

# Back to School: Social Work & Black Youth



## Black youth are contemplating suicide now, more than ever. We need to respond.

With the new school year approaching, more readjustments, and school re-openings, we hope to equip Social Workers with some tools to better serve those most impacted during these times. This practice brief outlines considerations and resources for school-based providers.

## The Issue

In the U.S., the suicide rates for Black children have been increasing, while the rates for White children have been decreasing. [sources noted below]

- 1 in 3 Black families report cancelled classes, compared to 1 in 4 white families. Two in 3 Black families report losing employment income, compared to 50% of white families.\*
- Families of color are twice as likely to be struggling with housing costs.\*
- Most children who died from COVID in 2020 were children of color. 14% of children in the U.S. are Black, yet they account for 21% of COVID child deaths for which race is known.\*
- 28% of Black families said they sometimes or often don't have enough food to eat, compared to 13% of white families.\*

## The Impact

A history of white supremacy and ongoing acts of racism, institutional maltreatment, and race-based violence have all contributed to the conditions that actively foster harms to Black children and families.

**COVID-19 is killing people of African ancestry at rates two times higher than White people.\***

Black or African American individuals have had the highest average change over the past year for **anxiety and depression**. In the U.S., 16% of Black Americans reported struggling with mental health issues this past year.\*

## Social Workers need to respond

There is a call for social workers to respond, to be ready, to be antiracist, and to lead the ways in which our communities can heal in our movement forward towards equity and justice. Our schools are reopening and that means we have an opportunity reconnect, reimagine, and to heal collectively.

"We need to develop the **grace** and **space** to practice tolerance as we hear one another's stories that are different than our own."

Dr. Allen Lipscomb,  
PsyD, LCSW

Hold space for students of African descent. Be a non-judgmental listener who provides emotional and mental support. Provide an open ear and allow students to feel what they are feeling. Be validating and present.

Honor the whole child, whole family, and whole community. Ask questions and name intersectionality and our relevant situations of oppression and injustice. Our questions and conversations should never be a-contextual.

Hold the responsibility of educating yourself about antiracism, anti-Blackness, and how you hold privilege. Consult as necessary. Do not ask your Black students to bear this burden to teach.

Name the pandemic. And talk about race and racism. Let youth guide you in the ways that they have experienced the past year. Allowing the space for these conversations allows children to deepen their understanding of racism and develop a vision for what it means justice in their world.

## Be a part of the solution

Our clients rely on us to not only be a source of support but to be their advocates to help transform and strengthen access and equity of care across systems.

When you see racism and/or discrimination, intervene. You may witness organizational policies that are discriminatory, inconsistencies in the ways students are punished, or hear about racialized bullying. We recognize that individuals are positioned differently in their roles, but complicity perpetuates the problem. Some may hold power or privilege while others may not. We honor your experience and offer you tools for pushing reform regardless of where you sit. You can write letters to your school administrators, start petitions, and facilitate meetings with your local elected officials. To receive some more tailored support to guide your advocacy reach out to NASW-CA at [membership@naswca.org](mailto:membership@naswca.org).

*Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people. NASW Code of Ethics*



## We are here to support you

We want to resource you to succeed! Here are some resources for you to use and some tools for local advocacy for schools and government officials to invest in the mental health of Black students and for the investment in school social work.

### Advocate for health equity

[The Color of COVID is Black](#)  
[California Black Health Network](#)  
[Each Mind Matters](#)

### Advocate for more school social workers

[Join the national campaign](#)  
[Write a letter to your local news media, administrator, or superintendent](#)

### Resources:

- ✓ [COVID-19 resources for school social workers](#)
- ✓ [Chill Spot Radio: A Podcast on mental health for people of color](#)
- ✓ [The Color of COVID is Black](#)
- ✓ [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- ✓ [Mental Health America](#)

The [California Association of School Social Workers](#) and the [National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter](#) thank all our partners who inspire and motivate us to continue this critical work in school.

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Sources:

- DC 2019 report & "Age-Related Racial Disparity in Suicide Rates Among US Youths from 2001 through 2015" (2018) *Journal of American Medical Association*
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed June 22, 2021)
- <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>
- <https://mhanational.org/issues/mental-health-america-printed-reports>

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