



SSWAA Response to Recent Hate Crimes Across the United States

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Like many of you, members of the SSWAA Board experienced a myriad of emotions in response to the recent events that occurred a few weeks ago in Charlottesville, VA and we felt it was imperative to respond to the ever present impact of racism, bigotry and oppression permeating our society. As school social workers, we have an ethical responsibility to confront all forms of bias and oppression. As outlined in our Code of Ethics, *“social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.”*

Now is time for the United States Government and leaders in our SSWAA community to work together to find effective means to help ensure that physical and emotional attacks on innocent law abiding Americans will not be tolerated. SSWAA recognizes the right to Free Speech; however, the U.S. Supreme Court has held that "advocacy of the use of force" is unprotected when it is "directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action" or is "likely to incite or produce such action" ([Brandenburg v. Ohio](#) , 1969). There is a responsibility that we all have to ensure that every human being is treated with respect and dignity. The behaviors of people who are members of neo-Nazi, white nationalist, KKK, or other hate groups over the recent months did not begin with the current national government and will not end when the current national leadership is out of office. The trauma caused by hate, bias and oppression has been around for centuries and it is time for the country to recognize and address this hate regardless of how difficult or challenging it is to discuss and confront these issues. Charlottesville is not an isolated event, situations similar to it occur on a regular basis. Thus, the impact of the historical, intergenerational and present trauma of hatred and oppression not only fractures our communities but devalues the strengths and well-being of every human being.

The behavior of a few will indeed negatively impact the future safety of many if we don't take deliberate, explicit and strategic action to ensure that all citizens (including our students) enjoy the same measure of freedom and democracy as the majority. Daily we contribute to the lives of future leaders. Our duty as social workers and individuals is to facilitate courageous

conversations about race and racism. In order to hold courageous conversations about race and racism, each of us must explore our own racial identity, the impact of white privilege and continually expand our racial consciousness. It is critical for school social workers and educators to address issues related to race to uncover personal as well as institutional biases that contribute to the marginalization of the students and families we serve. We need to hold or contribute to conversations about race. We certainly do not expect that every social worker is an expert on this topic and for some of us talking about race and racism may be uncomfortable and if it is, it is essential to explore this discomfort. We cannot continue to **not** have conversations about race or accept the view of not seeing color due to our professional or personal experience. "Color" and diversity are what makes this country great. It is not racist to talk about race or culture.

SSWAA is calling on all of our members to take a stand and respond against biased language and actions. We must also identify student populations that may be vulnerable to joining various hate groups. Finally, one of our pivotal roles is to help develop and sustain safe and supportive school environments where all students feel valued and respected. Utilizing restorative practices and peace circles is one strategy for building compassion and respect where every voice is heard.

To assist you and your staff in effectively honoring the personal narratives and experiences of our students, www.tolerance.org offers educational materials to support "educators committed to diversity, equity and justice". Here is a list of other resources to support and strengthen your practice :

1. McIntosh, Peggy. (1989). *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack..* Retrieved from: <https://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack>.
2. Wise, Tim. (2004). *White like Me : Race, Racism and White Privilege in America*. Retrieved from: www.whitelikememovie.org.
3. Singleton, G. E. & Linton, C. (2005). *Courageous Conversations about Race. 1st edition*. Corwin
4. Hobson, Melody. (2014). *Ted Talks: Color Blind or Color Brave?* Retrieved from: https://www.ted.com/talks/melody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave.
5. NASW. (2007). *Institutional Racism: The Social Work Profession: A Call to Action*. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialworkers.org/diversity/InstitutionalRacism.pdf>.
6. University of Minnesota Extension Children, Youth and Family Consortium. (2017). *Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing*. Retrieved from: <https://www.extension.umn.edu/family/cyfc/our-programs/historical-trauma-and-cultural-healing/>.
7. Forrest-Bank, S., & Jenson, J. M. (2015). Differences in Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Microaggression among Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White Young Adults. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 42(1), 141-161.
8. Hunn, V., Harley, D., Elliott, W., & Canfield, J. P. (2015). Microaggression and the Mitigation of Psychological Harm: Four Social Workers' Exposition For Care of Clients, Students, and Faculty Who Suffer 'A Thousand Little Cuts'. *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)*, 7(9), 41-54.

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