



Back to
School

The
Steve
Fund

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOR, THEIR FAMILIES, AND EDUCATORS

Coping with Common Stressors Affecting Young People of Color



Students of color are returning to campus amid a flood of news, social inequities, and experiences that impact their mental health and ability to cope with the opportunities and challenges of going back to school. Mental health experts at the Steve Fund have gathered information and resources related to key concerns facing young people of color. For information and resources, please see the STEVE FUND BACK-TO-SCHOOL TOOLKIT at stevefund.org/youthhealingspace.

MONKEYPOX

After dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic for over two years, monkeypox has been declared an international public health emergency. In an effort to reduce stress surrounding this disease, it is important to gather factual information about it.

Monkeypox is a disease caused by a virus. People with this illness may experience flu-like symptoms and most develop a rash in the genital area or anus or in other areas of the body including hands, feet, face, or mouth. These symptoms usually start within three weeks of being exposed to the virus. Monkeypox is contagious from the time symptoms begin until the rash has healed. The duration of the illness is usually 2–4 weeks.

If you notice a new or unexplained rash, it is important to avoid close contact including physical intimacy until you are evaluated by a healthcare professional. Be sure to wear a mask when you visit a doctor's office or clinic

HERE ARE SOME KEY WAYS TO PREVENT MONKEYPOX:

1. Avoid close, skin-to-skin contact with people who have a rash that looks like monkeypox.
2. Protect yourself by not touching the rash or scabs or kissing, cuddling, or having sex with a person with monkeypox.
3. Avoid contact with items a person with monkeypox has touched such as eating utensils, cups, bedding, towels, or clothing.
4. Use basic hygiene such as washing your hands often with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand-sanitizer. This is important to do before eating or touching your face and after you use the bathroom.

- cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/prevention/protect-yourself.html
- publichealth.jhu.edu/2022/what-you-need-to-know-about-monkeypox
- For information on lowering risk of monkeypox during sex or social gatherings, visit:
cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/sexualhealth/index.html

CHANGES TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CHOICE

The overturn of Roe v. Wade represents a change to reproductive health care access, which has been a right our country has taken for granted for half a century. Access to health care, including reproductive health care, is a social determinant of mental health, which when impeded, can lead to reduced healthcare options, psychological distress, and poor health outcomes. Intersectionality associated with being a woman, a person of color, and experiencing economic distress, creates multi-layered challenges related to reproductive health.

Systemic inequities and harsh social policies have had a disproportionate impact on women of color who have experienced disparate levels of maternal mortality. Socioeconomic challenges have increased the risk of unwanted pregnancies that may result in children of color ending up in the foster care system. Women of color have high rates of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and assault that has made access to a full range of reproductive healthcare options necessary. The current changes in access in some states to reproductive health care has created a public health emergency.

Women of color, and all women, should have the opportunity to exercise their personal choice for reproductive health and well-being. Whatever this choice may be, it is imperative that women have access to an array of resources to prevent unwanted pregnancies in order to avoid having to confront the legal consequences and healthcare challenges in states that have limited the range of reproductive health care options.

During this time of change, it is important to stay calm, and gather information from trusted sources. Some people find it helpful to participate in demonstrations to make their voice heard and contribute to efforts to uphold reproductive health choices.

For more information please visit

- hhs.gov/about/news/2022/06/25/know-your-rights-reproductive-health-care.html
- cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/womensrh/index.htm

SHOOTINGS AND VIOLENCE

The U.S. is one of the most violent countries in the world and has experienced a succession of mass shootings in schools, churches, supermarkets, parades, and other places where people gather. In addition to the anger, sadness, and grief over the senseless loss of life of innocent people, this form of terrorism can heighten stress for everyday people. No less disturbing is the violence in communities nationwide, where young people die every week due to homicide.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO LOWER OUR STRESS AND ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH SHOOTINGS?

We can be prepared by:

1. Reminding ourselves that the odds are low that we will be involved in a shooting in our lifetime
2. Avoiding thinking in extremes and engaging in self-talk that focuses on threats being everywhere or that nothing can be done about it
3. Obtaining reliable information from trusted media
4. Staying away from public areas that credible sources have identified as being at high risk for violence
5. Saying something to authorities if we see suspicious activity
6. Knowing emergency response procedures at school or work
7. Developing a home emergency response plan.

DURING A SHOOTING EVENT, REMEMBER TO RUN, HIDE, FIGHT IN THAT ORDER:

1. Run from the area if you can do so safely
2. If it is not safe to run, hide from the shooter in locked spaces if available, and run whenever possible
3. Fight the shooter as a last resort with whatever objects you can find

See the following resources for more details about how to prepare, respond, and cope with the stress of mass shootings:

- cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/preparing-responding-and-copeing-with-the-stress-of-mass-shootings
- cisa.gov/private-citizen
- www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/terrorism-and-violence

LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

Death and loss are difficult topics to discuss, and resources to support both young people and those who educate them are limited. Since COVID-19 emerged, young people of color and their families have been disproportionately impacted by loss associated with economic factors and our nation's social and racial justice reckoning. Losing a friend or family member as a result of violence has occurred with increased frequency, leaving individuals and community members struggling to find ways to cope and heal. Now more than ever, the difficult topics of death and loss must be brought to the forefront so we can best support our nation's young people of color to prepare for loss and heal from it.

For children who have lost a parent, bereavement is considered an especially challenging experience, and the topic is often overlooked. It is important to understand that loss happens to everyone and that feelings of grief are a normal response. Allowing oneself to experience grief, learn the meaning of the words associated with the various feelings that arise, and practice self-care can strengthen a person's mental health and their resilience, which can help them live overall healthier lives. When grief persists and depression occurs, seeking help from a professional is a step toward improving emotional well-being.

Peers talking with peers can often offer valuable comfort to young people experiencing loss, whether from natural causes or in the tragic event of homicide or terrorist attack. Friends and other loved ones can use their own words and simply be present for each other. By encouraging conversations within a family, members can heal together and incorporate healthy responses to future crises. Language needs to be concrete. Acceptance and encouragement to get professional support if needed can provide assurance that a sense of normalcy can be achieved.

See below resources with helpful information about loss and bereavement:

- newyorklife.com/foundation/bereavement-support
- The Grief Sensitive Schools Initiative: grievingstudents.org/gssi/
- ghpsychiatry.org/books/ • schoolcrisiscenter.org/resources/talking-kids-about-tragedies/

About the Steve Fund

The Steve Fund is the nation's leading organization focused on supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color. We work with colleges and universities, nonprofits, researchers, mental health experts, families, and young people to promote programs and strategies that build understanding and assistance for the mental and emotional health of young people of color