Mastery, Creation of control, low barrier access to services.
We often act before thinking, by building mindfulness and self-awareness, we can respond to momentary needs in a way that is fully and more supportive.

Reflective exercise – Take 2 minutes to think about when you felt overwhelmed at work from outside stressors, what did someone at work do that felt supportive? Can that be replicated and is there space to make that action more normal and ubiquitous for all?

Practice engaging empathy – receiving empathy from others reduces mental health symptomatology.

Notice your own mental health and seek support, it paradoxically can help others when you are well yourself.

Normalize and model positive ways of interacting with stress, create processes that enable periods of rest when needed.

Educate yourself
  - Attend a training – Like today!
  - Seek out opportunities to read/learn more about Black mental health from culturally appropriate sources (caveat – note your Black colleagues may not want to speak directly about this with non-Black staff members)

Setup system for continuously reviewing whether your org’s or team’s policies and procedures support mindful and culturally sensitive responses that are mindful of mental health.

Watch and Listen! Notice significant changes in behavior.
STRATEGIES

Resilience promotion + distress tolerance

- **Resilience Promotion:**
  - Connection, MH Hygiene, Feelings of Mastery, Creation of control, low barrier access to services.

- **Distress Tolerance:**
  - the ability to manage actual or perceived distress. Modeling and allowing processing space.

- **Name it** – Don’t avoid news about systemic issues. While you may not be able to process in the workplace, try to avoid downplaying or ignoring national news of injustice.

- **Consider allowing opportunities** for people to connect around these topics, engage consultants if necessary to run groups (sometimes EAPs are willing to do this) or for individual sessions.

- **Acknowledge safe spaces** may not truly be safe, many people will want to keep their feelings and thoughts out of work.

- **Slow down** – Sometimes this is impossible, but when it is allow a bit of extra flexibility in scheduling should people need time to do what they need for themselves.

- **Create and share lists of MH resources** across the company that are culturally supportive (eg, make sure there are providers that represent all different demographics)

- **Offer free or low cost options**
  - EAP programs and employee sponsored MH benefits
  - Community based resources

- **Include non-traditional options**
  - Meditation
  - Creative arts, music therapy, dance therapy, drama therapy
  - Massage
  - Exercise
  - Healthy eating
Don’t single anyone out!

Adding supportive options for mental health support should be made available and encouraged for everyone! This reduces stigma, and raises the mental health of the entire workplace which is good for all staff and leaders.
Questions?

PS- If you need to leave early, don’t forget to complete our exit survey for a chance to win our raffle.
Thank you!
Let’s stay in touch.

Kathryn Hall, LCSW
Emotional Wellness Manager
Harlem Children’s Zone
khall@hcz.org