

Evidence Brief

Four Strategies to Promote Radical Healing with Black Youth in Conflict with the Law

How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub, Google Scholar, Google, and online academic databases using the following key terms: "radical healing", "critical healing", and "Black youth".

Definition of Key Terms

Radical healing and *critical healing* are terms that are used interchangeably to describe the same concept. The term **radical healing** will be used throughout this Evidence Brief.

Radical healing is a process that builds the capacity of people to recognize the ways in which they are being oppressed, and inspires them to take action to change oppressive conditions by reimagining, and then recreating, the world in which they want to live (Chatmon & Watson, 2018; French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010; Ginwright, 2015; Ginwright, 2018; MacArthur & Lane, 2019; Nygreen, 2017; Theriault, 2019).

Helping people reach **critical consciousness** is a key part of the radical healing process, because it gives people the ability to come to the realization of their own oppression and take the steps necessary to liberate themselves (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010). The process of reaching critical consciousness in radical healing is done by *interrogating issues of power, history, identity, and the impact of collective struggle* (Ginwright, 2010). Civic engagement is also discussed in radical healing as a method by which people can act to change their conditions (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010; Nygreen, 2017; McArthur & Lane, 2019).

Summary of Evidence: Trauma and Healing are *Collective*

Evidence shows that racial trauma has the ability to wound individuals across generations, whether or not the individual has directly experienced racism (French et al., 2020). This underscores the finding that healing from racial trauma should be done *collectively*, as it is something that impacts entire communities (French et al., 2020; Theriault, 2019). Collective healing is necessary because it helps both the individual and the community at large (French et al., 2020). Radical healing recognizes that people of colour and Indigenous communities thrive when they are connected to each other, and are able to see that their traumatic experiences are part of a "common collective struggle" from which the entire community needs to be healed (French et al., 2020, p. 19). Radical healing rejects the idea that healing should be an individual journey, and does not classify

individualistic attempts to address trauma as healing, but, rather, as methods of coping (French et al., 2020).

One of the benefits of collective healing is that it helps individuals avoid internalizing the trauma that they have experienced (Ginwright, 2018). What happens instead is that members of the collective help to explain how the trauma is structurally facilitated and not the responsibility of the individual, which is where the healing process begins (Ginwright, 2018). When people are conscious of the root causes of their oppression, they are able to collectively take steps to carry out meaningful action that will result in the resistance, and transformation, of injustice (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010).

Summary of Evidence: Four Strategies

1. Create healing spaces.

Radical healing challenges our understanding of how healing is able to occur by moving away from ideas that restrict healing to the offices of doctors or therapists (French et al., 2020). Radical healing rejects deficit-based beliefs, which suggest that those who experience trauma must seek healing outside of themselves or their communities (French et al., 2020). The aim of radical healing is to foster the agency of traumatized communities to achieve **wellness** through strategies to engage individuals and their communities (French et al., 2020). One of these strategies is to create *spaces dedicated to healing* (MacArthur & Lane, 2019). Healing circles, for example, are facilitated so that participants can share testimony, bear witness, (re)build community, learn how to navigate racism, and talk about issues that matter to them without the help of mental health professionals (French et al., 2020; McArthur & Lane, 2019; Nygreen, 2017; French et al., 2020).

Radical healing moves beyond medical models, which are often individualistic and do not acknowledge collective trauma and the need for collective healing (French et al., 2020). Healing spaces are also useful for the process of radical healing because participants develop relationships in which they grow to love and care about each other (Nygreen, 2017). Caring is a radical act that counteracts the dehumanizing effects of racism (Ginwright, 2010). Healing spaces facilitate networks of care that promote “cultural integrity, communal and individual survival, spiritual growth, and political change under oppressive conditions” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 84). Community organizations can take part in radical healing by providing these spaces and opportunities for people to connect with each other where they can identify and organize to address the challenges facing their community (Ginwright, 2010).

2. Get political.

There is a connection between social action and radical healing (French et al., 2020), and civic

engagement is one way that social action can be carried out (Ginwright, 2010). Civic engagement is defined as any activity that strengthens social ties and collective responsibility, and benefits the overall society (Ginwright, 2010). Although it is generally thought that “urban youth have fewer opportunities and are less likely to participate” in civic affairs, these youth often participate in non-traditional ways (Ginwright, 2010, p. 79); in the context of radical healing, this could include writing and sharing poetry, performing in hip-hop concerts, and participating in gender-specific support groups (Ginwright, 2010; French et al., 2020; Nygreen, 2017; McArthur & Lane, 2019). These non-traditional spaces must be identified and included as sites for political engagement (Ginwright, 2010).

Practitioners must also work to disrupt the centering of whiteness in understanding what it means to be politically active. For example, othermothering is a non-traditional political practice defined by Black feminists as “women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities” (McArthur & Lane, 2019, p. 70). Othermothering (and otherfathering) is an act that is often done within communities to heal the wounds created by poverty, parents who are deceased, incarcerated people, or those otherwise unable to care for their children. Recognizing these actions as political and naming them as such is critical to recognizing collective trauma and collective healing from a strengths-based perspective.

3. Reimagine what is possible.

Another key component of radical healing is the process of reimagining and recreating the conditions that are desirable to those seeking healing (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010; McArthur & Lane, 2019; Nygreen, 2017). This process can be hindered if the imaginations of those healing are in conflict with oppression experienced from job loss, violence, poverty, or substance use (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2010; Chatmon & Watson, 2018). Radical healing is the reconciliation of “the past to change the present while reimagining a new future” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 86). The ability to imagine a new future requires that we possess the ability ***to hope and believe that the conditions that restrict an individual’s ability to thrive can be changed.***

The reimagining process is also critical for professionals who are prepared ***to step out of their traditional roles and recreate new ones.*** Practitioners can consider the following practices (French et al., 2020) to support their radical healing work:

- Be aware of and continually assess the power dynamic in your relationship with racialized youth;
- Work with youth in a manner that is collaborative and bidirectional;
- Bear witness to youth;
- Respond with urgency to racism;
- Encourage the externalizing of challenges faced by youth by locating their external

source(s);

- Make your choices understandable, and understand a young person's choices;
- Engage with the young person's community to better understand them.

4. Centre principles of love, joy, and hope.

Young leaders are expanding their methods of resistance by incorporating new approaches to healing that are centered on the principles of love, joy, and hope (Ginwright, 2015). A *love ethic* is described as “an unconditional desire for human dignity, meaningful existence, and hope” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 35). *Joy* in the face of oppression is radical healing. Acknowledging the harm that has been done, and still being *hopeful* for a better future, is also radical healing (Ginwright, 2018). Radical hope and joy are necessary for radical healing because they are at the root of what spurs the social action taken by individuals to change their oppressive conditions.

References

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