

# IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Racial Justice Series  
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## TRAUMA

SAMHSA describes individual **trauma** as resulting from "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

## VICARIOUS TRAUMA

**Vicarious trauma** refers to the secondary exposure of trauma. In other words, someone can experience symptoms of trauma by witnessing or being indirectly involved in a traumatic event (i.e., by seeing an event on TV or hearing a story of a trauma survivor).

## TRIGGERS

A **trigger** is something (usually a sensory stimulus, such as hearing or seeing something) that reminds someone of a traumatic event.

## RACISM

According to Merriam-Webster, **racism** is:

1. a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
2. the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another
3. a political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principles

## RACIAL TRAUMA

**Racial trauma** is experienced by BIPOC and is trauma caused by acts of racism, whether big (i.e., hate crimes) or a build-up of small events (i.e., microaggressions).

## MICROAGGRESSIONS

**Microaggressions** are "everyday insults, indignities and demeaning messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being sent to them.... at an unconscious level [white people] have biased thoughts, attitudes and feelings that harm people of color."  
-Dr. Derald Wing Sue

## WEATHERING

Coined by Dr. Arline Geronimus, a public health researcher, **weathering** is a metaphor used to describe the allostatic load (i.e., the collective impact of stress on the body over time due to stress) among BIPOC. In other words, it is the physical deterioration BIPOC experience due to the daily stress of systemic racism.

## INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

**Intergenerational trauma** is trauma carried from one generation to the next within a family system. This passing on of trauma may occur through behaviors of people in the previous generations who may have not yet healed from their own trauma.

## WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

**White supremacy culture** is the "idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions."  
--Dismantling Racism Works

## ANTI-RACISM

**Anti-racism** is a step beyond "not being racist," whereby white people take deliberate, consistent action toward helping dismantle racism at both a personal and systemic level. Anti-racism for BIPOC may look like working toward a deeper understanding of one's own internalized racism and recognizing it in other BIPOC.

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