

Counselors for Social Justice's (CSJ) Open Letter and Call to Action:

Counselors for Social Justice stands in solidarity with the Black community. We support the Black Lives Matter movement, protesters, and any other activists, leaders, advocates, communities and individuals who fight systemic and institutionalized racism. Our country is experiencing mourning, rage, confusion, heartbreak and despair over George Floyd's death, what was essentially a modern day lynching. A man, presumed guilty instead of innocent because of his Black skin, held down under a white officer's knee, gasping for breath, pleading for his life for almost 9 minutes, his life stolen away by someone who vowed to serve and protect, while people looked on. Now that this video is public for all to see it is possible that justice in some way will be brought. However, this is at a great cost. Not just the invaluable cost of a life and the family, friends, and community left behind. Black Americans are reeling right now. George Floyd's ghastly murder on public display is a collective trauma for all Black Americans. Let it be a call to action for ALL Americans.

Of course, racial violence and injustice is not a new problem. There are too many innocent Black Americans, like Rev. George Lee, Emmett Till, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and Botham Jean, who have been murdered in this country. These murders are a blatantly violent symptom of the systemic and institutionalized racism that permeates to the core of the political, economic and social systems of this country. Racism is a white problem, and it demands white action. This historically rooted issue demands united, collective action. Now is the time for white people, in particular, to listen to our Black leaders, colleagues, friends, neighbors, and family members and really listen. And, then we must take action. While listening to Black Americans and centering their voices, the rest of us must not expect them to comfort our discomfort, nor should we ask them questions that we can educate ourselves on. We must not ask them to do more emotional labor, as this continued and public display of undue violence and the microaggressive actions the Black community experience every day are too much already.

Key to the Counselor Identity is striking a balance between individual counseling and our role as social justice advocates with the ultimate goal of challenging the status quo that perpetuates world-wide inequities, while simultaneously addressing clients' immediate concerns. Our advocacy identity should be evident across the roles we hold (e.g., counselors, counselor educators, supervisors, researchers, leaders, and citizens). Therefore, we must work to increase our self-awareness and other-awareness, to be diligent in recognizing and addressing issues of power and oppression in our clinical settings, classrooms, communities, and our research.

To do this effectively, we must have a deep understanding of the impact of centuries of historical oppression, as well as an awareness of systemic barriers. Many of us, especially Black Counselors and Counselors of Color who are reminded every day of this oppression, are already aware, knowledgeable and doing this work. We must all follow their lead. We must work to ensure our counseling curriculum and research endeavors reflect the necessity of advocacy given the continued institutional and social barriers that create and sustain inequities. Finally, involvement at the local, state, national and international levels of government is necessary to address and remove barriers at the policy level. These processes include collaboration with

communities and community organizations and are outlined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2018).

Your professional organization, the American Counseling Association (ACA), and divisions of ACA, such as: Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ), the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), the Society for Sexual, Affectual, intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE), and the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) are offering resources and events to assist you in joining this cause. If you do not know where to begin and teeter between wanting to take action and wanting to crawl back to the comfort of complacency, there are many ways you can take action. Additionally, there are wonderful resources in print and online to begin or continue your own journey of racial exploration and action. CSJ will be posting some of these resources on our website. We also implore you to seek out racial justice educators such as Rachel Cargle, Layla Saad, Ijeoma Oluo, Ibram Kendi, Marc Lamont Hill, and Kimberle Crenshaw and to visit the website: racialequitytools.org. There are so many free access resources to educate yourself about the history and current state of racial injustice in this country. You only need to commit to begin or to continue forward.

For those of you all too familiar with racism and its insidious and detrimental effects, we see you, we hear you, and we stand with you. We also know this is not enough. It will never be enough until white supremacy and institutionalized racism are dismantled. We commit to be co-conspirators in this fight for justice. We have a long way to go, and we must continue on.

In Solidarity for Justice,
Counselors for Social Justice