

Healing racial trauma:
Focusing on racial socialization as a CBT strategy
for African American youth


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What is a
pandemic?

- *noun*
 - an outbreak of a pandemic disease or virus

What is a virus?

- *noun*
 - a harmful or corrupting influence
 - an [element] capable of copying itself and having a detrimental effect, such as *corrupting the system* or *destroying data*

What does it
take to control
a virus?

- *Prevention*
 - e.g., inoculation [vaccines]
- *Intervention*
 - e.g., systemic interruption [address the source] or treatment [healing]

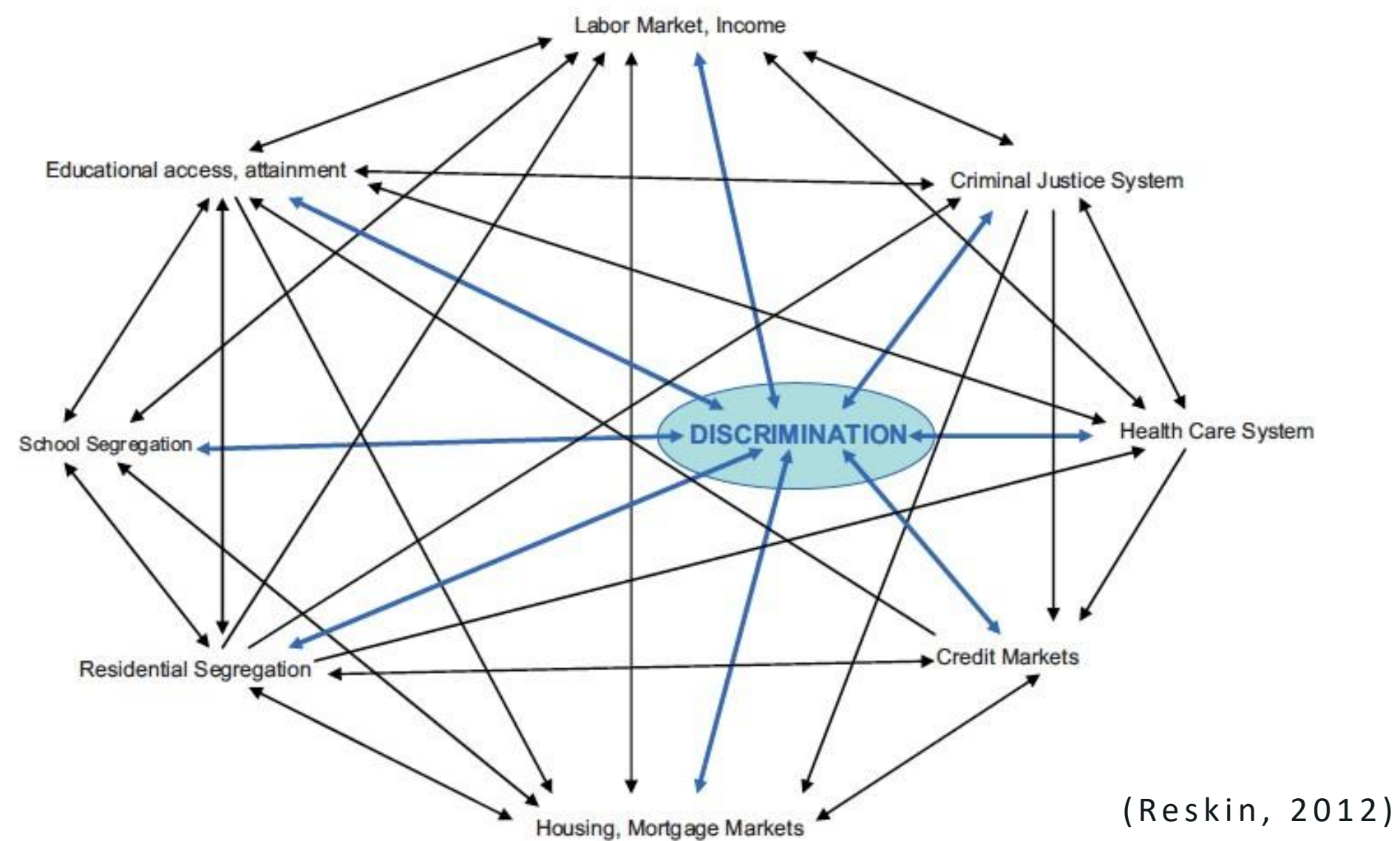
**WHICH VIRUS ARE WE TALKING
ABOUT?**



“There has never been any period in American history where the health of [blacks] was equal to that of [whites]. Disparity is built into the **system.”**

Dr. Evelynn Hammonds





(Reskin, 2012)

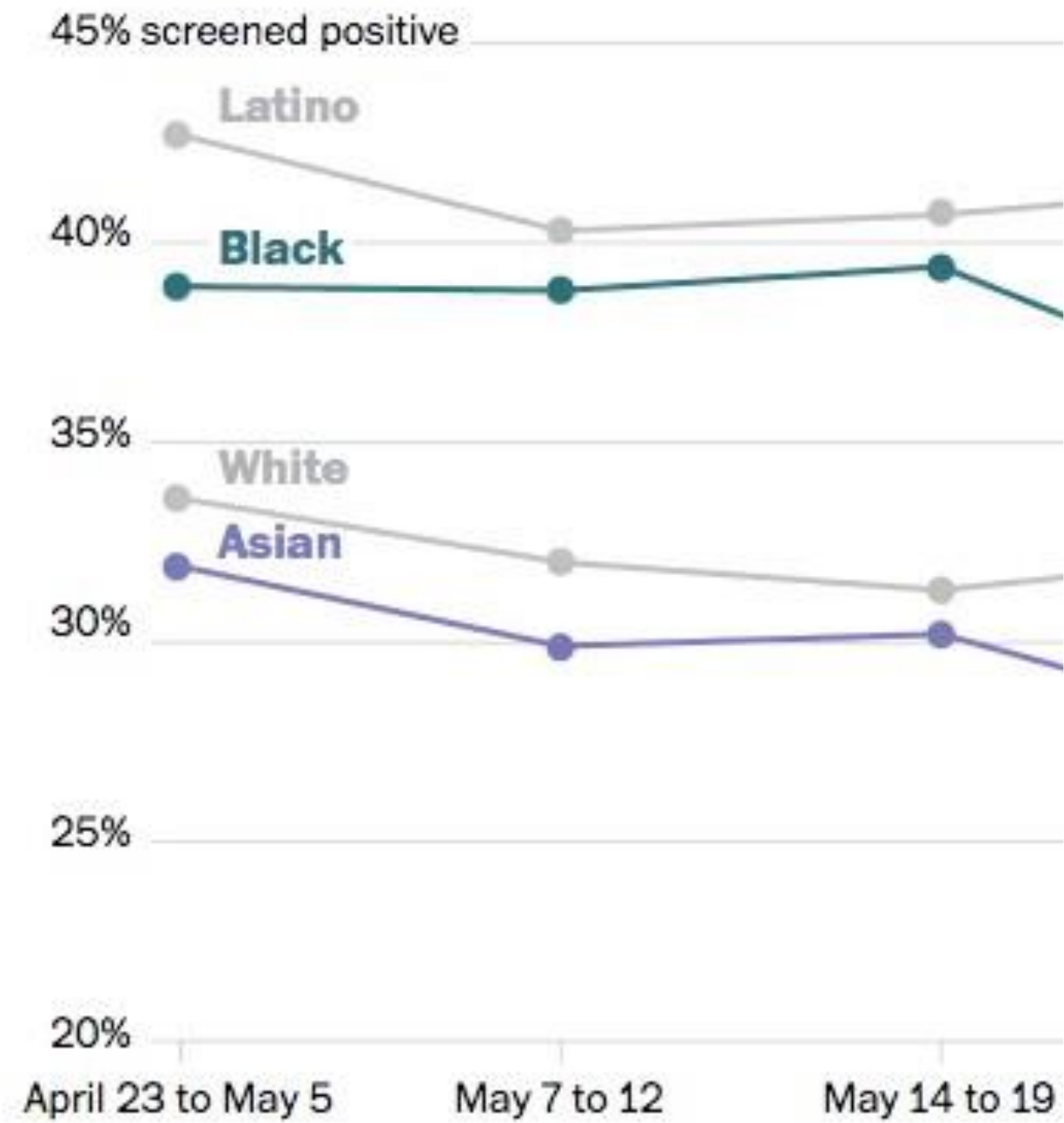
Social determinants of health as a function of racism + racial discrimination

Social Determinants of Health



Anxiety and depression

Percent screening positive for anxiety and/or depression



Racial Discrimination

- ❑ *Racial Discrimination: the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people on the grounds of race*
- At least 90% of Black adults **and** youth as young as 8
 - Recent data about daily average
- Discrimination types and experiences can differ
 - In-vivo and vicarious
 - Objective and subjective
 - Interpersonal and institutional



Racial Discrimination

In *children*, discrimination is associated with more than just psychological outcomes

Body mass index

Psychological well-being

Family functioning

Avoidant coping

Insulin resistance

Depressive symptoms

Juvenile delinquency

Academic achievement

Stress + Trauma

Alcohol consumption

Self-esteem

Academic engagement

Disruptive behaviors

HIV-risk sex behaviors

Marijuana use

Posttraumatic stress symptoms

Allostatic load

Racial Stress and Trauma

- ❑ Dangerous or frightening race-based events, stressors, or discrimination that “overwhelm one’s coping capacity and impacts quality of life and/or cause fear, helplessness, & horror...” (Carter, 2007)
 - ❑ Symptoms as a consequence of emotional pain during and/or after discrimination
- ❑ Racial trauma has similar criteria as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and can lead to a PTSD diagnosis but is distinct:
 - ❑ Can be due to an individual experience or ongoing collective experiences that can be traumatic
 - ❑ Linked to adult **and** youth outcomes
 - ❑ Academic/cognitive
 - ❑ Psychological
 - ❑ Physiological



Racial Stress and Trauma

Re-Experiencing

- Reporting of discrimination in higher numbers

Arousal

- Higher reports of somatization when distressed
- May lead to greater perception of behavioral problems

Negative Emotion

- Black middle school students have higher rates of depression in context of discrimination

Avoidance


- Less willingness to take academic risks
- Higher school drop-out rates after racial discrimination is perceived

“AJ”



Compromised Coping

- **Racial discrimination stress impairs normal coping processes**
 - **African Americans use more avoidant coping ONLY when faced with racially discriminatory events**
- **Impaired coping reduces the availability of coping options**
- **Parents attempt to socialize around coping with racial events in particular, which requires additional skillsets and effort**



“Humans have life-threatening stressors that activate a physiological stress response, like seeing a tiger in the bushes; the problem is that people who experience discrimination are **endlessly seeing tigers.**”

Dr. Arline Geronimus



Racial Socialization

- **Communication between family about the racial world as a means to better cope with racially discriminatory event**
 - Cultural socialization
 - Preparation for bias
 - Promotion of mistrust
 - Egalitarianism or colorblindness



Our Mental Health Minute @OurMHM | OurMHM.com



After George Floyd's death, an African American mother has 'The Talk' with her son

She offers the existential advice mea

By Laura Washington | Jun 12, 2020, 4:36pm

f SHARE



How to Talk to Kids About the Injustice of Breonna Taylor's Death

Kids hear the outrage, anger, and fear. Parents need to help them make sense of it all.

George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. What can black parents possibly tell their kids now about staying safe?



By **John Blake**, CNN

🕒 Updated 12:39 PM ET, Fri May 29, 2020



GETTY



BEN GRUMP / LAW FIRMS; LEE MERRITT / CHANGE.ORG

More from CNN



The Hummer is making a comeback -- and this time, it's...



Surfing world pays tribute to John Shimooka, who has died aged 51



David L. Allen, 47, Alexandria, Va.: I got an “I Can’t Breathe” tattoo on my chest back in 2015, probably a year after these words were choked out of [Eric Garner](#). My three biracial boys have seen it plenty of times, but we’ve never discussed what it means or why I have it.

We were talking about [George Floyd](#) recently when my 10-year-old asked me about the tat. “Those were George Floyd’s last words,” he said. “But you’ve had that tattoo for a while. How did you know he was going to say that?”

I could see his mind working as I was formulating an age-appropriate answer. And before I could respond, he said, “Oh, I know. This has happened before.”

I want to be excited about the peaceful protests and nonviolent demands for change. I hope change is coming. Really, I do. But what I am is tired. I’m tired of still hearing, “It’s heritage, not hate.” I’m tired of still reading, “Well, how many of them shot one another in Chicago last weekend?” And I’m tired of expecting that I’ll be long gone before my kids, their kids or anyone down the line are seen as equal to some of my friends’ kids.

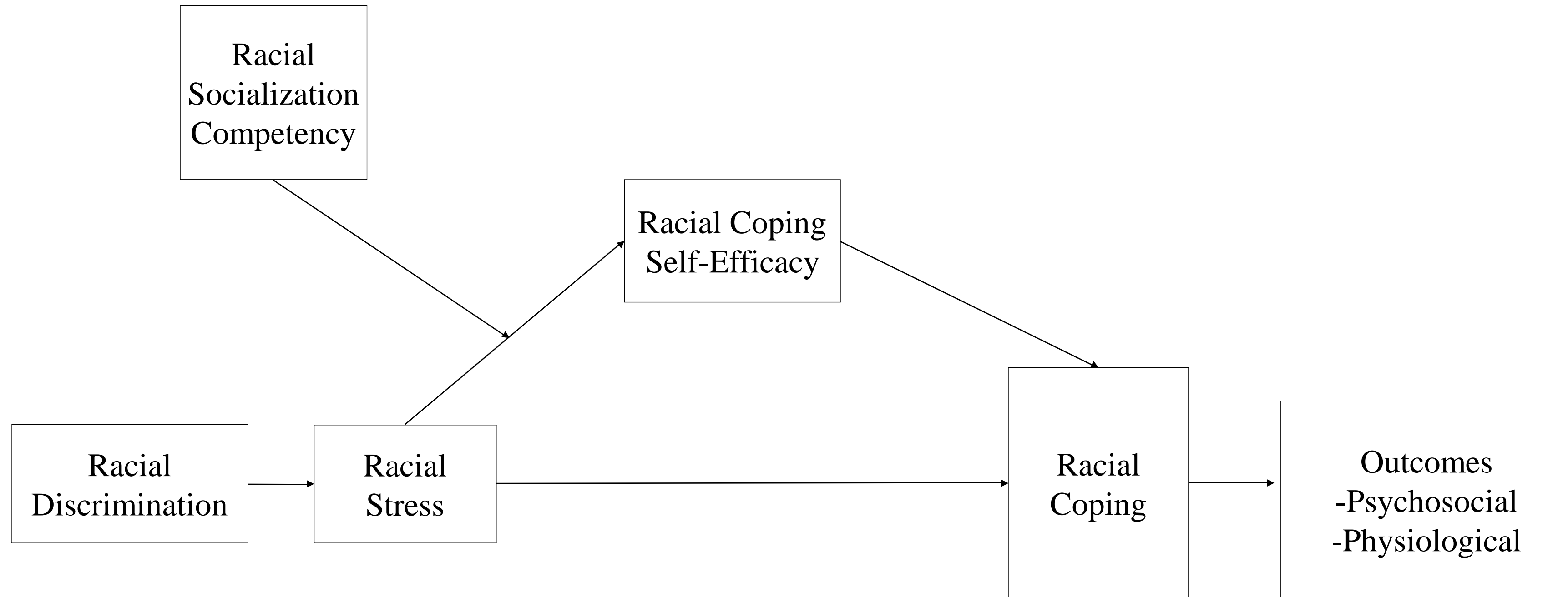
Racial Socialization

- Traditionally measured by:
 - Content
 - Frequency
- Findings, however, have been mixed
 - Certain RS types are associated with more positive outcomes
 - Discrepancy in transmission of content and frequency between reporters
 - How many times do parents have to remind kids to take their medicine?

Racial Socialization 2.0

- A new way of conceptualizing racial socialization:
 - Assessing the **quality** of processes
- Three basic competencies of racial socialization competency:
 - Reducing Stress
 - The burden and import of preparing children to successfully cope within a racialized society
 - Improving Skills
 - The degree to which a socializing agent understands and is prepared through repeated exercise to engage in racial socialization with a child
 - Improving Confidence
 - The ability that a socializing agent feels regarding communication with a child

Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory (RECAST)



- “We expect that [this theory] will predict how well African American youth can critically and consciously reappraise and resolve racial conflicts by facing and challenging the habitus of expendable Black humanity.”

We know the problem

We've got a theory

Why won't *someone* do something about it?!





EMBRace

Engaging, Managing, and Bonding through Race

EMBRace is a 5-session family-based intervention designed to:

increase parent and adolescent socialization competency

reduce parent and adolescent racial stress and trauma through self-efficacy and coping

improve adolescent psychological and academic outcomes



EMBRace involves skill development in:

Engaging [Racial socialization content]

Managing [Stress management and processing: CLC-BE]

Bonding [Familial delivery and relationship]

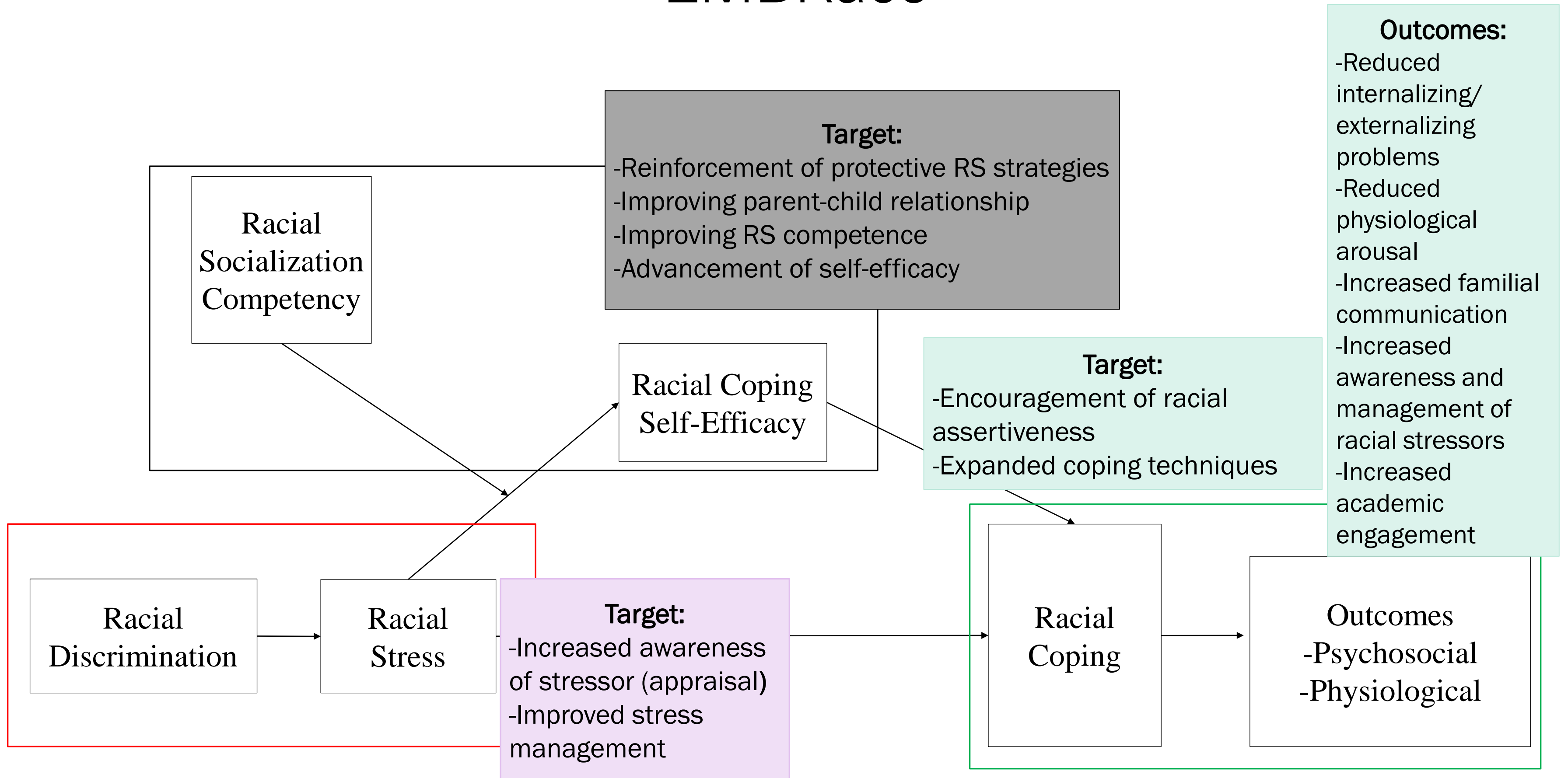


What is EMBRace?

- As the first racial socialization intervention for adolescents and parents*, EMBRace seeks to provide support for culturally-specific theories and evidence-based practices in the interruption of racism as a virus.
- In other words, we're moving "The Talk" to "The Walk".



EMBRace



■ Participants

- Black 10-14 year olds and their caregiver
 - Participants compensated \$100(+) dollars per family for a completed trial
 - Books, t-shirts, gift certificates, and participation certificates

■ Recruitment

- Referrals from schools
- Partner with behavioral service agencies
- Social media, word-of-mouth, community flyering

Method

■ Delivery

- Clinical manual and participant guide
 - Content and activities for parent, child, and family
 - 30-minute parallel, 15-minute dinner, and 45-minute conjoint sessions
 - Behavioral activation, role playing

Procedure



Media from EMBRace

“A Conversation About Growing Up Black” [NYTimes]

How do
we do it?

-To parent: *In the video, a child says he is being ‘hunted’. What has it been like as a parent to have a Black child at a time where they feel ‘hunted’?*

-To child: *How does it feel that your parent would have to warn you about racism?*

Integrating CBT Strategies in Clinical Care

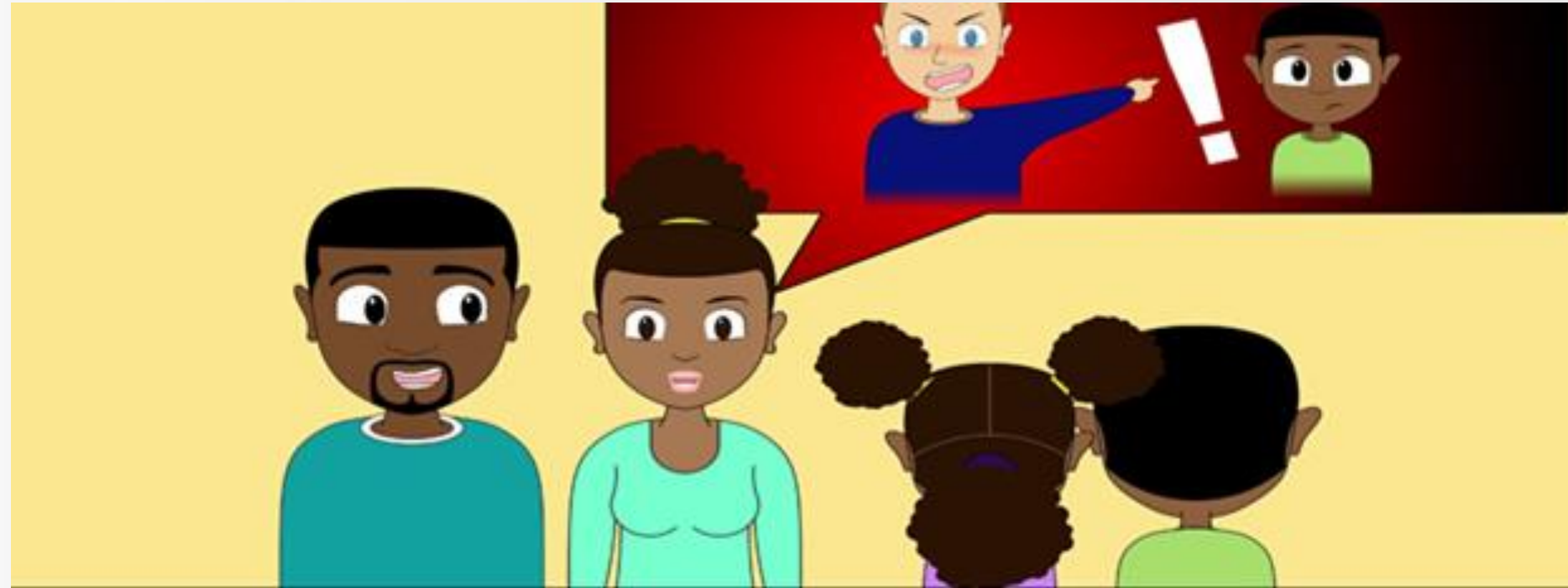
Psychoeducation and Parenting
Relaxation
Affective Modulation
Cognitive Coping and Processing
Trauma Narrative
In-Vivo Exposure
Conjoint Sessions
Enhancing Safety

Stabilization Phase

Processing Phase

Integration/
Consolidation Phase

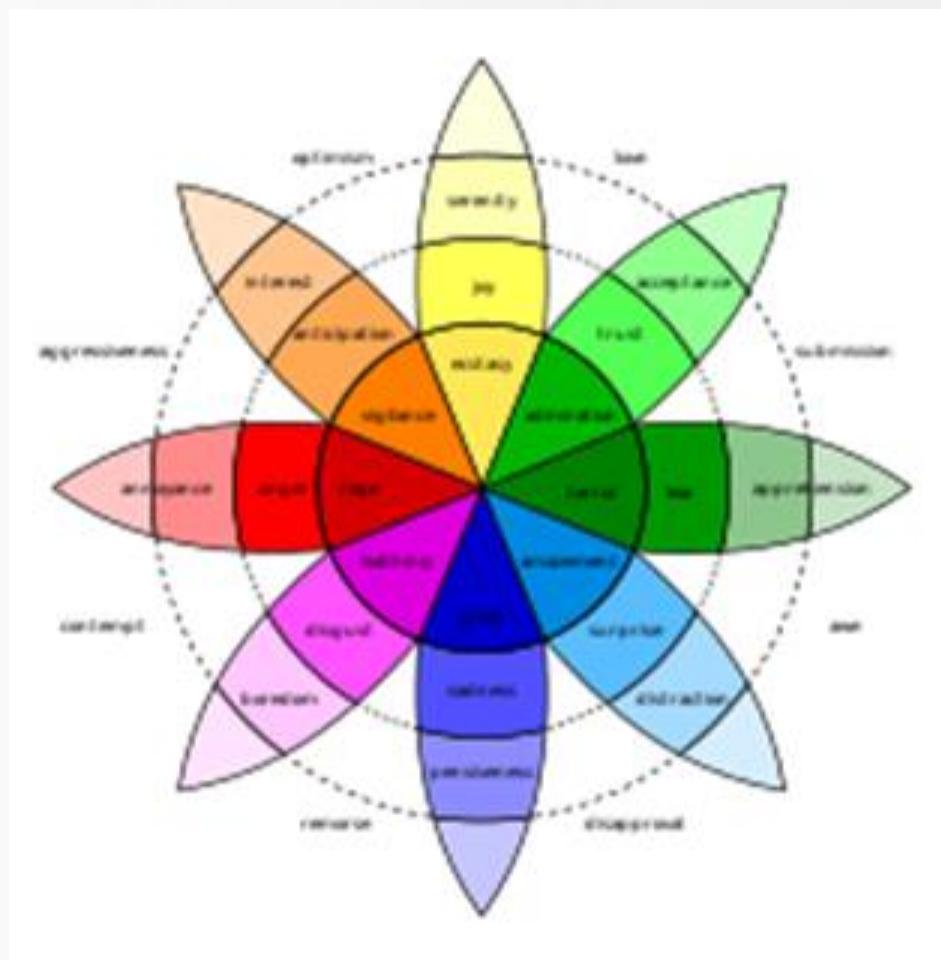
Affective Identification



The purpose of affective identification is to help recognize and communicate feelings associated with experiences of racism and discrimination.

Once you are able to identify and communicate your feelings, you can begin to tolerate distressing emotions and to change the thoughts that are associated with them.

What recent experiences have you had with racial discrimination, and how did they make you feel?

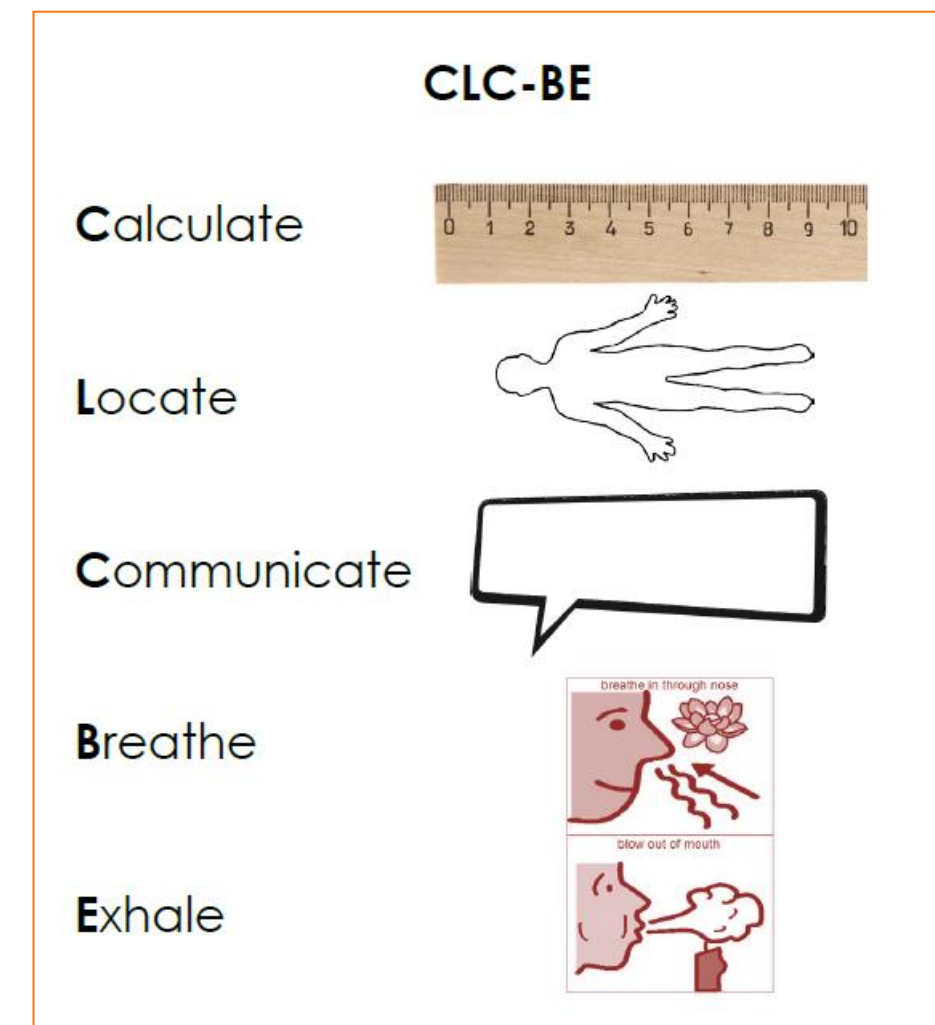


Other Cognitive Behavioral Strategies

- Regulation of relaxation response
 - Constant triggering of sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight)
- Solution-focused brief therapy and future-oriented questions
 - Supports clients' ability to generate solutions to their problem cognitions
- Cognitive restructuring, meaning making, and attribution
- Reducing cognitive dissonance
- Stress inoculation

Calculate, Locate, Communicate, Breathe & Exhale (CLC-BE)

- **Exposure: Think about a stressful encounter**
 - **Calculate**
 - On scale of 1-10, how stressful was it? Did it shift, spike?
 - **Locate**
 - Find in your body where you feel the stress: be detailed
 - **Communicate**
 - What self-talk is going on in your head?
 - **Breathe**
 - **Exhale**



Calculate, Locate, Communicate, Breathe & Exhale (CLC-BE)

- **Think about a stressful encounter**

- **Calculate**

- **Locate**

- **Communicate**

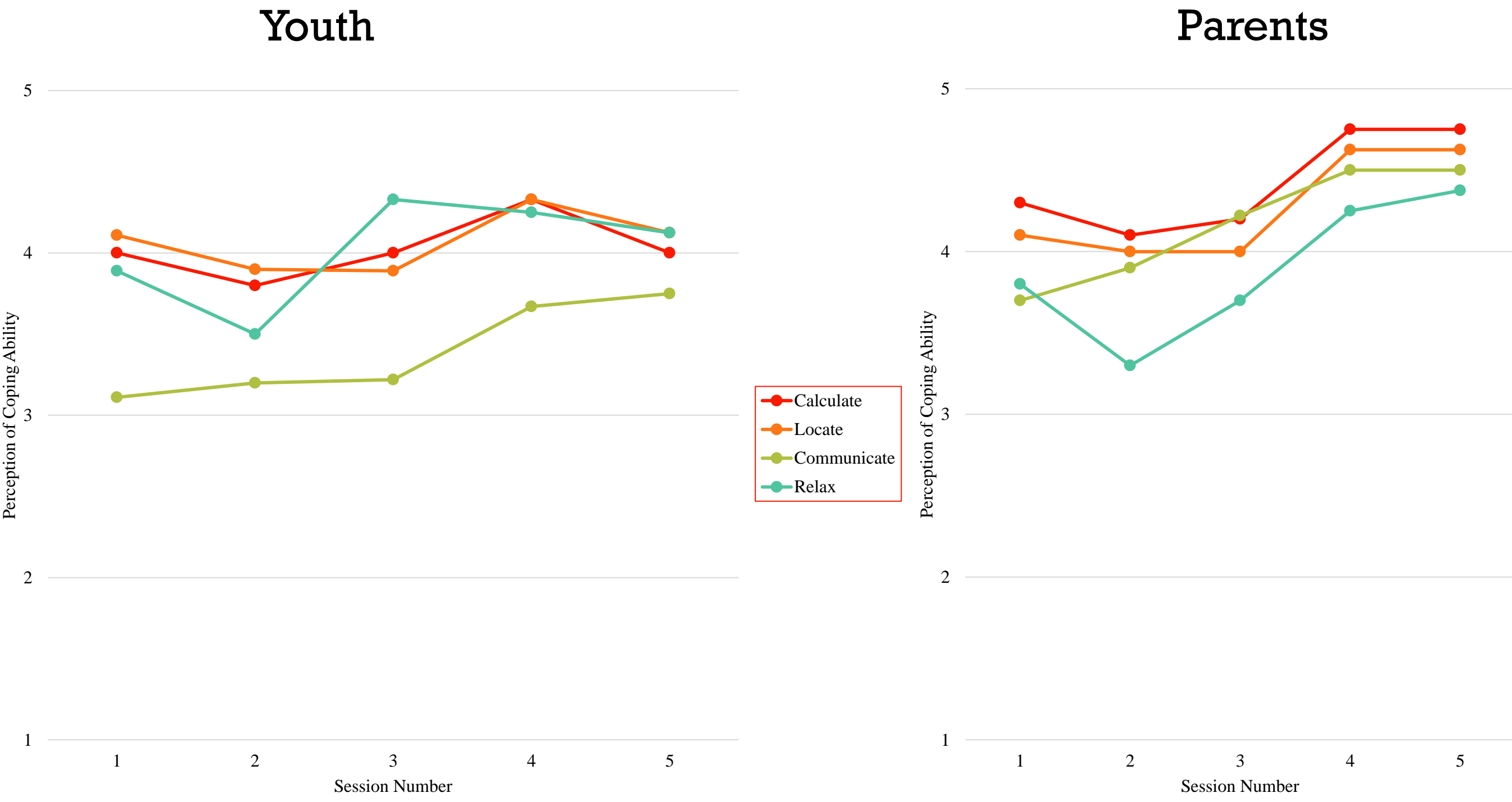
- **What self-talk is going on in your head?**

- **Communicate: We may hold a dysfunctional schema (no matter what I do, I'll always be viewed as x, y, and z) and in the case of racism, there may not be ANYTHING dysfunctional about it! However, the idea that it is somehow the individual's fault, when really, it is the jacked-up environment, is what we can target in our CBT work.**

- **Breathe**

- **Exhale**

Pilot Results



Engaging



[Youth] “...it felt good cuz like, we can talk about, like, what we seen. So like, we won't have anger built up inside of us.”

[Youth] “It was exciting um talking. It helped me be able to get the feelings out. Because if I didn't—it would have a negative impact on your character and morals.”

Managing

[Youth] “Getting to get stuff off my chest about how I feel about White people and racial experiences...”

[Parent] “It was empowering...It opens up like obviously a different conversation that you wouldn't typically have with your child. So, for me it was empowering because I feel like I'm teaching him, like you know, this is going to happen, but this is how you react.”



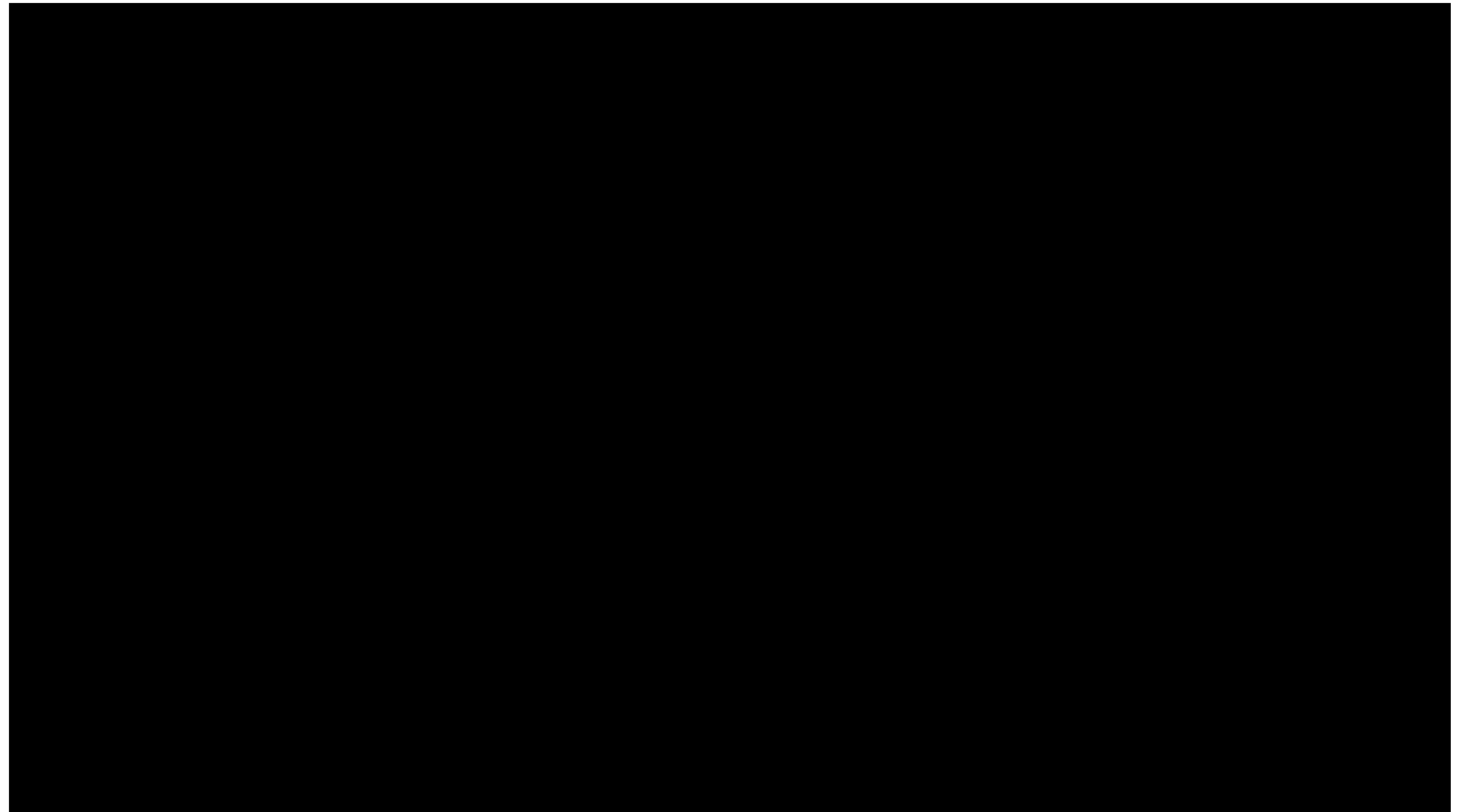
Bonding

[Parent] “I wouldn’t mind coming...they [the clinicians] listened to everything from me to [my child] and they helped us try to communicate together.”

[Parent] “Prior to EMBRace, I thought I was well-informed about how my child thought about certain situations. Since EMBRace, I now listen more and encourage more communication from my child.”



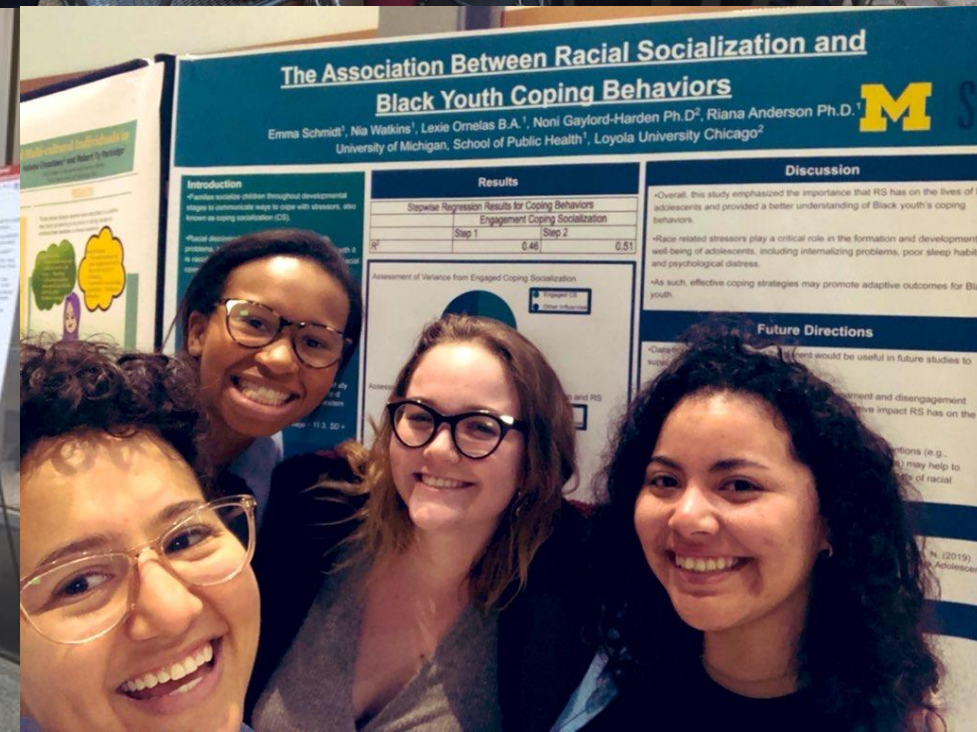
“Ben”
-Age 13



“BE”

What's Next?

- Publications
 - RECAST Theory
 - Intervention Development
 - Feasibility & Preliminary Outcomes
 - Case Study
- Funding
 - Michigan Health Endowment Foundation
 - UofM Depression Center
 - Michigan Center for Urban African American Adults Research
- Next Stop: Detroit (...but then COVID...)



DETROIT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



the
CHILDREN'S
Center



EMBRace



bfd
Inc.
BLACK FAMILY DEVELOPMENT INC.



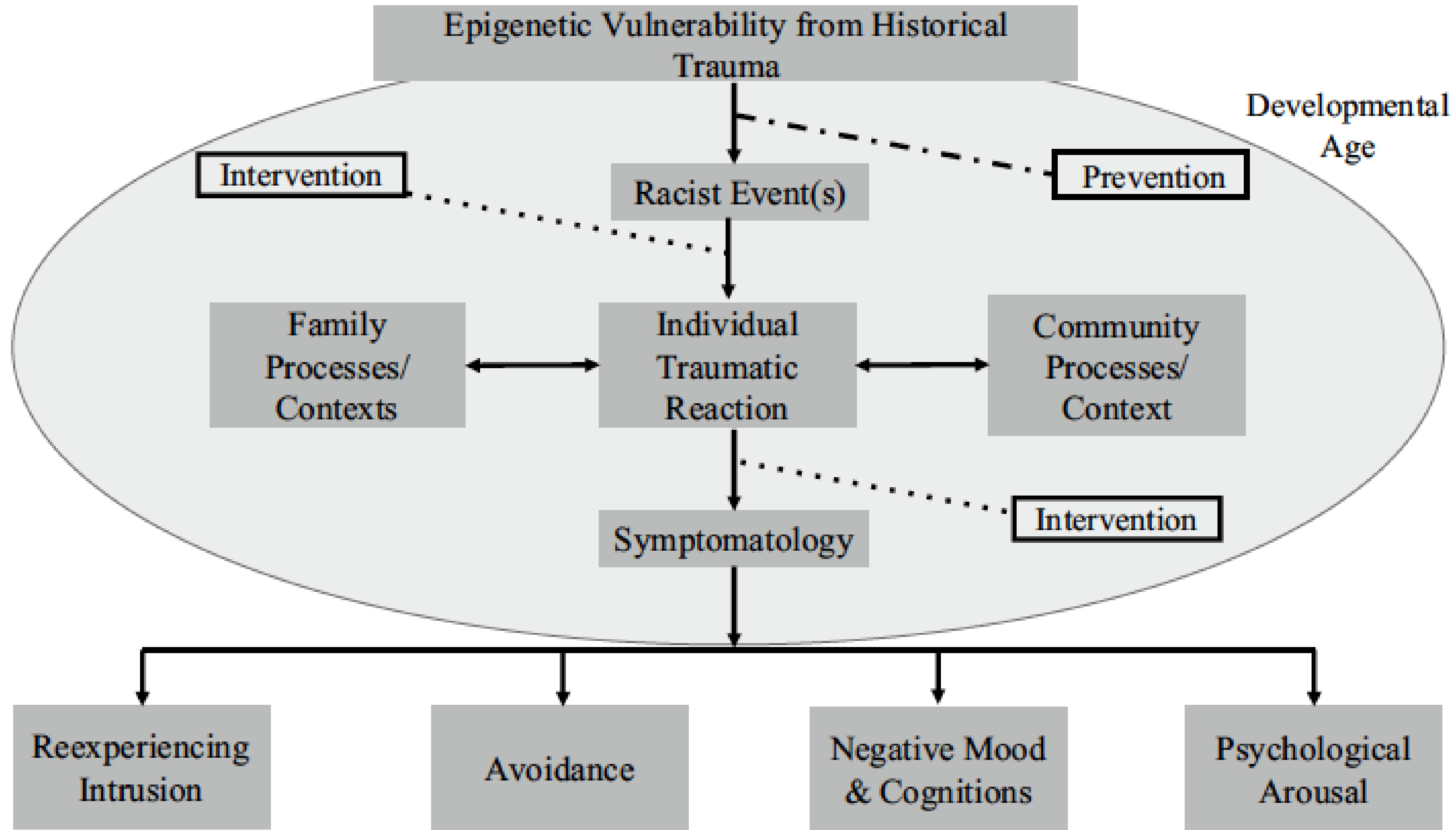
THE FUTURE



Directly working with families



Better training clinicians and research staff



Racial Socialization for *Clinicians*

-As providers living in a cultural and racial world, the experiences of our clients manifest in:

- Our biases or actions toward them
- Clients' experiences and manifestation of the problem with which they are contending

Racial Socialization for *Clinicians*

- Our unbelief in racial stress and trauma can lead to oversight
 - Challenges in properly assessing, diagnosing, and treating clients
 - Lead to inappropriate treatment decisions and rapport building
 - Lead to a misunderstanding of the etiology of trauma, invalidation of trauma, and cause some to erroneously believe that racial trauma is a “myth”



THE FUTURE

1

Directly working with families

2

Better training clinicians and research staff

3

Reduce and one day **eliminate** discrimination as a driving force of health

Safety Check

- In theory, viruses reduce in harm over time
 - Inoculation allows us to heal while devising new strategies
 - And yet...we prepare constantly for safety in the “real world”
- Although no magic formula exists from *preventing* viruses, **we must prepare for it**
 - Racial socialization allows for this preparation *and* healing
 - **Major key:** keeping children emotionally safe helps them to build the vaccine
 - We’re not taking the blame off the sickening system, rather, focusing first on life and quality of that life
- It takes a dual approach to keep Black kids safe – let’s get our masks ready

GET IN TOUCH



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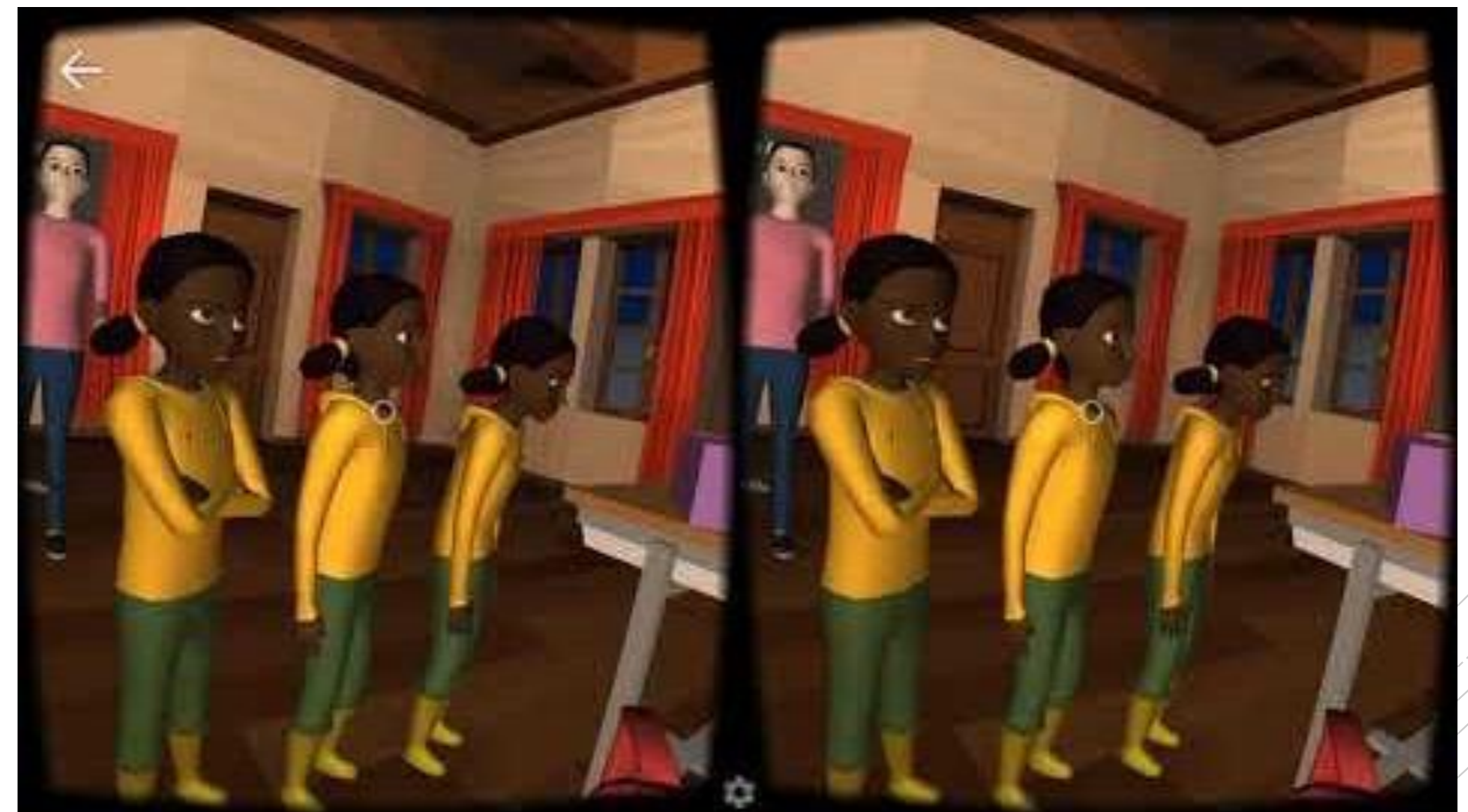
Kinetic Energy = The Talk as a Buffer



Individual + Interpersonal Work Creates Changes Externally and Systemically

Advancement

- Based on RECAST and with EMBRace, we are testing a new virtual reality platform ([Passage Home](#)) to see the *behaviors* influenced by the intervention
 - An experimental simulation of racial discrimination explores real-world phenomena via virtual narratives
 - In the classroom
 - With police outside
 - A new grant lets us co-construct narrative with Detroit youth



Advancement

- Based on the EMBRace Program, we are testing a new virtual reality platform ([Passage Home](#)) to **see** the *coping behaviors* influenced by the intervention
 - An experimental simulation of racial discrimination in this study seeks to explore real-world phenomena via virtual narratives



Racial Trauma: Preschool and Elementary Children

Ages 3-5 years and 6-11 years

Developmental Milestones

- ❧ Critical time for physical, cognitive, language and socioemotional development.
 - ✦ Children 6 and under may have different reactions to traumatic experiences compared to older children.
- ❧ May be able to recognize racial differences by 3 months, but lack the cognitive understanding and language to report and process racial discrimination.
- ❧ Can begin to understand that skin color can be a threat to safety and security
 - ✦ Their own, but also their caregivers

Racial Trauma: Middle School Aged Children

Age 12-14

■ Developmental Milestones

- Rapid physical growth, which may contribute to further stereotyping
- Cognitive and psychological changes associated with increased exploration of autonomous identity and autonomy
- Identity development including racial-ethnic identity development
- Youth may internalize RST
 - Can influence negative attributions about their racial group (e.g., private regard, public regard)

Racial Trauma: High School Age Youth

Age 15-18

Developmental Milestones

- Increase in physical, social, and cognitive changes
- Formal operational thought, deductive reasoning, and problem-solving skills
- Increase in social comparison
- Coalesce with increase understanding of advanced forms of racism (e.g., institutional), exposure, and ability to make meaning of these encounters

How is racism a virus?

- Passes down from friends, families, and Through generations
- Viruses - modifies its shape and form
 - Asymptomatic - people who don't see or don't know that they uphold racism in society
 - Hard to eradicate because it morphs
- Does not present itself on people - not immediately apparent
- Spreads between institutions
- Health effects of racism - chronic stress and pregnant Black women

How is RS a vaccine?

- -The suit “absorbs force,” but re-expells it. The more force the suit “absorbs” the stronger/more force it can expel, creating “super strength”
- -So the force and abuse of racism does not need to be taken in to ourselves, it can bounce off and be the power we use to dismantle racism
- -The suit allows you to connect with previous Black Panthers, so it gives you a connection to your intellectual, spiritual, and cultural heritage
- -Connecting the wisdom and strength of the ancestors to navigate oppression and racism

How is RS a vaccine?

- -Why were the costumes redesigned?
- Because you never know what you'll need; because you can improve things without it being broken
- -Just because something works, doesn't mean it can't be improved - Shuri
- -The suit is also made of vibranium, a material only found in Wakanda. So the strength that imbues Black Panther is culturally specific, his power comes from this Black source
- -He can generate the suit anywhere with the press of a button. So that strength is within us, always.