



North End
**COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE**

Mental  Health
Foundation
of Nova Scotia

Mental Health Toolkit for Black Youth in Nova Scotia

*Empowering Wellness Across
Diverse Black Communities*

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Understanding Mental Health</u>	4
What is Mental Health?	5
What Does it Mean to Have Good Mental Health?	6
Am I Okay? A Mental Health Check-In	8
Talking to Parents About Mental Health	12
Common Mental Health Disorders	15
Anxiety	15
Depression	16
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	17
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	18
Eating Disorders	19
Learning Disorders	20
Autism Spectrum Disorders	21
<u>Unique Challenges Faced by Black Youth</u>	22
Racism and Discrimination	23
Understanding Microaggressions	24
How to Respond to Racism & Microaggressions	26
Understanding Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) & Its Impact on Black Youth in Nova Scotia	27
Identity Formation, Intersectionality and Cultural Contexts in Nova Scotia	30
Colourism	32
Lack of Cultural Competence/Safety/Humility in Mental Health Care	34
Lack of Representation in Mental Health Care	35
Substance Use and Your Mental Health: What You Need to Know	36
Additional Resources	38
Specific Mental Health Challenges & Coping Strategies	39

What Happens in Therapy?	40
Coping with Anxiety	43
Coping with Depression	44
Coping with Trauma & Racial Trauma	45
Coping with Grief & Loss	46
General Strategies for Mental Well-being	47
1. Engage in Cultural and Community Activities in Culturally Affirming Spaces	48
2. Seek Culturally Competent Professional Mental Health Services	49
3. Practice Creative Expression	50
4. Develop Critical Consciousness Individually and in Groups	51
5. Develop Healthy Lifestyle Habits	52
6. Utilize Storytelling and Literature	53
7. Inspirational Figures: Black Celebrities Sharing Their Journeys	54
8. Engage in Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques	55
9. Establish Healthy Boundaries	56
10. Utilize Crisis and Support Helplines	57
Conclusion	58
Appendix	59
Appendix A	60
Appendix B	64

Mental Health Toolkit for Black Youth in Nova Scotia

Empowering Wellness Across Diverse Black Communities

Introduction

Navigating adolescence presents unique challenges, and for Black youth in Nova Scotia, these challenges can be compounded by cultural nuances, systemic factors, and diverse backgrounds. This toolkit aims to provide comprehensive resources, insights, and support tailored to African Nova Scotian youth, as well as those from African and Caribbean immigrant communities.

Navigating mental health can be challenging, especially when cultural factors and societal pressures come into play. This guide aims to provide Black youth in Nova Scotia with a comprehensive understanding of various mental health disorders, their symptoms, and avenues for seeking help. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is a vital step toward overall well-being.

Understanding Mental Health

- **Definition:** Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how we think, feel, and act.
- **Importance:** Recognizing the significance of mental health is crucial for personal development, academic success, and overall quality of life.



What is Mental Health?

Mental health is all about how you think, feel, and handle life's ups and downs. Just like your physical health, your mental health affects everything—how you deal with stress, connect with others, and make decisions.

For Black youth, mental health can feel complicated. You might hear people say things like:

- ◆ *“Just pray about it.”*
- ◆ *“Toughen up, we’ve been through worse.”*
- ◆ *“Black people don’t get depressed.”*

But the truth is, **mental health struggles can happen to anyone**—and taking care of your mind is just as important as taking care of your body.

Why Does Mental Health Matter?

When your mental health is in a good place, you:

- ✓ Feel more in control of your emotions
- ✓ Have energy to do the things you enjoy
- ✓ Handle stress in healthy ways
- ✓ Build better relationships with friends and family

When it's struggling, you might:

- ✗ Feel down or unmotivated all the time
- ✗ Have trouble focusing in school
- ✗ Get angry or irritated more easily
- ✗ Feel disconnected from the people around you

What Does it Mean to Have Good Mental Health?

Mental health or mental well-being is about more than just “not feeling sad” or “not being anxious.” It’s about feeling **balanced, heard, and whole**—in your mind, heart, and spirit. It means having the tools and support to face life’s ups and downs, and knowing that you don’t have to carry everything by yourself.

For Black youth in Nova Scotia, mental well-being includes the strength that comes from **community, culture, and identity**. It’s knowing who you are, where you come from, and knowing that your story matters. It’s being able to show up as your full self—whether that’s in your family, your friend group, your school, your church, or wherever you move in the world.

Mental Well-Being Looks Like...

- Feeling safe to express your real emotions, not just what you think people expect from you
- Knowing it’s okay to ask for help without feeling weak or judged
- Having energy and motivation to do the things that matter to you
- Feeling connected—to yourself, your community, your faith, your ancestors, and your future
- Being able to bounce back after something hard happens
- Taking care of your mind the same way you take care of your body, hair, or style
- Making space for joy, laughter, rest, and creativity
- Speaking kindly to yourself, even on your worst days

Mental Health
MATTERS

It Doesn't Mean You're Happy All the Time

Being well doesn't mean you won't have bad days. Everyone gets tired, stressed, or overwhelmed. Mental well-being means **you have ways to cope**, people who care, and the **belief that things can get better**.

You Deserve to Feel Well

Mental well-being is for *you*—not just for adults, or celebrities, or people with a certain look or lifestyle. Your mind, your peace, and your happiness matter. You deserve rest, love, healing, and joy. And no matter where you are in your journey, it's okay to start small and take it one step at a time.



Am I Okay? A Mental Health Check-In

Sometimes you just don't feel like yourself—and that's okay. Life can get heavy. This check-in is here to help you figure out what you might be feeling and why. It's not a diagnosis—just a starting point. Answer each question with a “Yes” or “No” to help you decide whether it's time to talk to someone you trust.

1. Have You Been Feeling Down or Numb Lately?

(Depression-related prompts)

- Do you feel sad, empty, or numb even when good things happen?
- Have you stopped enjoying things you used to love—music, sports, games, church, time with friends?
- Do you wake up tired, even when you've had enough sleep?
- Have you been eating way more or way less than usual?
- Do you feel like you're just “going through the motions” or faking a smile to get through the day?
- Do you sometimes wish you could just disappear or feel like you don't matter?

If you said “Yes” to a few of these... you might be feeling signs of depression. It's more common than you think—and it doesn't mean you're weak. You deserve support and healing.

2. Do You Worry a Lot or Feel on Edge?

(Anxiety-related prompts)

- Do you often feel nervous, even when nothing's really wrong?
- Do you feel like your mind won't stop racing—especially at night?
- Do you avoid people, school, or situations because you feel overwhelmed?
- Do you feel pressure to be “perfect” or to never mess up?
- Does your heart race or your body feel tight when you're stressed?
- Do you overthink things a lot, especially what others think about you?

If you said “Yes” to some of these... you could be dealing with anxiety. You’re not alone—and it’s okay to ask for help.

3. Have You Been Through Something That Still Hurts?

(Trauma-related prompts)

- Have you seen or experienced something scary, violent, or traumatic that you can’t forget?
- Do you get flashbacks, panic attacks, or nightmares?
- Do you avoid places, people, or things that remind you of what happened?
- Do you get angry or shut down without really knowing why?
- Do you always feel like you have to be “on guard” or ready for something bad?

If these sound familiar... you might be carrying trauma—and that’s a heavy load. Healing is possible, and you don’t have to carry it alone.

4. Do You Struggle to Stay Focused or Sit Still?

(ADHD-related prompts)

- Do you find it hard to focus in class or when someone is talking?
- Do you start tasks but get distracted or bored before finishing?
- Do you lose or forget things a lot—like your phone, homework, or keys?
- Do you feel restless, like you always need to move or do something?
- Do you say or do things impulsively and regret them later?

If you said “Yes” to a few of these... you might be dealing with ADHD. It’s not just a “school” issue—it’s real, and there are tools and strategies that can help.

5. Do You Feel Like You're on an Emotional Rollercoaster?

(Bipolar-related prompts)

- Do you go through extreme highs and lows—feeling on top of the world one moment and then deeply low?
- Do you have bursts of energy or big ideas that you can't sit still with?
- Do you sometimes not sleep much but still feel full of energy?
- Do people say your moods change quickly or dramatically?
- Do you make big plans or take risks, then regret them?

If you relate to this... you might be showing signs of bipolar disorder. You're not “too much”—your brain just needs balance and care.

6. Do You Ever Hurt Yourself to Cope?

(Self-harm prompts)

- Do you hurt yourself (cutting, hitting, burning) to deal with emotional pain?
- Do you hide injuries or scars and feel ashamed of them?
- Do you feel a temporary “relief,” but worse afterward?
- Do you feel like you have no other way to express how bad things are?

If this sounds like you... please know you are not alone, and you don't have to hurt to heal. There are safer ways to cope—and people who care.

7. Do You Struggle With Eating or Body Image?

(Eating disorder-related prompts)

- Do you skip meals or try to control how much you eat to change your body?
- Do you eat a lot in one sitting and feel out of control?
- Do you feel guilty or ashamed after eating?
- Are you overly focused on weight, food, or body image?

If you said “Yes”... you could be struggling with an eating disorder. This is about more than food—it's about how you see yourself. You deserve to feel good in your body.

What Now?

If you answered “Yes” to a few questions in one or more sections:

- Take a breath. You’re not broken, and you’re not alone.
- Talk to someone you trust—a parent, older sibling, youth leader, pastor, teacher, or guidance counselor.
- Write down how you feel if talking is hard. Share that note or message with someone who cares.
- Reach out for help—there are mental health resources made for Black youth who get it.

You Deserve to Feel Good. You Deserve to Be Heard.

Being strong doesn’t mean suffering in silence. Asking for help is strength. Healing is for you, too.



Talking to Parents About Mental Health

Opening up to parents about mental health struggles can be tough—especially in Black communities where cultural, generational, and religious differences can make these conversations even harder. Many Black youth in Nova Scotia face unique challenges when trying to express their feelings, often feeling unheard or misunderstood. Here’s what you might be up against—and how to cope.

1. Stigma & Silence Around Mental Health

In many Black households, mental health struggles are *not openly* discussed. Some parents may:

- See mental health challenges as a *weakness* or something to hide.
- Believe that talking about anxiety or depression will bring *shame* to the family.
- Dismiss symptoms with phrases like “*You’re just overthinking*” or “*It’s all in your head.*”

Why this happens:

- Older generations often *had to endure hardship* without support, so they expect the same resilience.
- Mental health awareness wasn’t as common when they were growing up, so they may not recognize signs of depression or anxiety.

2. “Just Pray About It” or “Be Strong”

A common response from parents (especially in religious households) is:

- “God will handle it, just pray more.”*
- “Back in my day, we toughed it out—you can too.”

While faith can be a source of comfort, *mental health is also medical*. Just like you wouldn’t ignore a broken leg, you shouldn’t have to ignore depression, anxiety, or trauma. You can pray and seek professional support at the same time.

3. Fear of Being Judged or Misunderstood

Some Black youth worry that if they speak up:

- Their parents will *think they're "crazy" or exaggerating*.
- They'll be *compared to others (Look at your cousin, they're fine!)*.
- Their struggles will be *blamed on phones, laziness, or lack of faith*.

4. Lack of Culturally Safe Mental Health Knowledge

Many Black families in Nova Scotia may not have access to mental health resources that understand *racial trauma, systemic discrimination, or the unique pressures of being Black in a predominantly white province*. This makes it harder for parents to recognize when their child needs help.



How to Cope & Navigate These Conversations

Even if your parents don't fully understand at first, there are ways to express yourself and seek support.

1. Choose the Right Time & Approach

- *Pick a calm moment*—not during an argument or when they're stressed.
- Use examples they relate to:
 - Remember when [family member] was sick and needed a doctor? My mind feels sick right now.
- Just like high blood pressure needs treatment, so does anxiety.

2. Bring in Trusted Adults or Resources

- If your parents don't get it at first, *ask a relative, pastor, or community leader* to help explain.
- Show them *articles or videos* by Black mental health advocates (like “The Steve Fund” or “Black Mental Health Canada”).

3. Find Alternative Support

If talking to parents isn't working right now:

- Reach out to a school counselor (ask if they have experience with Black youth).
- Join a youth group
- Text or call a helpline (Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868, Black Youth Helpline: 1-833-294-8650).

4. Practice Self-Care & Set Boundaries

- If your parents dismiss your feelings, *don't internalize it*—their reaction is about *their* experiences, not your worth.
- *Journal, meditate, or talk to friends* who get it.
- If needed, *limit conversations* that make you feel worse and focus on people who support you.

Remember: Your Feelings Are Valid

Just because your parents don't fully understand yet *doesn't mean your pain isn't real*. Many Black youth struggle with this, but *you deserve help*. Keep advocating for yourself—whether through small steps with family or by finding support elsewhere. You're not alone.



Common Mental Health Disorders

1. Anxiety Disorders

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety involves persistent feelings of worry or fear that interfere with daily activities.

Common Labels:

- Stress
- Nervousness
- Being "on edge"

Symptoms:

- Restlessness or feeling wound-up
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbances



Diagnosis:

- A family doctor can conduct an initial assessment and may refer to a psychologist or psychiatrist for specialized evaluation.



2. Depression

What is Depression?

Depression is characterized by persistent sadness and a lack of interest in activities once enjoyed.

Common Labels:

- Feeling down
- Burnout
- Laziness

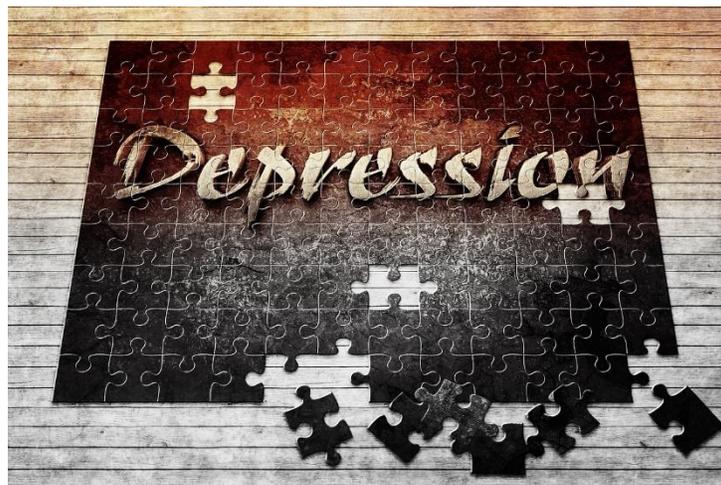
Symptoms:

- Persistent sad or empty mood
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide



Diagnosis:

- Screening by a family doctor, followed by possible referral to mental health professionals.



3. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

What is PTSD?

PTSD can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event.

Common Labels:

- Always in fight mode
- Emotional numbness
- Bad memories

Symptoms:

- Flashbacks or intrusive memories
- Nightmares
- Severe anxiety
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- Hyperarousal (being easily startled)

Diagnosis:

- Assessment by a psychologist or psychiatrist specializing in trauma.

4. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What is ADHD?

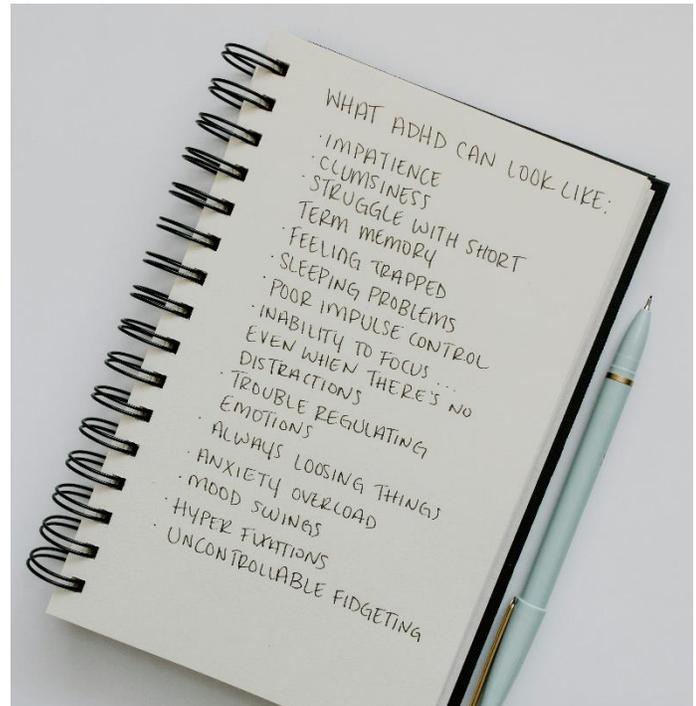
ADHD involves patterns of inattention and/or hyperactive-impulsive behavior.

Common Labels:

- Hyperactivity
- Daydreaming
- Acting out

Symptoms:

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Impulsivity
- Fidgeting or restlessness
- Difficulty organizing and/or finishing tasks
- Forgetfulness



Diagnosis:

- **Psychological testing:** Comprehensive evaluation by a psychologist or psychiatrist, often involving input from teachers and parents.

5. Eating Disorders

What are Eating Disorders?

Eating disorders involve preoccupation with food, body weight, and shape, leading to dangerous eating behaviors.

Common Labels:

- Dieting gone too far
- Picky eating
- Health obsession

Symptoms:

- Extreme restriction of food intake
- Binge eating
- Purging behaviors (e.g., vomiting, excessive exercise)
- Distorted body image

Diagnosis:

Assessment by a family doctor with referral to specialists in eating disorders.

6. Learning Disorders

What are Learning Disorders?

Learning disorders (LDs) affect how a person processes, understands, and uses information. This can make reading, writing, and math more difficult, but it does *not* mean a person is not intelligent. Many Black youth with learning disorders go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to bias in education systems.

Common Labels:

- Struggling student
- Lazy
- Not paying attention

Symptoms:

- **Dyslexia** – Difficulty reading, mixing up letters, or reading slowly.
- **Dyscalculia** – Trouble with math, numbers, and calculations.
- **Dysgraphia** – Struggles with handwriting, spelling, or organizing thoughts on paper.
- Avoiding schoolwork because it feels overwhelming.
- Understanding things better when explained out loud rather than in writing.
- Teachers saying you "aren't trying" even though you are.

Diagnosis:

- **Psychological testing** – A psychologist or specialist can formally diagnose LDs.
- **Medical evaluation** – A doctor may rule out other issues affecting learning.



7. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is Autism?

Autism affects how people communicate, interact socially, and experience the world. It is a **spectrum** because it affects each person differently—some may need more support, while others may not. Black youth are often diagnosed later than others or misdiagnosed with behavior issues instead.

Common Labels:

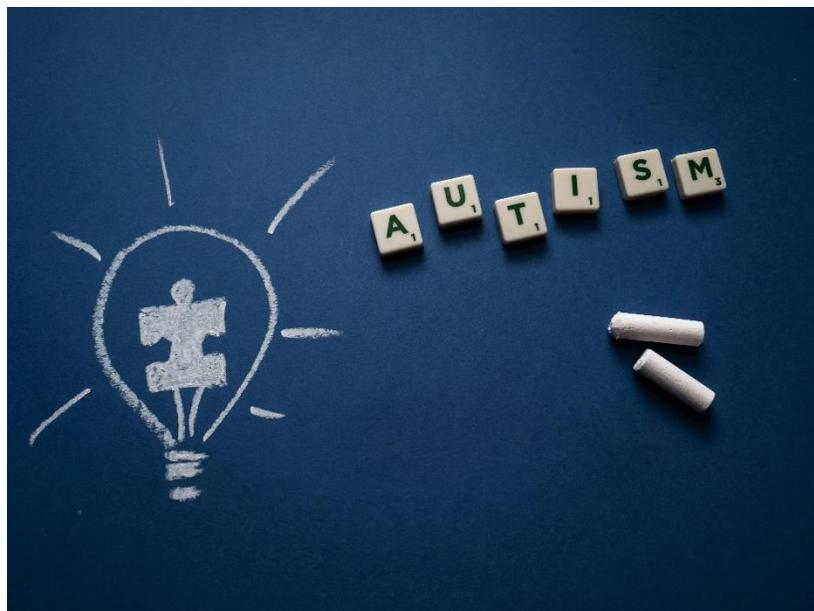
- Anti-social
- Awkward
- Too sensitive

Symptoms:

- Difficulty understanding social cues (body language, tone of voice, sarcasm).
- Preferring routines and getting overwhelmed when things change.
- Sensitivity to loud noises, bright lights, or certain textures.
- Deep interest in specific topics (knowing *everything* about one thing).
- Struggles with eye contact or making small talk.

Diagnosis:

- **Psychological assessment** – A psychologist or psychiatrist evaluates communication and behavior patterns.
- **Medical assessment** – Doctors may rule out other conditions.



Unique Challenges Faced by Black Youth

- **Racism and Discrimination:** Experiencing systemic biases and microaggressions can lead to feelings of isolation and stress.
- **Identity Formation:** Balancing cultural heritage with mainstream societal expectations can be complex.
- **Access to Resources:** Navigating mental health services that may not always be culturally sensitive or accessible.

Navigating mental health as a Black youth in Nova Scotia can be complex. Unique challenges—such as racism, discrimination, and cultural identity—can impact emotional well-being. This toolkit provides strategies for coping with anxiety, depression, trauma, and grief, while also empowering youth to advocate for their mental health needs.

Black youth in Nova Scotia come from diverse backgrounds, including African Nova Scotians with a long history in the province, as well as immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. This toolkit reflects those experiences and offers culturally relevant strategies for self-care, healing, and resilience.



Racism and Discrimination

Black youth often face various forms of racism and discrimination in different settings:

- **Systemic Racism:** Policies and practices entrenched in institutions that result in the exclusion or promotion of certain groups.
- **Interpersonal Racism:** Direct discriminatory interactions between individuals.
- **Internalized Racism:** The internalization of negative stereotypes and beliefs about one's own racial group.

Examples in Daily Life:

- **At School:** Experiencing lower expectations from teachers, disproportionate disciplinary actions, or underrepresentation in advanced courses.
- **In Stores:** Being followed or closely monitored by staff due to racial profiling.
- **With Police:** Facing increased stops, searches, or use of force compared to peers.

Impact on Mental Health

Experiencing racism and discrimination can lead to:

- **Increased Stress and Anxiety:** Constant vigilance and anticipation of bias can heighten stress levels.
- **Depression:** Feelings of hopelessness or sadness stemming from repeated discriminatory experiences.
- **Low Self-Esteem:** Internalizing negative societal messages can diminish self-worth.
- **Identity Confusion:** Struggling to reconcile personal identity with societal perceptions.



Understanding Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based solely upon their marginalized group membership. For Black youth, these can manifest in various aspects of daily life:

- **At School:**
 - *Assumptions about Intelligence:* A teacher expressing surprise when a Black student excels in advanced courses, implying lower expectations based on race.
 - *Stereotyping Interests:* Peers suggesting that a Black student should join the basketball team, based on racial stereotypes rather than the student's actual interests.
- **In Social Settings:**
 - *Exoticization:* Comments like, "Your hair is so different; can I touch it?" which objectify and otherize Black individuals.
 - *Cultural Appropriation Dismissal:* When concerns about cultural appropriation are dismissed with statements like, "It's just fashion; don't be so sensitive."
- **In Retail Environments:**
 - *Surveillance:* Being closely monitored or followed by store employees under the assumption of potential theft.
 - *Service Denial:* Experiencing longer wait times or dismissive service compared to other customers.
- **With Law Enforcement:**
 - *Unwarranted Stops:* Being stopped or questioned by police without just cause, based on racial profiling.
 - *Assumption of Criminality:* Officers expressing surprise when encountering Black youth in certain neighborhoods, implying they don't belong.

Impact on Mental Health

The cumulative effect of microaggressions can lead to significant mental health challenges for Black youth:

- **Chronic Stress and Anxiety:** Constantly anticipating or experiencing microaggressions can result in heightened stress levels, leading to anxiety disorders.
- **Depressive Symptoms:** Repeated exposure to subtle discrimination has been linked to increased depressive symptoms among Black adolescents.
- **Identity Struggles:** Facing regular invalidation or questioning of one's experiences can lead to confusion and distress regarding personal and cultural identity.

Challenges in Addressing Microaggressions

Addressing microaggressions is complex due to several factors:

- **Subtlety:** Microaggressions are often ambiguous, making them difficult to identify and confront.
- **Perceived Oversensitivity:** Individuals who call out microaggressions may be dismissed as overly sensitive, discouraging open dialogue.
- **Normalization:** Such behaviors can become normalized within society, leading to their perpetuation and acceptance.



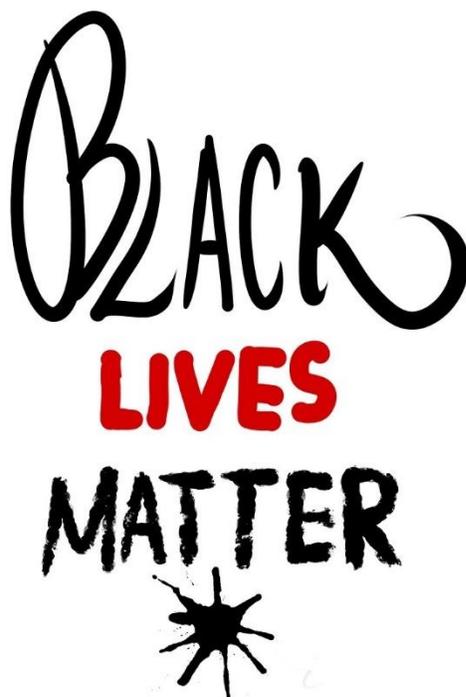
How to Respond to Racism & Microaggressions

Immediate Coping Strategies:

- **Set Boundaries:** It's okay to say, "I'm not comfortable with that."
- **Use Curiosity:** Sometimes asking questions curiously helps highlight the inappropriateness of the comment such as asking, "what do you mean by that?"
- **Use Humor or Redirect:** Sometimes deflecting with humor or shifting the conversation can reduce stress.
- **Lean on Allies:** Find teachers, friends, or mentors who understand and can support you.

Long-Term Coping Strategies:

- **Document Incidents:** If racism occurs in school or the workplace, keeping a record can help when advocating for yourself.
- **Find Safe Spaces:** Community groups, Black student associations, and online forums can provide validation.
- **Advocate for Change:** Speak up about injustices when you feel safe and supported.



Understanding Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) & Its Impact on Black Youth in Nova Scotia

As Black youth in Nova Scotia, you may sometimes feel weighed down by emotions—anger, sadness, hypervigilance—that you can't fully explain. Some of these feelings might be connected to *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)*, a concept developed by Dr. Joy DeGruy that describes the *lasting psychological effects of slavery, racism, and systemic oppression* across generations.

What Is Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)?

PTSS is not an official medical diagnosis but a framework to understand how:

- *Historical trauma* (slavery, colonization, segregation) has been passed down.
- *Ongoing systemic racism* (microaggressions, over-policing, lack of representation) reinforces that trauma.
- *Coping behaviors* (suppressing emotions, distrust of outsiders, enduring pain silently) were survival strategies that may no longer serve us.

Example:

If your grandparents or parents taught you to “*keep your head down, work twice as hard, and don't complain,*” that didn't come from nowhere—it came from a history where speaking up could mean danger. But now, silencing your pain can harm your mental health.

How PTSS Shows Up for Black Youth in Nova Scotia

You might recognize these feelings or behaviors in yourself or others:

1. Internalized Oppression

- Feeling like you *don't belong* in white-dominated spaces (schools, workplaces).
- Downplaying your achievements (“*I just got lucky*”) or feeling like an *imposter*.
- Believing *negative stereotypes* about Blackness (e.g., “Angry Black girl/boy” tropes).

2. Survival Coping Mechanisms

- *Avoiding vulnerability*: “I can’t show weakness.”
- *Hyper-independence*: “I have to do everything myself; asking for help is failure.”
- *Distrust of authority*: Fear of teachers, doctors, or police due to *generational* and *personal* experiences of racism.

3. Racial Trauma in Daily Life

- *Code-switching* to fit in, then feeling exhausted or fake.
- *Being the “only Black person”* in class/workspaces, which is mentally draining.
- *Experiencing or witnessing racism* (e.g., microaggressions like hair touching, “jokes,” or racial profiling).

Why This Affects Your Mental Health

PTSS can contribute to:

- *Anxiety & Depression*: Constant stress about racism or feeling “not enough.”
- *Anger & Frustration*: Feeling powerless against systemic barriers.
- *Emotional Numbness*: Shutting down because it’s too overwhelming.

Example:

If you’ve ever felt *triggered* by a racist incident but didn’t have the words to explain why it hurt so much, that’s PTSS echoing through you.

How to Heal & Protect Your Mental Health

You *can’t* change history or erase racism overnight, but you *can* learn to:

1. Name What You’re Feeling

- Journal or talk to someone about how racism affects you.
- Say: “*I’m not overreacting—this is racial trauma.*”

2. Challenge Internalized Messages

- Replace “*I have to be perfect*” with “*I am enough as I am.*”
- Remind yourself: *My ancestors survived, but I don’t have to just survive—I can heal.*

3. Find Safe Spaces

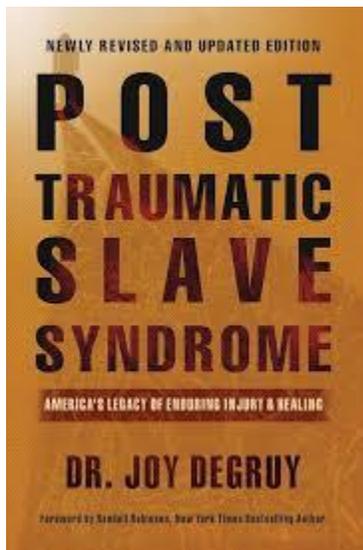
- Connect with *Black counselors* (e.g., through the *Health Association of African Canadians* and the *Association of Black Social Workers*).
- Join *Black youth groups* to share experiences.

4. Practice Liberation-Based Self-Care

- Rest *without guilt*—your worth isn't tied to productivity.
- Engage in *Black joy* (music, art, community events) to reclaim your spirit.

You Are Not Broken—You Are Resilient

PTSS isn't your fault, but *healing is your right*. Nova Scotia has a deep Black history, and your emotions are tied to that legacy. By understanding PTSS, you're *already breaking the cycle*.



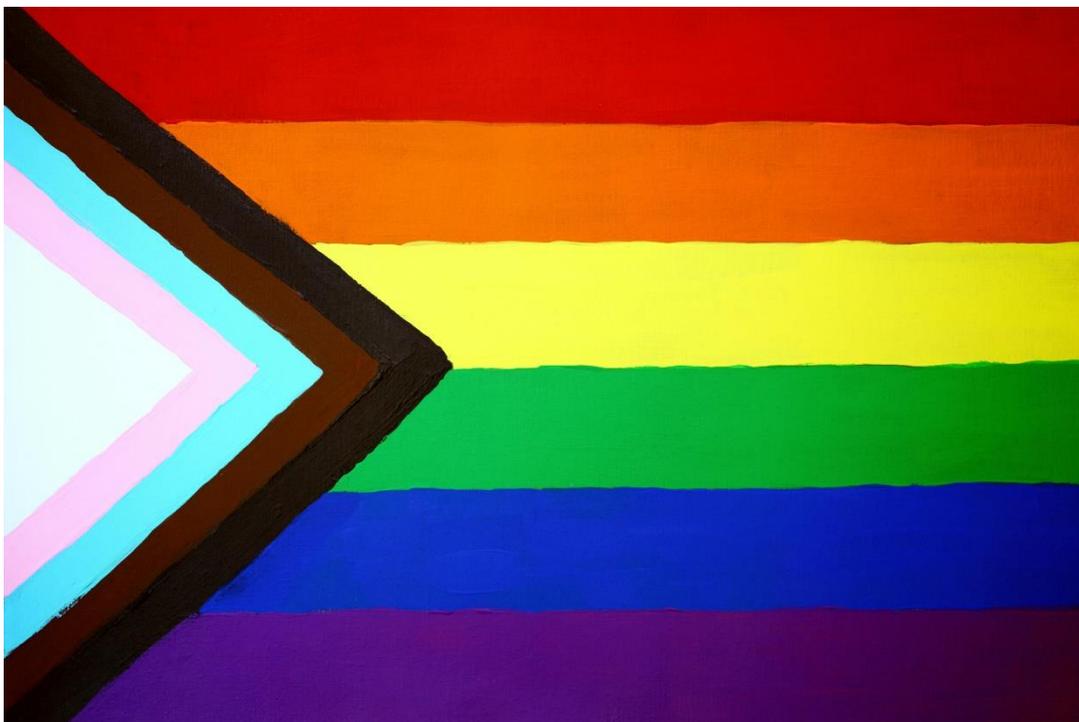
Identity Formation, Intersectionality and Cultural Contexts in Nova Scotia

Figuring out who you are can be complicated, especially as a Black teen in Nova Scotia. Your identity isn't just about being Black—it's about where your family comes from, your culture, your gender, who you love, your abilities, and so much more. All of these things shape how you see the world and how the world sees you.

What Does “Black Identity” Mean?

Being Black isn't one single experience—it's diverse, rich, and unique. In Nova Scotia, Black youth come from different backgrounds, including:

- **African Nova Scotians** – Many Black families in Nova Scotia have been here for generations, going back over 400 years. They have a deep history of resilience and community-building despite facing racism and discrimination.
- **African & Caribbean Immigrants** – If your family moved from Africa or the Caribbean, your experiences may be different. In some of these places, being Black isn't something you even thought about much because most people around you looked like you. But in Canada, suddenly “being Black” can feel like a big deal.
- **Mixed-Race/Biracial Black Youth** – If you have one Black parent and one non-Black parent, you might feel stuck between different worlds. You might question if you're “Black enough” or struggle to fit in with certain groups. You are enough just as you are!



Intersectionality: More Than Just One Identity

Intersectionality means that different parts of your identity combine to shape your experiences. Some examples of how this might affect you:

- **Being a Black Girl** – You might deal with both racism and sexism, like being expected to be “strong” all the time or being judged for how you speak.
- **Being a Black Boy** – People might see you as a threat, even when you’re just minding your business. You might feel pressure to act a certain way to stay safe.
- **Being Black & LGBTQ+** – You might struggle with being accepted, either in Black spaces or LGBTQ+ spaces, feeling like you don’t fully belong in either.
- **Being Black & Having a Disability** – Some teachers or doctors might not take your struggles seriously because of racist stereotypes, making it harder to get the support you need.

These overlapping identities can bring extra challenges, but they also make you unique and powerful. Knowing yourself and embracing all parts of who you are can help you push through the tough times.

Why Identity Matters for Mental Health

Research shows that having a strong sense of ethnic identity can actually protect your mental health. When you’re confident in who you are, you’re better at handling stress and bouncing back from discrimination.

Ways to build a strong identity:

- ✓ **Learn Your History** – Knowing about the history of Black people in Nova Scotia and beyond helps you feel connected to something bigger than yourself.
- ✓ **Find Your Community** – Whether it’s family, friends, or cultural groups, being around people who understand your experience can make a huge difference.
- ✓ **Express Yourself** – Through music, art, fashion, writing—whatever helps you feel seen and heard.
- ✓ **Speak Up for Yourself** – Don’t be afraid to challenge stereotypes and advocate for what you need.

Colourism

Colourism is when people are treated differently based on how light or dark their skin is—even within the same racial or cultural group. It's a type of discrimination that says lighter skin is better, more beautiful, or more acceptable, and that darker skin is less valuable.

This harmful idea didn't come from us—it was planted by colonization, slavery, and systems that tried to divide and control Black people. But its effects are still felt today—in schools, media, relationships, families, and even inside our own communities.

How Colourism Affects Mental Health

Colourism can have a deep impact on how Black youth see themselves, their self-worth, and how safe they feel in the world. It shows up in different ways, and it hurts—emotionally, socially, and mentally.

For youth with darker skin, it might look like:

- Being bullied or teased for your skin tone or features
- Feeling invisible, left out, or “less than” in friend groups or at school
- Seeing lighter-skinned people praised in media, while people who look like you are ignored or shown in negative ways
- Struggling with confidence, self-esteem, or body image
- Feeling pressure to “prove” your value or be “twice as good” just to be treated fairly

For youth with lighter skin, it might look like:

- Feeling guilt or confusion about how you're treated differently
- Being told you're “not Black enough” or made to feel like you don't belong
- Feeling stuck between different expectations or communities

♥ What Colourism Can Lead To Emotionally

- Low self-esteem or self-hate
- Social anxiety and isolation
- Depression or sadness
- Identity confusion
- Anger, frustration, or shame
- Not feeling “Black enough” or “worthy enough”

These aren’t just “confidence issues”—they’re real mental health impacts that deserve care, attention, and healing.

✿ You Are Not the Problem

Colourism is not your fault. It’s a system of harm that affects generations, but it can be named, challenged, and healed. Part of mental wellness is learning to love and honour your full self—including your skin tone, your features, your history, and your power.

☀ Healing From Colourism

- Talking about it openly—with trusted friends, mentors, or a therapist
- Reclaiming pride in your appearance, ancestry, and identity
- Surrounding yourself with affirming messages, images, and role models
- Calling out and unlearning colourism in your own thinking
- Creating spaces where all shades of Blackness are celebrated

Lack of Cultural Competence/Safety/Humility in Mental Health Care

Importance:

- **Understanding Cultural Nuances:** Recognizing the unique experiences and values of Black youth ensures more effective and respectful care.
- **Building Trust:** Culturally competent care fosters a safe environment where individuals feel understood and respected.

Consequences of Lack of Cultural Competence:

- **Misdiagnosis:** Cultural expressions of distress may be misunderstood, leading to incorrect diagnoses.
- **Underutilization of Services:** Lack of trust in providers can deter individuals from seeking necessary help.

Benefits of Cultural Competence:

- **Improved Therapeutic Outcomes:** Tailored interventions that respect cultural backgrounds can enhance effectiveness.
- **Increased Engagement:** Clients are more likely to participate actively in treatment when they feel their cultural identity is acknowledged.



Lack of Representation in Mental Health Care

Challenges:

- **Lack of Black Clinicians:** Scarcity of mental health professionals from similar cultural backgrounds can hinder relatability and understanding.

Advantages of Shared Cultural Perspective:

- **Enhanced Empathy:** Shared experiences can lead to deeper understanding and connection.
- **Culturally Relevant Interventions:** Practitioners can incorporate cultural strengths and values into treatment plans.

Advocating for Cultural Competence and Representation

- **Seek Diverse Providers:** Research and request clinicians with cultural competence or shared backgrounds.
- **Provide Feedback:** Share experiences with healthcare institutions to encourage improvements in cultural competence.
- **Community Engagement:** Participate in discussions and initiatives aimed at diversifying mental health services.



Substance Use and Your Mental Health: What You Need to Know

Let's be real—substance use is a part of conversations among teens, whether it's about drinking, smoking weed, or using prescription drugs. As Black youth in Nova Scotia, there are unique challenges that can lead to using substances, and it's important to understand both the risks and the healthier ways to cope with stress.

What Are People Using?

Here are some common substances that teens might be exposed to:

- **Alcohol** – It's legal for adults, but drinking underage can cause problems, like poor decision-making, memory loss, and increased risk of addiction later in life.
- **Cannabis** (Weed, Edibles, Vape Pens) – Weed is legal, but that doesn't mean it's harmless—especially for young people. It can affect brain development, memory, and even increase the risk of psychosis (losing touch with reality) in some people.
- **Prescription Drugs** (Stimulants, Painkillers, Sedatives) – Medications like ADHD pills (Ritalin, Adderall) and painkillers (Percocet, Oxy) can be addictive if misused. Even if a doctor prescribes them, using them in a way that's not intended can be dangerous.

Why Do Some Black Youth Use Substances?

Many people turn to substances to cope with life's struggles. As Black youth in Nova Scotia, you might be facing:

- **Racism & Discrimination** – Whether it's teachers doubting your abilities, people treating you differently because of your skin color, or microaggressions (subtle racist comments), these experiences can be exhausting.
- **Stress & Mental Health Struggles** – Anxiety, depression, and trauma are real, and sometimes people use substances to numb their feelings.
- **Fitting In** – Maybe friends are using, and you don't want to be the odd one out. Or maybe you hear that smoking or drinking helps people "relax."
- **Family & Community Pressures** – Some families have complicated histories with addiction, and for some, substance use has been a way to deal with pain.

The Risks You Need to Know

Substances affect people differently. Here's what you should watch out for:

- **Weed & Mental Health** – Studies show that regular cannabis use can increase the risk of psychosis, especially for Black youth who already face high stress. If you've ever felt paranoid or disconnected from reality while high, that's a warning sign.
- **Addiction & Dependence** – It's easy to think "I can stop anytime," but some substances rewire your brain, making it harder to quit.
- **Legal & School Consequences** – Even though cannabis is legal, it's still illegal if you are underage. Getting caught with it at school or using it before driving can get you into serious trouble.

How to Cut Back or Avoid Substance Use

If you're thinking about making changes, here are some real ways to protect your mental and physical health:

At Home & In Your Community

- **Find Healthy Outlets** – Try sports, music, art, or other activities that help you deal with stress in a positive way.
- **Talk to Someone You Trust** – This could be a family member, mentor, or community leader who understands your experiences.
- **Know Your History** – Black communities in Nova Scotia have dealt with challenges like over-policing and criminalization related to substance use. Learning about this can help you make informed choices.

Formal Support (If You Need It)

- **Therapy & Counseling** – Find a therapist who understands Black experiences. Programs like the Nova Scotia Brotherhood and Sisterhood Initiatives offer culturally safe support.
- **School & Community Programs** – Some schools and organizations provide substance use education and mental health resources tailored for Black youth.
- **Peer Support Groups** – Connecting with others who have faced similar challenges can help you feel less alone.

Additional Resources

- **Nova Scotia Brotherhood and Sisterhood Initiatives:** Provides culturally appropriate health care for Black men.
- **Black Youth Helpline:** Offers support for Black youth and families.
- **Mental Health Commission of Canada:** Provides insights into mental health within Black communities.
- **Canadian Mental Health Association - Nova Scotia Division:** Offers resources and support for mental health challenges.
- **Health Association of African Canadians:** Offers resources, workshops, town halls to support the health and mental health of people of African descent.
- **Association of Black Social Workers:** A volunteer charitable organization consisting of Black Social Workers and Human Service Workers throughout the Province that offers educational and community based programs ranging from clinical counselling to professional development.



**Health Association
of African Canadians**
Our Health is our Wealth



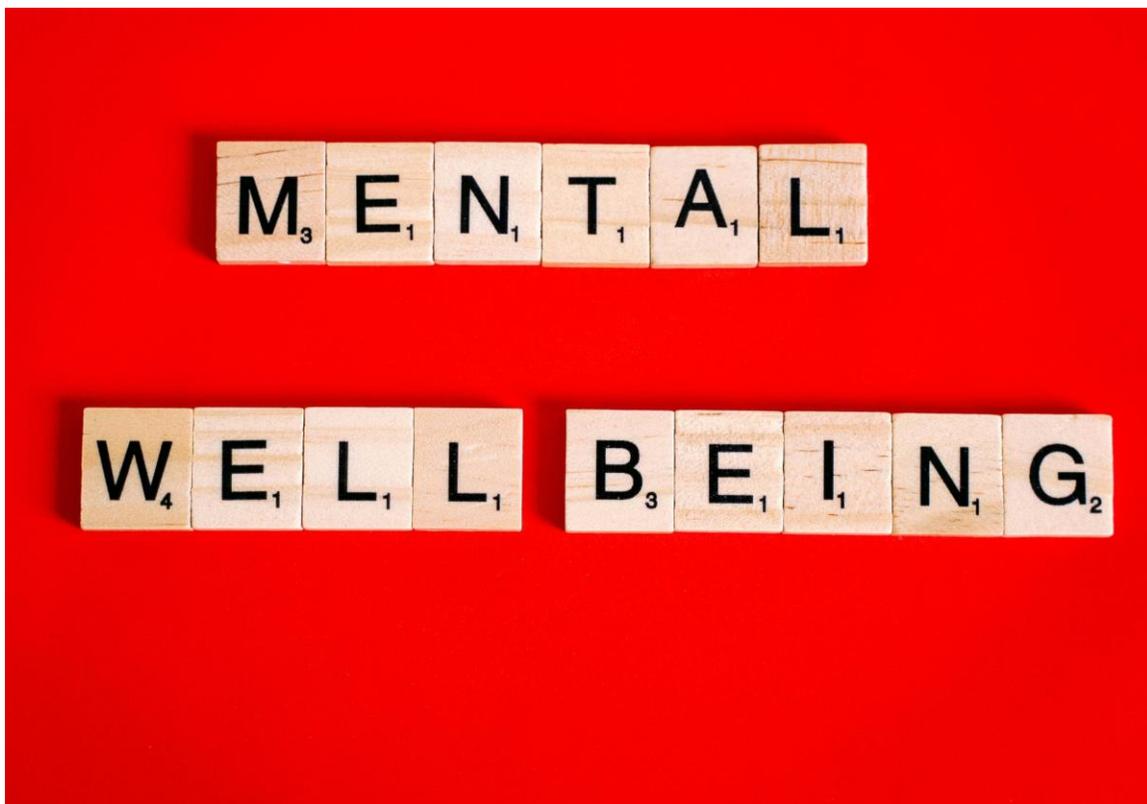
Specific Mental Health Challenges & Coping Strategies

A. Recognizing When You Need Help

- If you feel persistently sad, anxious, or overwhelmed.
- If your school performance, sleep, or social life is being impacted.
- If you're experiencing racial stress, trauma, or burnout.

B. Steps to Finding the Right Support

- **Ask for Help:** Speak to a teacher, school counselor, or community leader.
- **Look for Culturally Competent Services:** Search for therapists who understand Black experiences.
- **Use Free Mental Health Hotlines:**
 - **Black Youth Helpline:** 1-833-294-8650
 - **Nova Scotia Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team:** 1-888-429-8167



What Happens in Therapy?

When you're going through something tough, therapy is one way to get support. It's like having a safe space to unpack your thoughts, feelings, and struggles—with someone who's trained to help.

Therapy isn't one-size-fits-all. There are different styles of therapy, called therapeutic orientations—think of them as different ways of approaching healing. Here's a breakdown of the ones you might come across, what they feel like in session, and what you can expect.

🌱 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

What it is: CBT helps you understand the link between how you think, how you feel, and how you act.

In session: You'll work on noticing unhelpful thoughts (like “I'm not good enough”) and practicing new ways of thinking and coping. You might set small goals and do activities or worksheets together.

Why it's helpful: It gives you practical tools you can use day-to-day—like when anxiety, sadness, or self-doubt show up.

🧘 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

What it is: ACT helps you stop fighting your feelings and start living a life that matters to *you*.

In session: You'll talk about your values—what truly matters to you—and learn to accept uncomfortable feelings without letting them control you. Mindfulness (being present) plays a big role.

Why it's helpful: It reminds you that you're not your pain or your past—and you can still move forward, even when things feel heavy.



Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

What it is: DBT helps you manage big emotions, build better relationships, and stay grounded when you feel overwhelmed.

In session: You'll learn coping skills in four main areas: mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and communication.

Why it's helpful: It's great if you feel like you swing between emotional highs and lows, struggle with impulsive actions, or have a hard time with conflict.

Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT)

What it is: EFT is all about your *feelings*—helping you understand, express, and move through them in a healthy way.

In session: You might explore moments from your past or present that carry emotional weight. Your therapist will help you get to the root of those feelings and how they show up in your life now.

Why it's helpful: It's especially good if you've been through emotional trauma or if you've been taught to “just be strong” and keep things inside.

Family Therapy

What it is: This kind of therapy brings in the people around you—parents, guardians, siblings, or other caregivers—so everyone can heal together.

In session: You'll talk about how everyone's actions, communication, and emotions affect each other. A therapist helps your family build understanding and find new ways to connect.

Why it's helpful: Mental health doesn't exist in a bubble—family dynamics, stress, and intergenerational trauma all play a part.

Medication (and Mental Health)

What it is: Medication can be used along with therapy to help manage certain mental health conditions, like depression, anxiety, or mood disorders.

What to expect: A medical doctor or psychiatrist will explain your options and how meds work in your brain (usually affecting chemicals like serotonin or dopamine). You'll work together to figure out what's right for you—some people use medication short-term, others longer.

Why it's helpful: Sometimes your brain needs support from both talk therapy and medication to get to a place where you feel like yourself again.

Real talk: Taking medication for your mental health isn't weak, weird, or wrong. It's just one of many tools to help you heal.

Other Types of Support You Might See

- Trauma-Informed Therapy: This approach understands how past trauma affects your brain, body, and behavior. It's especially important for Black youth who've experienced racial trauma, violence, or family/community loss.
- Culturally Safe Therapy: Some therapists are trained to understand Black history, racism, identity, and systemic issues—so you don't have to explain everything. This might include Afrocentric or spiritually grounded approaches.
- Creative or Expressive Therapy: Music, art, journaling, or movement may be used as ways to express emotions you can't yet say with words.

What Therapy *Feels* Like

It can feel awkward at first. You might not know what to say. That's okay.

But with time, it can feel like:

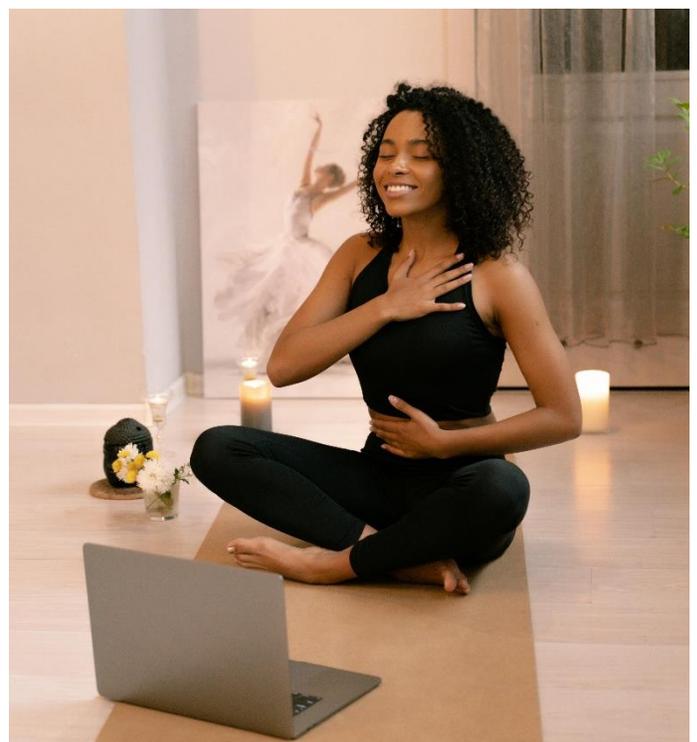
- Being seen and heard for real
- Getting tools that actually help
- Letting go of shame and pressure
- Building a better relationship with yourself

A. Coping with Anxiety

Anxiety can feel overwhelming, causing excessive worry, racing thoughts, and physical symptoms like a rapid heartbeat or trouble breathing.

Strategies to Manage Anxiety:

- **Grounding Techniques:**
 - *5-4-3-2-1 Method*: Identify five things you can see, four you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell, and one you can taste.
 - Hold onto a cold or warm object (like ice or a warm cup of tea) to refocus your mind.
- **Breathing Exercises:**
 - Try *box breathing*: Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold again for 4 seconds. Repeat.
 - Practice *deep belly breathing*—breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, let your stomach expand, and exhale slowly.
- **Movement & Physical Activity:**
 - Engaging in activities like dancing, running, yoga, or boxing can release built-up tension.
- **Mindfulness & Meditation:**
 - Apps like *Liberate* and *Shine* offer meditation sessions specifically for Black communities.
- **Journaling:**
 - Write down worries and fears to process them, and reframe negative thoughts into positive affirmations.

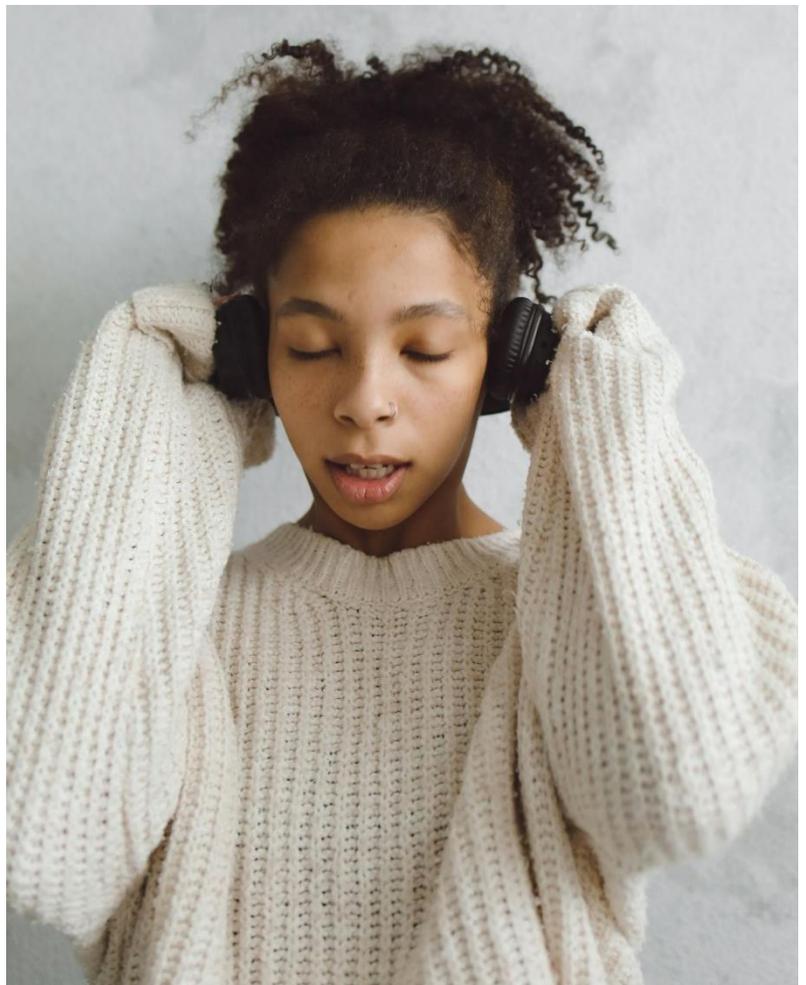


B. Coping with Depression

Depression can lead to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of motivation. It's important to take small, manageable steps toward healing.

Strategies to Manage Depression:

- **Break Tasks into Small Steps:**
 - If getting out of bed feels hard, start with small wins—sit up, drink water, or take a shower.
- **Connect with Supportive People:**
 - Talk to friends, family, a trusted teacher, or a community member about how you feel.
- **Use Music as Therapy:**
 - Listen to uplifting songs, gospel music, or beats that make you feel empowered.
- **Sunlight & Nature Therapy:**
 - Spending time outdoors, even for a short walk, can boost mood and energy.
- **Professional Support:**
 - Speak to a culturally competent therapist if possible. If formal therapy isn't accessible, consider talking to a mentor, elder, or a helpline counselor.



C. Coping with Trauma & Racial Trauma

Trauma, including racial trauma, can leave lasting emotional wounds. Black youth may experience trauma from racial profiling, discrimination, or witnessing violence.

Recognizing Trauma & Racial Trauma:

- **Flashbacks, Nightmares & Hypervigilance:** Constantly feeling on edge or re-living a painful experience.
- **Numbness & Avoidance:** Shutting down emotionally or avoiding certain places or people.
- **Mood Swings & Anger:** Feeling easily irritated, frustrated, or disconnected from others.

Strategies to Heal from Trauma:

- **Storytelling & Creative Expression:**
 - Writing poetry, painting, or dancing can help process pain and express emotions.
- **Body-Based Healing (Somatic Therapy):**
 - Practices like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or movement can help release stored trauma in the body.
- **Seeking Cultural & Ancestral Wisdom:**
 - Connecting with elders, engaging in spiritual practices, and exploring African or Caribbean healing traditions can provide comfort.
- **Therapy & Community Healing Circles:**
 - Look for community support groups that create safe spaces for Black youth to share and heal together.

D. Coping with Grief & Loss

Losing a loved one or experiencing a significant life change can be painful. Grief doesn't follow a straight path, and it's okay to take time to heal.

Ways to Process Grief:

- **Acknowledge Your Feelings:**
 - It's okay to cry, feel numb, or experience waves of emotions.
- **Talk About Your Loss:**
 - Share memories with others or write letters to the person you lost.
- **Create Rituals for Healing:**
 - Light a candle, create a memorial playlist, or honor their legacy in a meaningful way.
- **Find Support:**
 - Join support groups, talk to a counselor, or connect with faith-based communities.



General Strategies for Mental Well-being

It's essential to recognize that seeking help is a sign of strength. If you're facing challenges, consider reaching out to:

- **School Counselors:** They can provide guidance and connect you with resources.
- **Community Elders:** Offer wisdom and cultural insights.
- **Mental Health Professionals:** Trained to provide coping strategies and therapeutic support.
- **Connect with Community:** Engage with local cultural organizations and events to foster a sense of belonging.
- **Open Conversations:** Discuss mental health openly with trusted individuals to reduce stigma.

Black youth in Nova Scotia face unique mental health challenges influenced by systemic racism, cultural identity struggles, and societal pressures. Implementing culturally sensitive coping strategies can enhance resilience and well-being. Below are tailored approaches supported by research and expert recommendations:

1. Engage in Cultural and Community Activities in Culturally Affirming Spaces

Participating in cultural events and community gatherings that celebrate Black culture fosters a sense of belonging, strengthens cultural identity, and provides support. Celebrating spirituality can often play a pivotal role in coping.

Engage in Prayer or Meditation: Incorporate daily spiritual practices to find peace and grounding.

- **Attend Faith-Based Gatherings:** Participate in church groups or spiritual circles that offer communal support and guidance.
- **Join Cultural Organizations:** Engage with local African Nova Scotian groups or cultural clubs that promote heritage and community bonding.
- **Participate in Community Events:** Attend festivals, art exhibits, or workshops that highlight Black history and achievements. Events like the Africville Reunion celebrate African Nova Scotian heritage.

Benefits:

- **Enhanced Social Support:** Building connections with peers who share similar experiences can provide emotional support.
- **Strengthened Identity:** Engaging with one's cultural heritage reinforces self-esteem and pride.

Nova Scotia Resources:

- **Health Association of African Canadians (HAAC):** Offers programs and events promoting health and well-being within Black communities.
- **Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia:** Provides educational resources and hosts cultural events.

2. Seek Culturally Competent Professional Mental Health Services

Accessing mental health professionals who understand the Black experience and the cultural context can provide more tailored and effective support.

- **Find Black Therapists:** Seek out mental health professionals who share similar cultural backgrounds or have experience working with Black youth.
- **Explore Community Counseling:** Utilize services offered by local organizations focusing on Black mental health.
- **Support Groups:** Joining groups where experiences and coping strategies are shared among peers.

Benefits:

- **Personalized Coping Strategies:** Professionals can offer tools and techniques specific to individual needs.
- **Safe Space for Expression:** Provides an environment to discuss issues without judgment.

Nova Scotia Resources:

- **Nova Scotia Brotherhood and Sisterhood Initiatives:** A free program offering culturally appropriate primary health care for Black men and women, including mental health support.
- **IWK Child and Adolescent Services:** Provides mental health and addiction services to youth under 19 within a client and family-centered context.



3. Practice Creative Expression

Artistic and creative outlets such as art, music, writing, drumming, or dance can serve as therapeutic tools to process emotions and experiences.

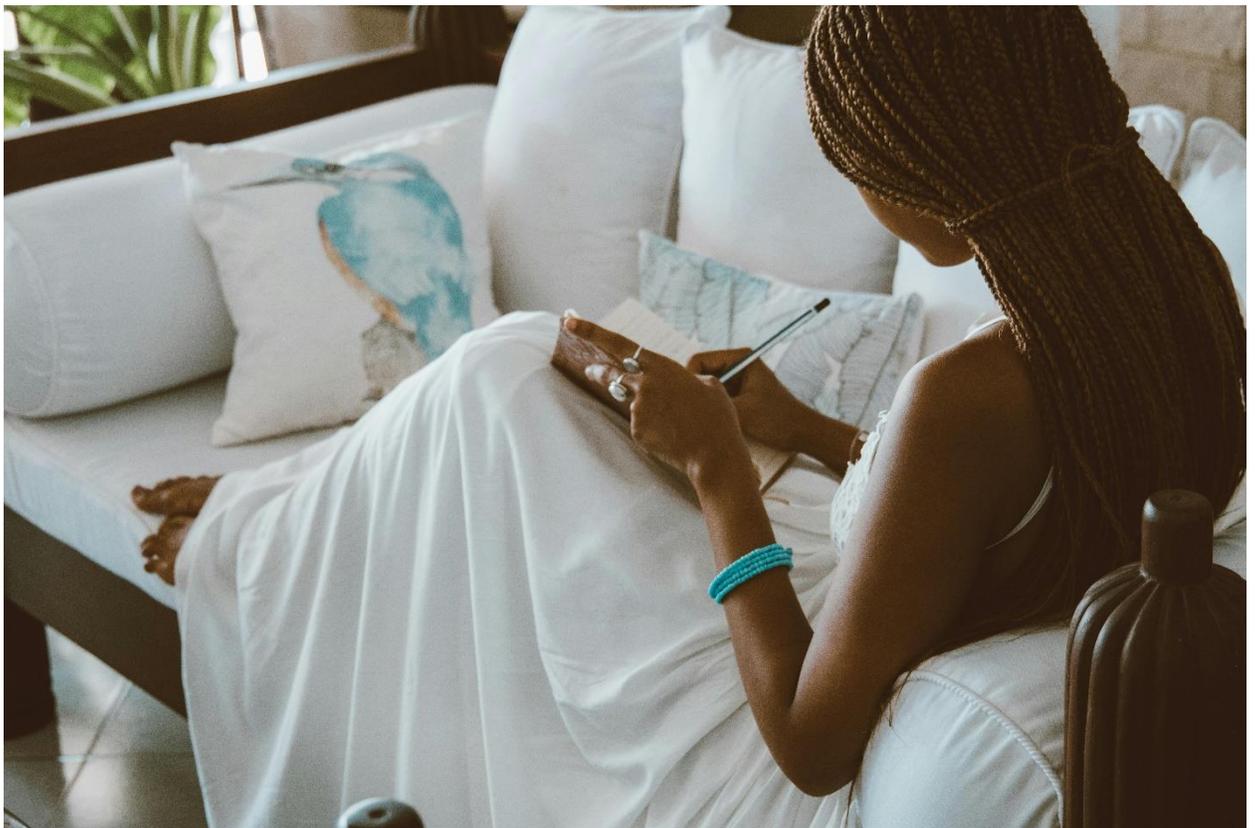
Examples:

- **Journaling:** Writing down thoughts and feelings to gain clarity and insight.
- **Engage in Art and Music:** Use drawing, painting, writing, or playing instruments to express feelings and tell personal stories.
- **Join Performance Groups:** Participate in dance, theater, or spoken word collectives that explore themes relevant to Black youth.

Benefits:

- **Emotional Release:** Provides a healthy outlet for expressing complex feelings.
- **Self-Discovery:** Encourages exploration of identity and personal experiences.

Local Art Programs: Community centers and organizations may offer workshops and classes focused on creative expression



4. Develop Critical Consciousness Individually and in Groups

Understanding systemic issues empowers teens to contextualize personal experiences and connecting with peers who share similar experiences fosters a sense of belonging.

Examples:

- **Educate on Social Justice:** Learn about historical and current social movements to recognize and challenge systemic oppression.
- **Engage in Advocacy:** Participate in initiatives that promote equity and address community concerns.
- **Form Peer Support Groups:** Create or join groups where Black teens can discuss challenges and share coping strategies.
- **Participate in Mentorship Programs:** Seek guidance from older Black individuals who can provide insights and support.
- **Attending Workshops:** Participating in seminars and discussions about mental health awareness.
- **Mental Health Literacy:** Understanding common mental health issues and coping strategies.
- **Cultural Identity Workshops:** Programs that celebrate and explore Black heritage and identity.

Benefits:

- **Increased Awareness:** Knowledge reduces stigma and promotes proactive mental health care.

5. Develop Healthy Lifestyle Habits

Incorporating regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and adequate sleep into daily routines supports overall mental health.

Examples:

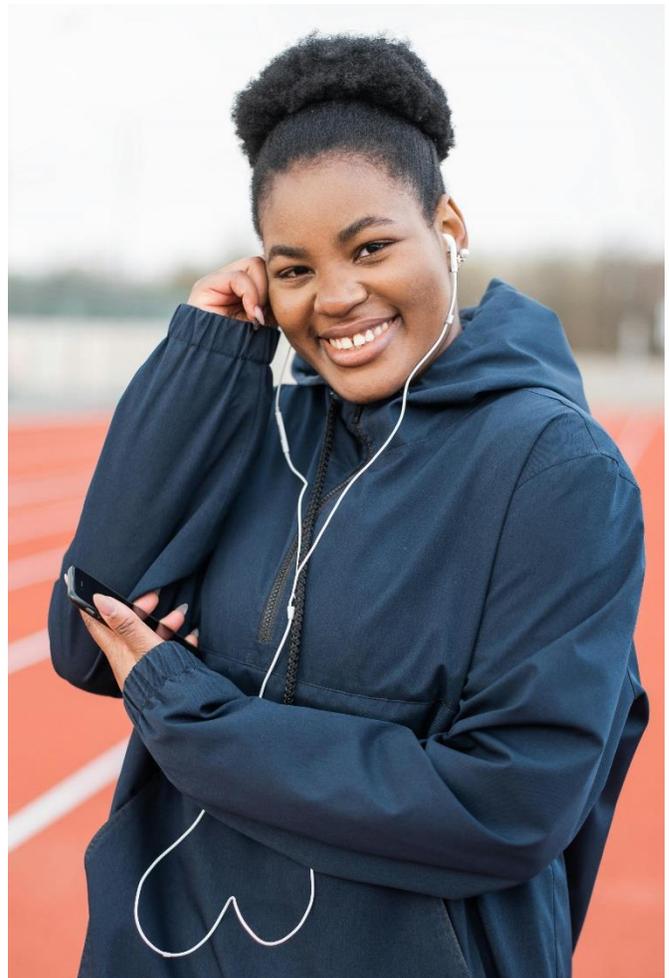
- **Regular Exercise:** Engaging in activities like basketball, dance, or yoga.
- **Nutritious Diet:** Consuming a variety of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains.
- **Consistent Sleep Schedule:** Aiming for 7-9 hours of sleep per night.

Benefits:

- **Mood Improvement:** Physical activity releases endorphins, which can enhance mood.
- **Increased Energy Levels:** Proper nutrition and sleep contribute to overall vitality.

Community Recreation Programs: Local community centers often offer sports and fitness programs for youth. Regular exercise benefits mental health and can be a communal activity.

- **Join Sports Teams:** Participate in sports that have significance within Black communities, such as basketball or track and field.
- **Practice Dance Forms:** Engage in dance styles rooted in African or Caribbean traditions to connect with cultural heritage.



6. Utilize Storytelling and Literature

Sharing stories and reading literature that reflect Black experiences can be validating and healing. Understanding mental health, including recognizing signs and symptoms, empowers individuals to seek help and implement coping strategies.

Examples:

- **Read Black Authors:** Explore works by Black writers that resonate with personal experiences.
- **Reading Books and Articles:** Exploring literature focused on mental health topics relevant to Black youth.
- **Participate in Story Circles:** Engage in community storytelling events to share and hear narratives that reflect shared histories.

See Appendix A



7. Inspirational Figures: Black Celebrities Sharing Their Journeys

Hearing about the mental health journeys of public figures can be empowering. These stories underscore the importance of acknowledging mental health challenges and seeking support. By sharing their journeys, these individuals contribute to breaking the stigma and fostering a more understanding and supportive environment for Black youth.

- **Taraji P. Henson:** Advocates for mental health awareness, especially in the Black community.
- **Lizzo:** Openly discusses her experiences with anxiety and the importance of self-care.
- **Janet Jackson:** Emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental well-being.
- **Usher:** Speaks about the significance of mental health in personal and professional life.
- **Jay-Z**—one of the most successful rappers, entrepreneurs, and cultural icons of our time—has spoken publicly about his journey with mental health, showing that **even the most powerful people carry pain.**
 - In interviews, Jay-Z has talked about how he used to **avoid his emotions** and didn't always realize how much his past had impacted him. He's opened up about **going to therapy**, saying that it helped him understand his childhood trauma, heal from emotional wounds, and grow into a better partner, father, and man.
 - "I grew so much from the experience... I think the most important thing I got is that everything is connected. Every emotion is connected."
 - He's also challenged the idea that therapy is "weak" or "not for Black men," and encouraged others—especially in the Black community—to **seek help and talk openly about what they're feeling.**

See Appendix B

8. Engage in Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

Mindfulness involves staying present and fully engaging with the current moment, which can reduce stress and anxiety and improve emotional regulation.

Examples:

- **Deep Breathing Exercises:** Taking slow, deep breaths to calm the nervous system.
- **Meditation:** Setting aside time for guided or unguided meditation to enhance self-awareness.

Benefits:

- **Stress Reduction:** Regular practice can lower cortisol levels, reducing overall stress.
- **Improved Focus:** Enhances concentration and cognitive function.

Mindfulness Programs: Local community centers and organizations may offer mindfulness workshops tailored to youth.

- **Practice Yoga:** Engage in yoga sessions that are inclusive and considerate of cultural backgrounds.
- **Use Relaxation Apps:** Utilize apps designed for Black individuals to guide meditation and relaxation exercises.

9. Establish Healthy Boundaries

Learning to set boundaries protects mental health and personal well-being.

Examples:

- **Limit Exposure to Negative Media:** Be mindful of media consumption that may perpetuate negative stereotypes or induce stress.
- **Communicate Needs:** Clearly express personal limits in relationships and social interactions to maintain mental health.

10. Utilize Crisis and Support Helplines

Accessing immediate support during times of crisis can provide relief and guidance.

Examples:

- **Black Youth Helpline:** Dedicated support line for Black youth. Phone: 1-833-294-8650.
- **Youthspace.ca:** Offers online chat and text support for youth in crisis.
- **Kids Help Phone:** Provides confidential counseling and support via phone or text.
- **Healthy Minds Nova Scotia:** Provides online peer support communities accessible 24/7 for youth aged 16 and above.

Benefits:

- **Immediate Assistance:** Access to trained professionals during critical moments.
- **Anonymity:** Allows individuals to seek help without fear of stigma.

Nova Scotia Resources:

- **Mental Health Crisis Line:** Available 24/7 for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. : 1-888-429-8167.

Conclusion

Your mental health is a vital part of your overall well-being. Embrace your identity, connect with supportive communities, and don't hesitate to seek help when needed. Remember, you are not alone, and there are resources and individuals ready to support you on your journey.

- **Affirmations for Black Youth:**
 - “I am worthy just as I am.”
 - “My Blackness is powerful and beautiful.”
 - “I deserve love, peace, and joy.”
- **Surround Yourself with Positive Influences:**
 - Follow inspiring Black figures who promote mental well-being.
 - Engage in hobbies, music, and art that uplift you.
- **Remember, You Are Not Alone:**
 - Seek out mentors, community spaces, and trusted individuals who can support you.

By using this toolkit, you can strengthen their mental health, advocate for themselves, and find joy in their cultural identity. Healing is a journey—take it one step at a time.

Appendix

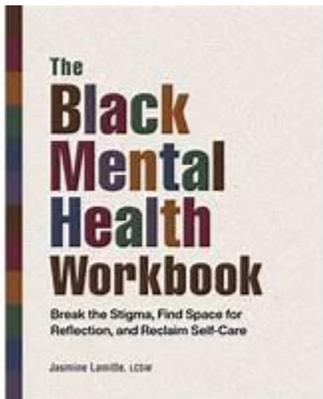
Appendix A:

Exploring mental health through literature can provide Black youth with valuable insights, coping strategies, and a sense of connection. Here is a selection of books and articles that delve into mental health topics relevant to Black youth:

The Black Mental Health Workbook: Break the Stigma, Find Space for Reflection, and Reclaim Self-Care

Author: Nia A. Ferguson

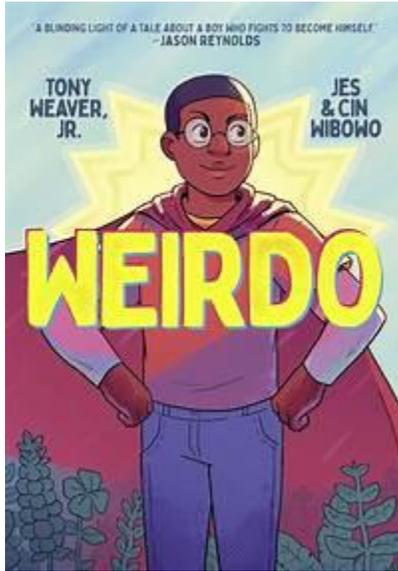
Description: This workbook offers tools and resources specifically designed for Black individuals to address anxiety, depression, and trauma, promoting self-care and reflection.



Weirdo

Author: Tony Weaver Jr.

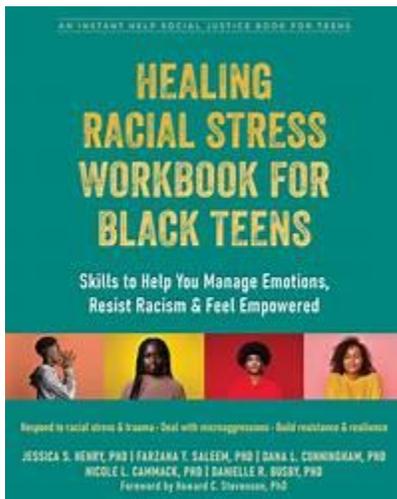
Description: A graphic novel that addresses the challenges faced by Black adolescents dealing with bullying, mental health issues, and the journey toward self-acceptance.



Healing Racial Stress Workbook for Black Teens: Skills to Help You Manage Emotions, Resist Racism, and Feel Empowered

Author: Dr. Jennifer Shepard Payne

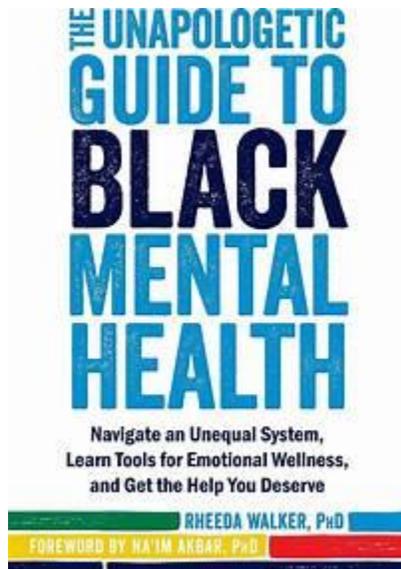
Description: This workbook provides strategies to help Black teens manage racial stress, build resilience, and empower themselves in the face of discrimination.



The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health: Navigate an Unequal System, Learn Tools for Emotional Wellness, and Get the Help You Deserve

Author: Dr. Rheedra Walker

Description: This guide addresses the unique mental health challenges faced by Black individuals and offers practical advice for emotional wellness and navigating the mental health system.



Black Mental Health Matters: The Ultimate Guide for Mental Health Awareness in the Black Community

Author: Aaren Snyder

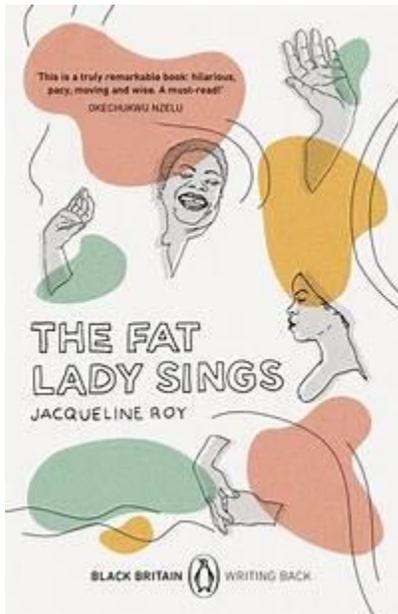
Description: This comprehensive guide explores mental health issues within the Black community, offering insights and strategies to promote awareness and healing.



The Fat Lady Sings

Author: Jacqueline Roy

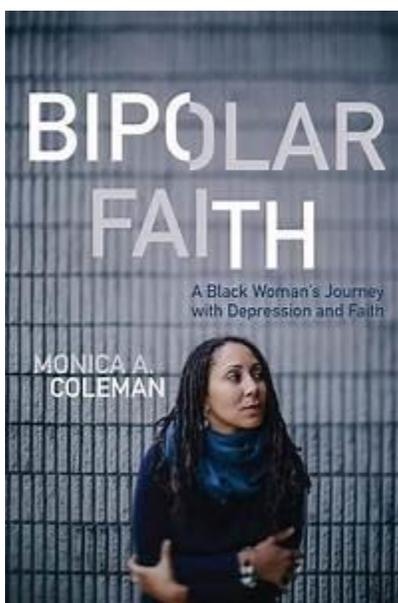
Description: A novel that follows the lives of two Black women in a psychiatric facility, exploring themes of mental health, systemic failure, and the power of storytelling.



Bipolar Faith

Author: Monica A. Coleman

Description: A memoir that intertwines the author's personal journey with bipolar disorder and her spiritual path, offering a unique perspective on mental health and faith.



Appendix B:

Hearing the personal stories of Black celebrities who have navigated mental health challenges can be both inspiring and reassuring for Black youth. These narratives highlight resilience, the importance of seeking help, and breaking the stigma surrounding mental health. Here are some notable figures, including Canadian personalities, who have openly shared their journeys:

Stacy-Ann Buchanan

Background: A Jamaican-Canadian actress, filmmaker, and mental health advocate.

Journey: Buchanan faced personal battles with depression and anxiety, which led her to recognize the stigma surrounding mental health in Black communities.

Achievements: She directed "The Blind Stigma," a documentary shedding light on mental health issues within the Black Canadian community.

Impact: Her work has been recognized by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health as one of "The 150 Leading Canadians on Mental Health."



Doechii (Jaylah Hickmon)

Background: An American rapper and singer gaining prominence for her unique style and music.

Journey: Doechii has openly discussed her experiences with anxiety and the pressures of the music industry.

Achievements: She launched "Anxiety is Watching Me," a mental health resource hub inspired by her song "Anxiety," providing support and resources for those facing similar challenges.

Impact: By sharing her story and creating this platform, Doechii aims to destigmatize mental health discussions and offer tangible support.



Orville Peck

Background: A South African-born Canadian country singer-songwriter known for his masked persona.

Journey: Peck faced mental and physical health challenges, leading him to cancel his 'Bronco Tour' to focus on recovery.

Achievements: He made a notable return with his third studio album, "Stampede," featuring collaborations with artists like Elton John and Kylie Minogue.

Impact: Peck advocates for mental health awareness and inclusivity in the music industry, emphasizing the importance of self-care and balance.



DeMar DeRozan

Background: A professional basketball player from Compton, California, who played for the Toronto Raptors.

Journey: DeRozan has been open about his struggles with depression and the pressures of professional sports.

Achievements: By sharing his experiences, he has sparked conversations about mental health in the athletic community.

Impact: DeRozan's openness has encouraged other athletes to discuss their mental health, helping to reduce stigma in sports.

