

May 31, 2020

Dear Emory Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Community,

It is with deep sorrow, pain, and anger that once again, we are responding to senseless killings of innocent African Americans who have been targeted because of their race. These horrific injustices, along with the multitude of others, strikes our core, our sense of being, our yearning for displays of humanity and love. We are inundated with the reality of blatant hate and racism as it is being shared on every media platform. African Americans are afraid to go almost anywhere and sometimes even to be in their own homes. African Americans are frightened beyond belief when their children are not in their sight, as they dread the day they hear their child call “Momma” as they are at the brink of death.

As we write this statement, we are grieved, we are tired, and most of all, we are disheartened. The frustration, disappointment, and anger of American citizens have resulted in many protests taking place across our country, including our city. We implore members of the Emory community to consider and reflect on the impassioned cause and catalyst for the many peaceful protests across the country this past weekend. We also encourage our community, especially those with privilege to spare, to stand in solidarity with peaceful protest.

We are aware that some protests have escalated to violence. While we do not promote violence in any form, we certainly understand how feelings of hopelessness, precipitated by senseless acts of violence without justice or acknowledgement, in the face of rising tensions, may incite such behavior. So many feel dispirited, disregarded, and disempowered. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Riots are the language of the unheard.” It is important to us that everyone remembers that Emory is a community of diverse individuals who continually strive to hear each other, act in support of one another, and in times like these, come together to uplift one another. We united in the face of the COVID – 19 pandemic. Now we have to be intentional and unite once again to fight an equally insidious and destructive agent racism.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/05/racism-pandemic>.

Continuing to witness repeated injustices that occur in our nation and in our neighborhood is difficult. On Monday, May 25th, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 46-year-old George Floyd was being detained by police for a nonviolent charge. The video taken by bystanders depicted him handcuffed on the ground surrounded by police with an officer placing his knee in the back of Mr. Floyd’s head and neck. He can be heard crying “I’m about to die”, “I can’t breathe”, “Momma”, “My stomach hurts, my neck hurts, everything hurts”, and “Please, the knee in my neck, I can’t breathe, sir.” The incident resulted in Mr. Floyd’s death.

A little more than two months earlier on March 13th in Louisville, Kentucky, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old EMT was asleep in her bed with her boyfriend Kenneth Walker, when they awoke to loud banging and a burst into her apartment. According to the

family's lawsuit, Mr. Walker called 911 and shot at what he thought were intruders. The Washington Post reports that Ms. Taylor was shot eight times and killed by plainclothes officers executing a "no-knock" search warrant looking for a man who did not live in her apartment and who was already in police custody. We are now left to deal with these tragedies without having fully grasped the unconscionable murder of Auhmad Arbery just a short time before. These repeated racist-related horrors continually re-traumatize the African American community and result in a heavy psychological and physical toll. Allies are experiencing vicarious trauma as well.

For too long, America has failed to hear its citizens' demand for racial justice. For too long, America has failed to comprehensively act in response to their Black and Brown citizens' suffering under racialized state violence. We, in Emory's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, believe that America is a country in which all people have the right to feel safe, respected, and accepted. Indeed, the 14th Amendment guarantees equal protection of the laws for everyone. Regardless of our political leanings or our race or ethnicity, we all want a more just and equitable world for our children, one in which everyone is treated with dignity and fairness and can achieve their full potential.

For members of our community impacted most personally by this tragedy, we empathize with your grief and your outrage, and will stand with and for you. Should you find yourself really struggling, understandably so, during this time, you may find the following helpful.

- Stay true to your core values while practicing self-care
- Prioritize taking care of yourself during these difficult times, and remain aligned with what matters most to you
- Define what you would rather not become, as it is easy to drift away from your values when the crowd is angry and emotions run high
- Connect with family, friends, and other community support people
- Talk candidly about your feelings
- Allow yourself to do something you enjoy
- Limit your exposure to the continuous news coverage and viral videos
- Protect your energy. Do not feel that you must respond to requests, demands or explanations of why there is anger, fear, and frustration personally or professionally.

The DISC stands in unity with the African American community and the families of Mr. Floyd, Ms. Taylor, Mr. Arbery, and others who have senselessly lost their lives to acts of hate and violence. Racism is unacceptable. In the words of Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, "Being Black in America should not be a death sentence." Black Americans deserve lives free of harassment and racial profiling. Just like all Americans and any human being on this earth, they deserve a life replete with equity and unlimited possibility.

As we at Emory, including in our department, work to dismantle unfair and invalidating systems, we must voice our pain and outrage against all bigotry, violence, and hate. We

encourage everyone in our community to take positive action to confront anti-black bias, racial injustice, and discrimination in all of its forms. Stand up and speak out in ways that are visible and that allow respectful, meaningful conversation. Show your love for your fellow citizens and your local community. Let's all work toward sustainable change, further healing, and improved mental health. Together, we must strive to create a reality where everyone can live in peace and safety with equal access to liberty and justice for all.

Resources:

- Powerful perspective in the time of COVID by our colleague Kimberly Manning, MD, Emory Department of Medicine – <http://www.gradydoctor.com/2020/05/perspective-in-time-of-covid.html>
- Blog by members of the Atlanta Behavioral Health Advocates, Naadira Upshaw, PsyD, Emory Department of Pediatrics and Douglas Lewis, PsyD, Emory Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/outside-the-box/202005/modern-day-public-lynching>
- Message to White allies - <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/05/9841376/black-trauma-george-floyd-dear-white-people>
- OpEd by Kareem Abdul Jabbar- <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-05-30/dont-understand-the-protests-what-youre-seeing-is-people-pushed-to-the-edge>
- [Healthcare worker statement - https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSef_I6Eoc6KksCqPjkFjATQ-3BrrSAxSxK1Ull8-SuG2ltBxA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSef_I6Eoc6KksCqPjkFjATQ-3BrrSAxSxK1Ull8-SuG2ltBxA/viewform)
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With Hope for a Future without Racism and one the Cherishes our Rich Diversity,
DISC Members



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