

Four Tips to Improve Mental Health During BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month

July's BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month is an observance dedicated to raising awareness about the unique mental health challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This month emphasizes the importance of culturally competent mental health care and aims to address the disparities in mental health services and outcomes among these communities.

In this Q&A, Magellan Health's Eric A. Williams, Ph.D., LCMHCS, LMFT, LPC, and Stephanie White, LMFT, regional supervisors for the Military and Family Life Counselor program, share four ways BIPOC can improve their mental health.

Q: What advice would you give to BIPOC individuals seeking to improve their mental health and well-being?

Dr. Eric Williams:

#1 Prioritize Self-Care

How you treat yourself reflects your relationship with yourself. This includes your diet, sleep hygiene, social support system, and spirituality. Here are a few strategies to prioritize your self-care:

- **Body:** Get regular medical and dental check-ups. Engage in regular physical activity, eat a balanced diet, and get enough sleep. Lastly, take prescription medications as prescribed.
- **Mind:** Ensure a healthy balance of mass media, social media, and other uplifting sources of information. This

doesn't mean you have to give up your social media accounts, but it does mean you emphasize being exposed to information that supports your mental well-being. This could include practicing relaxation techniques like meditation or deep breathing, reading, learning a new skill, or spending time in nature.

- **Spirit:** Consider establishing a personal vision reflective of your values and purpose in life. Spend time with loved ones, practice gratitude, and engage in activities that nourish your sense of meaning.

#2 Build Strong Connections with Family and Friends

Strong social connections are essential for mental well-being.

- **Nurture existing relationships:** Intentionally create time for friends and family who support you and make you feel good. Don't be afraid to set boundaries with people who drain your energy or contribute to negativity in your life.
- **Expand your social circle:** Join clubs, or sports leagues (i.e., bowling, softball, etc.), volunteer in community organizations to include church and other non-profit organizations, or take classes to connect with people who share your interests.

#3 Seek Professional Help if Needed

You may experience racial discrimination, stresses and microaggressions, which can influence your emotional well-being in ways these tips may not address. Don't hesitate to reach out for professional help if you're struggling. Finding a therapist or counselor who understands your cultural background is important. Look for therapists who identify as BIPOC themselves or have experience working with BIPOC communities.

Stephanie White:

#4 Practice Self-Affirming Habits for Adults and Children

I highly recommend a personal habit of affirming your color and appearance through meditation and self-care. Take good care of your coils and strands, your health, and your heart. For our youth, I also recommend that we embrace and build a collection of literature that is directed toward children of color, celebrating their uniqueness as well as their belonging.

For more information to increase awareness about BIPOC mental health and wellbeing and the importance of recognizing and addressing concerns, visit MagellanHealthcare.com/BIPOC-MH.