



## ►► Conversations about Racism and Race-Based Violence: The Four “E”s

The recent civil unrest has left us all with strong and powerful emotions that affect our sense of personal safety and wellbeing. As a society, we have failed to eliminate the structural and systemic racism that is the root cause of health disparities and access to healthcare resources that disproportionately affect African-Americans and other people of color. Witnessing violent and traumatic events first-hand (in person) or second-hand through the media takes a serious toll on us all. Our personal racial identity frames our interactions with the world around us and affects our physical and mental health. Those living with mental health diagnoses may have exacerbations of their conditions and those who have never had symptoms before may be experiencing high levels of anxiety, distress or depression for the first time. Research shows that we all harbor [implicit biases](#) regardless of our ethnicity, background or racial identity. It is important to be aware of them and take steps to address them in order to engage in this work. The brief guide below, the Four “E”s, can serve as a starting point in how to approach discussions about racial injustices in a way that leads to reflection and healing.

### “Engage”

Having conversations about race, racial injustice and the toxic effects of race-based violence is not easy. Connecting with others around their psychological and emotional reactions to racially motivated violence starts with an invitation to talk. Begin with an open-ended question like “Can we talk about what’s been going on?” or “How are you dealing with all of this?” Giving someone an opportunity to share their feelings lets them know that you are interested in their wellbeing.

### “Empower”

For centuries, African-Americans and other oppressed groups have learned that speaking up about injustice and unfair treatment can put them at risk for negative consequences. This is because activism is often accompanied by dangerous costs, ranging from discrimination to imprisonment or even death. For this reason, it is important to establish early on in the conversation that it is safe to discuss topics of race and racial equity in the treatment setting. Let others know that you want to hear their thoughts and ideas about the role that racism has played in their life. Explain that you unequivocally condemn racism and discrimination in all forms and that you want to align with them to reduce the impact of these forces on their mental health.

### “Explore”

Once you have established rapport and a sense of safety, a journey through an individual’s emotions linked to race and racism can begin. While some will be very comfortable talking about the topic, others may not be ready yet. It is important to let the discussion proceed at a pace that feels right and comfortable for them and age appropriate. Be aware that elders and others who have experienced race-based trauma might find discussing the details too triggering or painful to revisit. Be respectful and proceed cautiously by allowing them to tell their story in their own words and in their own time. Ask about what they have experienced and how it has affected them. Avoid making assumptions or judgments about what you hear.

### “Empathize”

The most important therapeutic tool during difficult conversations like those about race is empathic listening. Whether as a therapist/counselor or simply a caring person invested in being helpful, it is crucial to gain a clear understanding of a person’s feelings and their situation. Listen actively and mirror back what you hear. Repeat and summarize their statements to ensure you have heard them correctly and to let them know you are tuned in and committed to understand. Communicate your understanding back in a way that demonstrates your support. “Talking about this must be difficult, but it’s important for me to hear it so that I understand how it’s affecting you.” Don’t be afraid to share your own emotions when appropriate.

**For those who are experiencing anger, anxiety, fear, and/or depression or if your symptoms have worsened or become unmanageable as a result of civil unrest the LACDMH is available to help 24/7 at 1-800-854-7771 or text “LA” to 741741.**