



## Student and Community Counseling Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

### Violence Directed at the Black Community

We are being inundated with news coverage of the most recent, tragic incidents of violence directed toward black citizens in our country, and the subsequent protests being held across the nation. The racism is real, and has yet again led to the taking of lives. Some police officers, and some white individuals feel empowered to do what they wish, dehumanizing communities and committing murder. This has happened with such regularity, that there would seem to be a danger of becoming anesthetized to this. As with other past incidents, we first want to acknowledge the pain and devastation caused by these tragedies to the victims and families of this violence, and to the communities impacted.

As a counseling service, it is our responsibility to address the impact of negative experiences on individual psychological lives. This is our job and avocation. We understand the science of what can lead to wellness, or take it away, and rely on evidence-based practices. Our profession has developed codes of ethics that guide how we engage those we assist, and what our responsibilities are in promoting health.

As part of this community, state, nation and world, we do not take for granted, nor forfeit our right to speak out against those who would perpetrate racial violence, and threaten those principles and ideals of equality, freedom and justice that we as a nation, hold dear. We condemn without equivocation, acts of racial bigotry and violence, and the harm that this does to the individuals, families, and communities targeted.

Racism is by definition, a dehumanizing action. It strives to make race the essential explanation for difficulties "suffered" by the racist. For those who have experienced, personally or via media reports, racist interactions and violence, reactions will vary by individual, but almost all are impacted in some form.

Feeling a certain level of mystification is a frequent part of being in a community that has been impacted by a hate crime. It is critical that we call it what it is. Having strong reactions to such events makes sense, is not pathological, and can be shared with many other people. What we are all feeling is not about a personal weakness; this is about a community and political experience that may be felt on a deeply personal level.

When racial violence is perpetrated, it can negatively impact those not directly involved; those who witness, and/or who themselves have experienced racial trauma.

A person's sense of safety can be negatively impacted, and lead to a myriad of emotions. For members of some communities, this type of trauma has deep, historical and contemporary underpinnings. The impact of violence and oppression can be immediate for some, and more remote for others. It is both a personal and collective experience.

For some, talking about the event, acknowledging the feelings, and focusing on helping others can assist with reducing the negative emotional impact of violence. As a collective experience, political activism with others; seeking allies; and understanding the institutional-nature of racism can greatly reduce some of the all-too-common despair that can result from feeling "inconsequential". Often, seeking support from friends and loved ones can be important in helping one navigate the reactions to violence. Talking with a mental health professional can also be a useful step in moving through these reactions.

With the fall semester approaching, we welcome students returning or coming here for the first time. We reiterate the university's value and commitment to creating an environment where different perspectives are encouraged; and where we respect and value each other's experiences. Disagreement is inevitable...but hate and violence have no place.

We would like to reaffirm our role as being a supportive resource to the CU Denver community. If you have questions and/or wish to speak to a counselor, you can do so by calling the Student and Community Counseling Center (303/315-7270).