



**School Social Work Association of America
Position Paper**

Solidarity Statement with Black Lives Matter

May 31, 2020

Racism, stigma and inequities continue to permeate every aspect of our society. Whether in the form of individual acts or institutional policies and practices; racism establishes privilege, preferential treatment and power based on one's whiteness. The overall health and wellbeing of individuals and communities are significantly impacted by racism. As a profession guided by our ethical values of honoring the dignity and worth of every person and the need to challenge social injustices, the School Social Work Association of America is outraged by the traumatic and recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd as well as the threat to Christian Cooper's life.

On Monday, May 25th, two incidents took place within hours of each other that speak to the legacy of racial injustices, white supremacy and the attack on Black lives. On Monday morning, in New York City, Amy Cooper, a white woman, called 911 telling the dispatcher that an African American man, Christian Cooper, was threatening her. Mr. Cooper, an avid birdwatcher, had just simply asked that she leash her dog. This incident summoned the historical impulse to "protect" white womanhood from African American men. Ms. Cooper weaponized her whiteness, putting a black man's life in danger, and attempting to invoke fear in Mr. Cooper.

The very same day in Minneapolis, MN a 46-year-old black man named George Floyd was murdered by the police. While this occurred in a different city than the Christian Cooper incident, the murder of George Floyd is a haunting example of what can ultimately happen in the hands of the police when such calls like the one Amy Cooper placed are made. George Floyd was murdered when a white police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for more than seven minutes. Civilians witnessing the event stated to the police that his life was at risk. Even more disturbing, 3 other police officers trained to protect, stood by as Mr. Floyd was murdered by one of their own. Echoing the haunting words of Eric Garner in 2014, Floyd repeated, "I can't breathe" and "I'm about to die." The video of his horrific murder played in the media, likely triggering the historical and identity trauma of many communities of color as they have endured many such deaths without any legal consequences to the perpetrators. This murder is one among a long legacy of sanctioned state violence against Black bodies. Police killings have remained steady over the last 5 years with three persons, disproportionately African American men and/or persons with disabilities, losing their life each day.

As social workers, it is incumbent that we stay informed and engaged in issues of injustice, racism, oppression and violations of human rights that occur all around us. Our professional ethics not only demands competence in areas of diversity and cultural issues but that we

“challenge social injustice,” and as such we must be in solidarity with movements such as *Black Lives Matter*. In doing so, it is not enough to “not be racist,” rather we must be anti-racist and anti-oppressive in our actions. In doing so, we must work to address institutional and structural racism and actively disrupt these systems. State sanctioned violence against Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities is pervasive in the U.S. and we must take action. This means taking action in our personal lives, with our families, in our work, and in our communities. This means taking action as a school by equipping ourselves as faculty, school social workers, and staff to address institutional and structural racism, and the trauma that follows. Our mission as school social workers should be to dismantle white supremacy in our profession and in our schools. When we seek to dismantle systemic racism and oppression created by white supremacy, then and only then are we able to fully embrace and value the diversity in our communities.

As school social workers, we must all step into the discomfort of this conversation as this impacts every one of us when we serve children and teenagers in the schools. If we serve Black youth and other youth of color, we must be willing to assess where we are in our own journey of anti-racism. If we work with white youth, we are equally responsible for breaking the legacy of white supremacy and model for white youth what anti-racism looks like. We need to assess our own spheres of influence and our skill sets, thinking about how we can use our strengths, develop new skills, and be willing to be courageous and take risks in order to enact anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices. Here are some resources to begin these conversations and most importantly, to take action.

Resources

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