# CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

## Interpersonal Trauma: Violence & Abuse In Our Communities

*"Something happened at home last week. I don't know what to call it. But I feel crushed…and depressed."*

Interpersonal trauma is violence and abuse that occurs between two or more people—typically where one or more person is the causing harm to the other(s). Because violence and abuse are about power and domination, research shows that people of Color, LGBT folks, and those with disabilities experience more interpersonal trauma. The person who commits the violence is usually called the perpetrator, while those who experience the violence are typically known as victims or survivors. Still, people are complex and multidimensional. Perpetrators are more than what they've done, and victims/survivors are more than what they've experienced.

There are 3 types of abuse: physical, sexual, and emotional. Physical abuse includes throwing things, shoving, hitting, strangling, or beating someone up. Physical abuse can include weapons, like a knife or gun. From research, we know that over half of the general population has experienced some form of physical abuse in their lifetime.

Sexual abuse involves a wide range of unwanted behaviors where consent is not given, including, but are not limited to, molestation and unwanted touching, sexual harassment, attempted or completed rape, gang rape, and sex trafficking. Not giving consent includes saying "no" and/or trying to push the person off of you, as well as being unable to give consent due to drug/alcohol intoxication or limited cognitive capacity. People can also be unable to give consent due to age, such as a 50-year-old adult molesting a 5-year-old child; in those instances, the child is considered unable to give consent because they are too young. Research shows that between 24% and 80% of the general population has been sexually abused sometime during their life. Emotional abuse includes verbal words and behaviors like yelling, screaming, putting someone down, and calling them names. Emotional abuse can also be controlling behavior that isolates the other person, like someone not allowing their romantic partner to talk to their family. Researchers have found that about half of the general population experience emotional abuse.

Interpersonal trauma often occurs in private, like in someone's home. It can also happen in public. For example, community violence happens on public streets and inside neighborhoods. It can also happen in semi-public locations, like at parties.

Interpersonal trauma can be perpetrated both by people the victim or survivor knows and people who are strangers. Research finds that abuse is most often perpetrated by familiar people: acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, and family members. Authority figures, such as police officers and doctors, also commit interpersonal trauma.

Interpersonal trauma is harmful for many reasons, including the betrayals that happen as part of the abuse. Research finds

that when perpetrators are someone trusted or needed like when a parent sexually abuses their child, there is a betrayal within the abuse. Cultural betrayal occurs when violence is perpetrated within communities that face societal discrimination, like people of Color and the LGBT community. Research shows that with cultural betrayal, the violence and abuse are impacted by it being perpetrated by a member of the same minoritized community.

There are decades of research that document that interpersonal trauma is linked with mental health struggles, like depression and anxiety, physical health difficulties, like chronic illness, and behavioral health, like thinking of suicide. From research, we know that internalized racism, like a Black person thinking all Black people are violent, is also a possible outcome for those who experience violence with a cultural betrayal. Although these outcomes are common and understandable responses to trauma, researchers find that people can and do have happiness in their lives after violence. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.