**Stress, Trauma & Coping**

The experience of traumatic events shapes us, no matter if they happened during childhood or as an adult. Trauma is an event or series of circumstances that have lasting effects on mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual well-being. Stress occurs from our minds and bodies identifying an event as physically or emotionally life-threatening. The situation triggers our survival instincts and our natural fight-flight-freeze response. But our minds and bodies cannot sustain being in survival mode for extended periods of time. Sometimes, those who experience high amounts of stress and traumatic situations are unable to process or move past what has happened and are stuck in a loop.

Childhood trauma manifests in many ways and when carried into adulthood, it can create a cycle of adverse experiences that affect future generations. The effects of traumatic events place a heavy burden on the individual, connected families, and communities. Responses to stress and traumatic experiences are personal. There is an intersection between trauma, coping, and substance misuse. Studies show that about 61% of adults have had at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) according to the CDC. Historical trauma is critical to understanding the progress and plight of African American mental health and wellbeing. During February the contributions into the culture and history of the United States of America from African Americans are highlighted and celebrated.

Trauma prevention and intervention strategies are important. Creating a strategy of helpful coping skills to pull from prepares us to face difficult moments while increasing levels of resilience and feelings of wellbeing. Here are a few tips to add to your coping strategies:

1. Seek mental health and/or substance use treatment.
2. Identify one or more people you feel safe with who can help to hold you accountable.
3. Develop, repair, or maintain healthy relationships for internal and external support.
4. Learn and practice self-regulation skills.
5. Encourage yourself and others.
6. Find ways to increase your self-esteem.
7. Focus on your strengths.
8. Model healthy behavior when dealing with difficult situations.
9. Identify your triggers and practice ways to work through them.

**Resources:**

* [Why Historical Trauma is Critical to Understanding Black Mental Health](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202010/why-historical-trauma-is-critical-understanding-black-mental)
* [Addressing Childhood Trauma Starts with Family Support](https://www.verywellhealth.com/adverse-childhood-experience-family-support-5442873#citation-13)
* [Violence Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html)
* [ACEs and Minorities](https://www.centerforchildcounseling.org/aces-and-minorities/)

For general questions about the FCPS Substance Abuse Prevention Program, please contact the Office of Student Safety & Wellness at: 571.423.4270.

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