



June 12, 2020

Dear CFS department students and colleagues,

These past two weeks have been filled with outpourings of deep pain, much sadness and anger as protests and denouncements have joined calls for us to *come together to forge alliances against racism* and White supremacy after the video surfaced of George Floyd's death following the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the losses of Black lives due to anti-Black violence. This racial trauma cannot be disconnected from the COVID-19 trauma given its' disproportionate impact on communities of Color. COVID-19 has magnified existing health disparities rooted in systemic and structural racism impacting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, as well as the insidiousness of xenophobia and racism towards Asian people.

These traumas create fear, exhaustion, and righteous anger. Some of you may have felt and feel these emotions and experienced these racialized traumas throughout your life, so calls to come together may feel empty and like a burden. Others who have not had the lived experiences of racism may feel hopeless and unsure of how to join in efforts to confront systemic racism or feel tired, as many of us have not developed the stamina and toolkits to confront racism. For those of us in the second group, we ask that all of us begin replacing hopelessness with helpfulness. Our actions are essential for dismantling systems that privilege some us at the expense of so many others. Black Lives Matter, and we must act accordingly.

This call to action is aimed at joining together Child and Family Studies students, colleagues, alumni, and community members near and far to not only acknowledge racism and White supremacy (*the belief that White people are superior to all others and should dominate society*) but also, to seek out and participate in actions that support efforts against racism and White supremacy and honor and celebrate Black Lives. [How can we do this?](#)

- Join a protest or celebration,
- Attend a workshop,
- Host a gathering to listen and learn,
- Create anti-racist learning experiences for peers, students, and community members,
- Do some reading and learning from Black scholars, or
- Actively search for opportunities to counter racist narratives, policies, actions or inactions, and work to dismantle systems that privilege White people at the expense of Black, Indigenous, and people of Color.

In the weeks and months to follow, we will provide additional resources and ideas to support this call to action. This call to action is rooted in our department's mission to research and teach topics that are socially and scientifically significant and emphasize development in context.



Everyone is invited to join, but this ask may be too much of “an ask” for those of you who live with racism and thrive despite its omnipresence. If this is you, we encourage you to engage in actions (or deliberate inactions) that promote resting, healing, resisting, and celebrating cultural heritage and resilience.

An immediate action that the Department of Child and Family Studies has taken is to create the **Diversity Action Committee**, chaired by Megan Haselschwerdt, joined by Javiette Samuel, Elsa Nownes, and Amanda Capannola. The committee’s role and responsibilities are still being determined; we are devoted to making sustained changes in the department. An early action will be drafting a new diversity statement and plan for department review. In Fall 2020, each college and Vice Chancellor unit is submitting Diversity Action Plans (DAPs). DAPs will be tied to the evaluation of Deans and others.

Thank you to those of you who have already submitted resources. Cassie Sorrels spent a lot of time collecting and categorizing these resources for us; they are attached to this email. We will continue inviting others to share resources with the committee so we can incorporate them into this list. Moving forward, if you need resources not listed, have questions about having tough conversations with children, family members, students or others about race, racism, Whiteness, White Supremacy, or anything related (including other oppressions, like homophobia, sexism, ableism, classism), please do not hesitate to reach out to Megan ([mhase@utk.edu](mailto:mhase@utk.edu)) who will consult with the committee and provide you with resources.

Becoming anti-racist and dismantling White supremacy are lifelong processes that require regular engagement, accountability, making mistakes, and doing better the next time. This call to action serves as our first steps. Stay tuned for an array of initiatives in which we will engage in and offer to you, including activities and opportunities to learn together and support one another. As we work to educate others, we have to continue educating ourselves, as individuals and a department, since we are complicit in sustaining White supremacy, and vow to take sustainable steps to learn more, rectify our wrongs, educate, heal, and take action.

We view diversity and social justice as central to researching, teaching, and practicing human development across the lifespan and family dynamics and processes –recognizing that action is needed to be consistent with these values.

In solidarity,

Mary Jane Moran, Department Head  
Megan Haselschwerdt, Faculty and Chair, Diversity Action Committee  
Javiette Samuel, Affiliated Faculty and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement and  
Director of Community Engagement and Outreach, and Member, Diversity Action Committee  
Elsa Nownes, Lecturer and Member, Diversity Action Committee  
Amanda Capannola, Doctoral Student and Member, Diversity Action Committee  
Cassie Sorrells, Doctoral Student