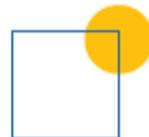




THE BLUEPRINT

Virtual Town Hall



Code Blue: The COVID Impact on Mental Health and Black Men

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall
September 29, 2020
Transcript

Speaker: Dr. Jeff Gardere

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([00:13](#)):

Well, hello everyone. My name is Dr. Jeff Gardere, better known as America's Psychologist, and I am part of Fathers Incorporated. Kenneth Braswell, our great leader, has asked me to address with you the issues of the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of Black men.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([00:34](#)):

First and foremost, let me tell you that we have a very interesting statistic, and that is that nationally, Black people represent 58% of COVID-19 deaths and about 13% of the population. States like Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin are really the examples of what I'm talking about with regard to racial disparities and the effects on their Black residents, and in this case, of Black men.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([01:04](#)):

By the way, the statistics come to you from Alvin Thomas, June 18th, 2020, from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. I can tell you my experience as a clinical psychologist is that many of the Black males that I speak to have been overrepresented with regard to the impact of COVID-19, not only on their physical health, but also on their mental health.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([01:32](#)):

Of course, a lot of that has to do with the day-to-day realities of Black men in this country, in the United States. First of all, we know they are overrepresented with regard to being frontline workers and because they are frontline workers and they cannot stay home as many of us are fortunate enough to do and work from home, they are out there in the trenches. But they are in many ways risking their lives and are more therefore vulnerable to COVID-19. So they have to deal with the illness of COVID-19, and given issues of an inequitable medical system that we have.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([02:16](#)):

Therefore, we see that they are having issues with diabetes, they're having issues with obesity, they're having issues with heart conditions and respiratory issues. Those are the conditions if, God forbid, they contract COVID-19 that make that illness much worse within their systems.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([02:37](#)):

Ta-Nehisi Coates talks about the reality of being in the Black body, and therefore that's what we're talking about, what happens to that Black body, and therefore they may be much more at risk for serious illness and for death.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([02:54](#)):

The other day-to-day reality that we have to look at is social injustice. We know that COVID-19 in many ways has pulled the cover off the many, many years of systematic racism, and in this political climate as well, overt racism. Therefore, we know that Black and Brown men, Black and Brown women, Native American men and women are much more at risk to police violence than white men and women, and all of those things have been, of course, exacerbated by COVID-19. As well, socioeconomic status as usual, because we are second and third class citizens the way that we are treated in this society because of COVID-19.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([03:48](#)):

We know that many people have been laid off. We know that there are many people who no longer are able to work, have lost their jobs, and again, we see an over-representation in the Black and Brown population, and therefore Black men have to deal with that. How do they take care of themselves? How do they take care of their families? Those are the day-to-day realities that we know that Black men, Black people, Black and Brown men are facing.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([04:19](#)):

Of course, along with that comes the second part of COVID-19. Not just the physical, not just the financial, but now the mental health tsunami, as I like to call it. What we're seeing is because of the socioeconomic struggles, because of the physical struggles of COVID-19, and because of the repercussions of now pointing out the social injustice, and as we see with Black Lives Matter how they're pointing out these situations have gone on for way too long and they finally need to be addressed.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([04:53](#)):

One of the things that is highlighted is what I call post-traumatic stress disorder. Some people call it post-traumatic slavery disorder. Now we're calling it race-based PTSD. What happens, all of the years of inequality, all of the years of having some issues with a police brutality, all of the years of systematic racism, how does that



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

play into the mental health of the Black male? So, we see that they do have post-traumatic stress. They have anxiety, they have depression, they have isolation, they have internalization, they have nightmares, they have flashbacks, and of course the fear of being Black in America. What doesn't help is that there is a stigma with regard to psychological and psychiatric care, and too often we don't tap into that.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([05:50](#)):

And as well, the biggest concern I believe for Black men, for me as a Black man, is the concern for my children. Sending them back to school. We know many of our schools in inner cities and where we are located have less funding than some of the more affluent white suburbs. We know that many of the schools where they're located have higher rates of COVID-19, and therefore that becomes a real issue as to the vulnerabilities of our children, of our teachers, of our administrators, of our school faculty, and then of course, bringing that back home to us who have all the vulnerabilities that I talked about before with regard to health issues and health disparities.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([06:42](#)):

We see a steep rise in children contracting COVID-19. So not just bringing it home, not just spreading it in schools, but how are they dealing with it physically? And knowing that Black children get less care than white children with regard to the quality of medical care, that becomes another concern for us.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([07:07](#)):

We do have many Black children as all children, or many children, I should say, who are getting online education. Now we know that's been a real issue in the Black community and many of our kids in our schools that are underfunded don't have the proper computers, and as well at home we don't have the proper internet connections. And of sometimes with the many issues that we face as people of color in our homes, not having enough resources, childcare, and so on, that becomes another issue as to the quality of the online education.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([07:47](#)):

Many of our children are special needs. Online education does not necessarily work for our kids because they can't focus because of ADD and other issues. And of course, as Black men, as Black parents, we have to have that talk with our children, the talk as to what happens with issues of police brutality, and of course what we see as profiling in many communities. So that is another concern for us and causes us as parents a lot of angst and anxiety making sure that our kids are safe.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([08:27](#)):

One of the things that I'm seeing now is that even though the Black Lives movement is changing many of the societal boundaries and issues that have held us back, there is a backlash. There are many people who are non-



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Black who have joined the Black Lives Movement, but again, this situation has become precarious in that we have a presidential campaign where many people are told to fear for their lives, to fear for the Black Lives Movement, and that's causing many issues with regard to our relations with one another as far as diversity in the United States.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([09:14](#)):

So just to close, what are some of the strategies that may help our Black males and our Black families, Black and Brown families? First of all, tap into organizations such as Fathers Incorporated, because they have so many resources that have been put together to help us, not just as Black parents, but also as Black males and Black families. Partner with the schools and make sure that we are part of the educational process and helping in making the decisions for our children with regard to education.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([09:51](#)):

Social distancing doesn't mean social isolation, so it's important that we say stay connected with our loved ones. We can do that online. And certainly, it is so important that we check up on one another and be able to talk to one another, commune with one another, share with one another as to what that Black pain feels like, but also what strategies that we can share with one another.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([10:18](#)):

Houses of worship is so important for us to tap into in that they are de-stigmatizing the whole issue of psychotherapy, and not just our spiritual health, but psychological health as being important. Psychological resources are online. Tap into them. They are there. Again, Fathers Incorporated is a great resource for that.

Dr. Jeff Gardere ([10:42](#)):

What can you do as a Black male? I'm speaking to you directly as a Black male what I've found important for me and what may be important for you. Establish routines every single day. Make sure that you get up at the proper time. Make sure that you shower and you shave and that you exercise and that you eat properly and that you meditate, that you love, that you take care of yourselves, because in order for us to help our children and help our communities, we've got to help ourselves and we have got to stay strong. Thank you so very much.

