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# Modeling Empathy for Others by Addressing Racial Trauma in the Classroom

## INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with “Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators.” This guide was developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

## Goals

- ◆ Learn about how to address racial trauma in the classroom.
- ◆ Recognize that creating a safe space to talk about racial issues in the classroom is a way to model empathy for children and communities of color.

## Activity

- ◆ Read the guide. If you can’t read the whole guide, focus on pages 3 to 5.
- ◆ After reading the guide, use the questions below to guide your reflection on why addressing racial trauma in the classroom teaches children to have empathy for others.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed.

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**“Students cannot divorce themselves from events in their homes or communities simply by stepping into the classroom”**

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the guide? What made that idea, fact, or example meaningful to you?
  
- ◆ Think about past race-related traumatic events (e.g., a police shooting, family separation, hate crimes) that have happened within your community or that you and the children have been exposed through media, daily experiences, family conversations, etc.
  - Have you ever talked about these events with your colleagues?
    - If you have, how did you feel? How do you think your colleagues felt during the conversation? How could you tell? Why do you think they felt that way?
    - If you haven't, why not?
  - Have you ever talked about these events with children in the classroom?
    - If you have, how did you feel? How do you think the children felt during the conversation? How did you know? Why do you think they reacted that way?
    - If you haven't, why not?
  
- ◆ To address racial trauma in the classroom, the guide recommends that educators create a safe space to discuss racial issues. It also suggests that they provide children with opportunities to talk and work through their emotions around racial events. Think back to or imagine that a traumatic racial event recently affected your program's local community. Then, consider the following questions:
  - Put yourself in the shoes of children who belong to the racial community that might have been directly affected by the racial event.
    - What messages are you sending to these children when you address racial trauma in the classroom?
    - Children learn empathy both from watching us and from experiencing our empathy for them. How might addressing racial trauma model empathy to these children?
  - Now put yourself in the shoes of children who do not belong to the racial community directly affected by the racial event.
    - What messages are you sending to these children when you address racial trauma in the classroom?
    - How might addressing racial trauma model empathy to these children?
  - Imagine a racial event happens within your community in the next weeks. Plan for one concrete way to address racial trauma in the classroom:
    - What will be the learning goal? How will you accomplish that goal?
    - Will you do any specific activity (e.g., one-on-one time, a storybook reading to elicit conversation, creative expression)? In what ways do you think this plan supports your children to develop empathy for others?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about modeling empathy for children exposed to trauma:

- ◆ **Source:** Royal Society for Arts (RSA)
- ◆ **Video:** Brené Brown on Empathy
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>
- ◆ **Description:** In this video, you will learn about the distinction between empathy and sympathy. Distinguishing between empathy and sympathy is important to ensure that you are modeling empathy, and not sympathy, for others.
  
- ◆ **Source:** Head Start - Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC)
- ◆ **Webinar:** Promoting Empathy, Understanding Trauma
- ◆ **Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/promoting-empathy-understanding-trauma>
- ◆ **Description:** In this webinar, you will learn to identify the effects of trauma in young children. The webinar focuses on how you can respond to these children's needs and demonstrate empathy.