

Ratgeber für Angehörige

von Opfern rechtsextremer,
rassistischer und antisemitischer
Gewalt

**Impressum:**

Psychologische Beratung
Für Opfer rechtsextremer, rassistischer &
antisemitischer Gewalt
Heinrich-Heine-Str. 15
Annenhöfe, 3. OG
10179 Berlin

Tel: 030 92 21 82 41
info@opra-gewalt.de
www.opra-gewalt.de

Gestaltung: Klara Oltersdorf



Contents

Foreword „Traumas are virulent“	4
Acts of violence as a cause of trauma.....	5
What is a racially motivated act of violence?	
What is an act of violence motivated by right-wing extremism?	
What is an antisemitic act of violence?	
Anti-Muslim Racism	
Experiences of misanthropic and racist discrimination	
Information on traumas.....	7
What is a traumatic experience?	
What are the possible consequences of traumatic experiences?	
Is my relative traumatized?.....	8
What is happening to my family member or loved one?.....	9
Shame, Avoidance, Helplessness	
Sensitivity towards racism	
How may I help?.....	13
How can I help myself?.....	15
Additional Stress Factors.....	16
Loss of the workplace	
Representation in the media	
Legal proceedings	
Traumatized Children and Teenagers.....	19
Helpful addresses and webpages.....	21

Foreword „Traumas are virulent“

Racist, (extreme) right-wing and antisemitic assaults are no rare events in Berlin. The victims of violence are usually severely traumatized and in need of help to move on with their lives. However, they are not the only ones requiring assistance at such difficult times. When a person is traumatized, they don't suffer alone as their family members and loved ones are also affected by the attack and trauma can be contagious.

It is understandable when relatives and loved ones of the victim feel stressed themselves, when they are sad, disheartened or angry.

After the violent event, perhaps...

- you feel helpless or discouraged because your friend is not well and you don't know what you can do for them.
- you feel that you are being treated unfairly by your relative when they are irritable.
- you are annoyed because everything now revolves around your family member.
- you feel helpless because your loved one asks you for your help at times and then rejects it at other times.
- you feel a growing anger inside you because improvement appears to be miles away.

This guidebook addresses family members, friends and loved ones of those who have been victims of right-wing, racist and antisemitic violence. It aims to support you in two primary ways. Initially, it seeks to inform you about the causes and consequences of these acts of violence, so you can better understand and support your loved ones. Furthermore, it directly addresses you as a relative and illustrates how you can cope with the stress and difficult emotions you are experiencing.

Acts of violence as a cause of trauma

What is a racially motivated act of violence?

A racially motivated act of violence is a violent attack, which is usually accompanied by racist remarks and insults. This can entail physical as well as psychological violence.

The actual affiliation or identity of the victim(s), such as to a specific race, group or ethnicity, doesn't play a role in these attacks. The perpetrators have the decision-making power in choosing how to read and racialize the victims (i.e. as Black, Muslim, or as a refugee, etc.). The origin of the perpetrator hereby is inconsequential; the only determining factor is the racist assumption-making of the offender and their motivation. Moreover, acts of violence aren't necessarily organized. Thus, what at first looks like a simple argument, can be a racially motivated act of violence.

Similarly, police violence can also be racially motivated at times. In addition to racially motivated police violence, racialized people may be stopped by police controls, having been deliberately selected by an identifying marker, such as their skin colour or clothes. This form of racism is called *racial profiling*. For racialised people, this can become a psychological burden that they struggle to cope with alone, especially when it occurs repeatedly.

What is an act of violence motivated by right-wing extremism?

An act of violence motivated by right-wing extremism is an act of violence committed by people with far-right and nationalistic worldviews. This ideology is based on the inequality of human beings and social Darwinism, where negative and contemptuous tropes are applied to specific groups of people. This includes, but is not limited to racism, anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism, antisemitism, racism towards Roma and Sinti, homophobia, transphobia, hostility towards homeless people, antifeminism and chauvinism.

What is an antisemitic act of violence?

An antisemitic act of violence towards Jewish people and people who are read as being Jewish.

Anti-Muslim Racism

Many Muslims and people read as being Muslim face structural racism, racist discrimination, threats and physical violence during their everyday lives.

Experiences of misanthropic and racist discrimination

More frequently than physical acts of violence, racialised people face experiences of everyday racial discrimination, structural racism and Othering experiences. Moreover, victims of racism are often exposed to multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. Being discriminated against based on multiple characteristics (such as race, gender, age, sexuality, classism, ableism, etc.) is called intersectional discrimination. Everyday racial discrimination might not leave behind physical scars, yet they wound just as deeply and can have a significant impact on people's mental health. This type of psychological wound can be exacerbated when this type of discrimination occurs consistently and repeatedly.

Information on traumas

What is a traumatic experience?

A traumatic experience is an event that usually occurs unexpectedly and surprises the affected person. Examples of such situations are:

- Racist insults and threats on the streets
- Racially motivated acts of violence in public places
- Experiencing abusive speech, being spat upon, being followed and chased due to the racialisation of the victim

The affected people tend to experience extreme helplessness, shock and/or fear (for their lives).

What are the possible consequences of traumatic experiences?

Every person reacts differently to a trauma. However, most people can't forget the traumatic event. They usually can't control the recall of events, experiencing intrusive memories and flashbacks of the incident within their everyday lives and routines. This can leave the victims feeling haunted and overwhelmed. Often the victims experience nightmares and restlessness during their sleep, preventing them from processing the traumatic experience during their sleep. Many people find themselves in a state of shock after the event occurs and are unable to process the event and their emotions. During their everyday lives, victims are often easily startled and afraid of going to places that are related to the traumatic event. Permanently reliving the incident can make them fall into a state of despair and helplessness. All of these effects are normal and are called post-traumatic stress reactions.

Not all victims of acts of violence develop a disorder

The symptoms and the degree of severity of the subjective suffering can be very different for each individual. Not all people develop post-traumatic stress reactions following a traumatic event. The interplay of a wide range of risk and protection variables influences how people can process traumatic events.

Is my relative traumatized?

How do I recognize that my family member is suffering from stress?

Many small changes can occur in the aftermath of a traumatizing event. If you have the impression that 'my relative isn't how they used to be', then that is a clear sign that they are severely stressed by the traumatic incident.

Psychological symptoms

- Irritability
- Nervousness
- Angry outbursts, if your relative 'has a fit'
- Nightmares, sleep disturbances
- Concentration problems and forgetfulness

Physical symptoms

- Tiredness
- Pain
- Listlessness

Remarkable behavioural changes

- Heightened attentiveness, anxiety and jumpiness
- Drifting off, absence of mind (dissociations)
- Changed eating habits
- Sleeping disorders
- Things they used to enjoy during their free time no longer hold their interest
- Social withdrawal
- 'Self-medication' through the consumption of stimulants such as alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana or other narcotics and drugs

What is happening to my family member or loved one?

Shame

Often victims are ashamed of what has happened to them. They ask themselves whether they could have avoided the traumatic incident somehow. The degree of intensity of shame people feel depends on a variety of factors specific to the individual.

Avoidance

Avoidance is a protection mechanism, for instance, repressing emotions to avoid suffering. Victims may try not to think about the traumatic incident and avoid talking about it.

Helplessness

The traumatic event most likely caused the affected individual to feel intense helplessness. This emotion may be triggered by everyday situations and could potentially impact the healing process significantly. For instance, well-meaning family members and supporter workers may take on too many tasks from the victim without consulting them. This can lead the victims of violence to feel a loss of agency or autonomy.

The Question of Guilt

Often the victims are plagued by self-reproach. They ask themselves whether they are responsible for the violent incident. But the fault never lies with the victims of violence! All of us can end up in a situation in which we experience a traumatic event.

Avoidance

Victims of violence often avoid spaces that remind them of the attack. For example, they might avoid trains because they were attacked during a train ride. If they are confronted with places and stimuli that they associate with the attack despite their efforts to avoid it, it may evoke the same feelings they experienced during the attack.

Typical trauma-associated stimuli are police or fire truck sirens. The sound could be connected to their traumatic experience and cause the victims to be afraid. Furthermore, in some instances, victims may start fearing people who look similar to their attacker(s).

Sensitivity towards racism

It may be that victims of racialised violence portray an increased awareness and sensitivity towards racism after a racist incident. They might get upset by comments and behaviours that supposedly didn't bother them before the incident. Our daily lives are filled with racism and racialised people can have various reasons for not speaking up about it; they may be exhausted of complaining about it to deaf ears, or they might not recognize the various forms of racism for what it is (such as structural racism) or they might not have the energy to take action against it. The victims of racist attacks often develop an increased sensitivity towards racism in their lived realities.

Examples of everyday racism

- The question, "Where are you from?" (And the follow-up question, "No, I mean, where are you really from?")
- Comments such as, "Your German is exceptionally good!" to native speakers.
- Discriminating or racist jokes and slogans.
- Discrimination at the workplace or in the housing market.

See further:
<http://www.bpb.de/dialog/194137/webtalk-alltagsrassismus>
<http://isdonline.de/>

Racial Trauma and Race-related Stress

Experiencing racial violence is often accompanied by intense psychological effects. In those instances, family members and loved ones may assume that the victim's reaction to the attack is potentially an overreaction or disproportional. Often the reason for the racialised victims' intense reactions are previous experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination.

Everyday racism generally refers to looks, statements, questions or comments through which racialised people are Othered and discriminated against in subtle ways. The accumulation of these experiences is referred to as race-related stress and may be an underlying variable which causes racialised victims of violence to experience psychological problems. The greater the accumulated stress, the lower the tolerance limit is, at which point the racialised victim may experience intense trauma-like symptoms. Moreover, everyday racism can lead to a heightened state of vigilance, which could exponentially increase the level of stress the victims experience.

Further variables that may increase the general levels of stress within individuals are experiences of torture, seeking refuge, physical illnesses, earlier experiences of violence and childhood traumas.

Separation as a means of Self-protection

At times, racialised victims of violence internalise prejudices directed towards them. This can result in the person thinking negatively about the group to which they are ascribed and may lead to them wanting to distance themselves from this group. Subsequently, this may lead them to lose social contacts and communities from which they could seek support.

Profound Insult

The helplessness and impotence victims often feel during an attack can deeply wound their sense of agency and understanding of themselves; this may lead to feelings of resentment, violent (revenge) fantasies and fits of anger. They repeatedly ask themselves why the attack happened in the first place or why it happened to them in particular. Unfortunately, there is no satisfying answer to these questions.

Accompanying illnesses (comorbidities)

Further health issues may occur in addition to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Frequent concomitant mental health issues

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Addiction (e.g. (increased) consumption of alcohol to cope with stress)
- Personality disorders, such as borderline disorders, or psychotic disorders

How may I help?

What can I as a family member or loved one do?

- Take their suffering seriously and demonstrate your understanding and care.
- Be patient. Healing processes take time.
- Encourage your relative to seek out a counsellor and/or psychosocial advice centres.
- Support your friend when they show self-initiative.
- Mobilize your social network. Ask your friends and acquaintances for support. [Beware that some victims don't want to speak about what happened with certain individuals. Respect the wishes of your relative.]
- Ask your friend what they need.
- Educate yourself on traumas and their consequences - the better informed you are, the more you can support them.
- Partisanship: it is important that you show the affected person that you are on their side and that you believe them.
- Be there for your family member, make time for them and be open for talking about what happened.
- Be patient. Show your solidarity and empathy.
- Trust that your relative is telling the truth and position yourself openly and clearly so that your relative is assured of you standing by them. Keep offering your loved one help, but also accept their boundaries.

What should I NOT do?

- Don't reproach or blame your relative because they are not responsible for their suffering.
- Avoid expressing exaggerated pity or sympathy as it is not helpful.
- Don't downplay their suffering or demand of them to pull themselves together.
- Don't take rejections personally, as hard as it may be.
- Avoid belittling the act of violence.
- Don't pressure your relative into speaking. They shouldn't get the feeling that they need to "function properly" as soon as possible.
- Don't suppress your feelings. You don't have to force yourself to be positive or uplifting if you are not feeling okay.
- Don't act patronising toward the affected individual, even if you have good intentions and ideas on how to proceed, i.e. pressing charges.
- Don't undertake any action on your own. Instead, talk to your loved one and let them decide!
- Don't push the affected individual to talk about what happened. Traumas also function as a self-protection mechanism. Your loved one will open up to you, once they are ready.

How can I help myself?

Take care of yourself

Maybe you have the impression that lately, everything is centred around your loved one. However, it is important to not neglect your own needs and interests. Be mindful of reserving time for yourself and the things you enjoy. Take care of yourself and remember, neither your loved one nor you are responsible for the present situation. Being close to a victim of racialised violence might also affect your mental health. Please note that the nature of trauma is contagious, causing you to potentially develop PTSD symptoms, even if you weren't physically present during the act of violence.

Am I responsible for the mental health of my relative?

You might have a natural desire for your relative to get well soon. Nevertheless, if everything becomes too much for you to handle, don't pressure yourself to make things better. You are neither responsible nor obliged to ensure that your relative recovers. There are special counsellors, doctors and lawyers for this purpose. People sometimes tell themselves,

“I'm only a good partner if I am there for him at all times”,

“My problems are nothing in comparison to what has happened to her”

or

“It didn't even happen to me.”

Maybe you have similar thoughts running through your head. Feeling guilty is normal. However, it may cause you to feel helplessness and an inability to act. It's important to be conscious about your own heightened stress levels, and how you have been impacted as well. There is a serious risk of secondary traumatisation which might affect you and may require counselling and treatment to avoid the development of trauma sequelae. For many family members, loved ones and relatives, the stress of the situation is often tremendous and it's normal to feel bad. You must allow yourself to feel your own pain and remember it's okay to be sad or angry at times.

Additional Stress Factors

Loss of the workplace – don't underestimate the impact!

Research indicates losing one's job usually leads to negative psychological effects. It generally impacts one's self-confidence negatively and increases feelings of helplessness.

The loss of a workplace comes with the loss of social contacts and the social support system associated with it, as well the additional financial instability.

Another contributing component is the structural and institutional racism in Germany, which makes professional advancement very hard or even impossible for B(I)PoC* (Black, Indigenous & People of Colour).

Romantic relationships

The psychological effects of experiencing right-wing, racist or antisemitic violence may become a heavy burden for romantic relationships. It's important to reflect together on the socio-political power dynamics of racism and openly communicate about the challenges. Couples' counselling with a focus on trauma may be a helpful tool in holding space for each other and strengthening the relationship.

* B(I)POC is a political self-definition by and for people who are not racialised as white, first used in the United States. It attempts to highlight the shared experiences that racialised people share whilst differentiating that particular racism Black people experience and the invisibility of Indigenous people. (Source: <https://vielfalt.uni-koeln.de/en/anti-discrimination/glossary-discrimination-anti-racism/bipoc>)

Representation in the media: What do I need to pay attention to?

Potential media coverage of the incident may be a further burden for victims because they are once again reminded of what happened to them. The journalists might ask them to recall every small detail of the attack, which could be very painful and trigger traumatic memories.

Moreover, this type of media coverage is often racist. The reporting tends to emphasize the racialised victims' ethnicity, religion and appearance. This type of coverage leads to further stigmatisation and the trivialization of racialised violence. Negative reporting can feel like a renewed attack on the racialised identity of the victim and may increase the fear of a further attack. In the worst-case scenario, ignorant and biased reporting can demonise and vilify racialised victims.

On the other hand, media coverage may be necessary and helpful for the victims to process the incident. Potentially, the victims may gain social recognition and community support through (social) media. Furthermore, media coverage is indispensable in addressing the problem of racism, right-wing extremism and antisemitism in our society.

The question of whether media coverage will be helpful or not needs to be decided case by case. The victims and their relatives and loved ones should carefully consider whether they want to make the incident public and if they do decide to share it, be very attentive to how and with whom they share their case.

Legal proceedings:

What does this mean for racialised victims of violence?

Once the victim decides to file a complaint, this can exponentially worsen the effects of traumatic stress. Within the attack the victim usually has no control over the incident, instead, they are helpless in the situation. When a complaint is filed, either by the victim or the police, an investigation is launched and conducted by other people- once more leaving the victim in a position of powerlessness. The proceedings of the investigation and case details are usually not shared with the victim.

This can be intensely damaging to the victims' psyche and may diminish their belief that we can control what happens in our lives. The unknown courtroom and the complicated judicial language can further evoke fears and insecurities. Moreover, often victims meet their attackers in court, which can be very unpleasant and frightening.

How can Process Support help?

Process Support offers victims and their relatives and loved ones support during the investigative proceedings and the criminal and civil trial. The victims are supported emotionally, helping them to process arising fears, doubts, anxieties and expectations. Process Support aims to help stabilise the victims and reduce the traumatic stress they might experience.

Through preparing the victims about what they might encounter at every turn of the court case and accompanying them, process support provides victims with a measure of orientation and feeling of safety, hoping to facilitate their sense of agency. These kinds of fears and insecurities can be further bolstered through professional support.

Traumatized Children and Teenagers

Prevalent symptoms in children and teenagers

Some symptoms are similar between children, teenagers and adults (e.g. sleeping disorders, anxiety).

Some additional symptoms may be observed especially in children and youths. Among these are:

Social withdrawal

- Your child spends more time alone in their room or doesn't want to eat dinner together as usual.

Worsening performance at school

- Your child's performance at school suddenly declines for no obvious reasons. Possibly your child refuses to go to school altogether.

Loss of concentration

- Your child has difficulties with concentrating as they used to. They drift off and often appear to be absentminded.

Different things help your child recover from trauma

Conveying a sense of security

- For children, it is especially important after a traumatic experience to feel protected and safe. Be there for your child and assure them repeatedly that the experienced threat is over.

Listening

- Encourage your child to speak about the trauma and listen to them without judgment. If your child isn't ready to talk about what happened, give them time and space to open up.

Feelings that reassure your child

- Tell your child that all feelings are acceptable and that it is normal if they experience contradictory feelings such as sadness and anger.

Allow your child to return to behaviour they had already passed through in their development

- (e.g. bedwetting) Be patient and try not to criticize "immature" behaviour or to make fun of it. It is a coping strategy for your child and will pass with time.

Look for support for yourself

- Seek out counselling and support groups with other concerned parents. You can best support your child if you feel strong and hopeful.

Helpful addresses and webpages

reach out (Ariba e.V.)

Psychosocial counselling and advice centre for victims of right-wing and racist violence in Berlin

Counselling is also available for family members, loved ones and friends of the victims, as well as witnesses of an attack.

Heinrich-Heine-Str. 15 - Annenhöfe, 3. OG - 10179 Berlin

Telefon: 030 695 68 339

Internet: www.reachoutberlin.de

E-Mail: info@reachoutberlin.de

Mobile psychosocial counselling and support for victims of right-wing extremism

Adresse: Gleimstraße 31, 10437 Berlin

Telefon: 030 817 985 810

Internet: www.mbr-berlin.de

E-Mail: info@mbr-berlin.de

Opferperspektive e.V.

Psychosocial counselling for victims of right-wing violence and racial discrimination

Adresse: Rudolf-Breitscheid-Straße 164, 14482 Potsdam

Telefon: 0331 8170000

Internet: www.opferperspektive.de

E-Mail: info@opferperspektive.de

ADNB – Antidiskriminierungsnetzwerk Berlin des Türkischen Bundes in Berlin-Brandenburg

Counselling and advice centre for victims of racial discrimination and mediation between the affected person and the authorities

Adresse: Richard-Sorge-Str. 13, 10249 Berlin

Telefon: 030 5506 5905

Internet: www.adnb.de

E-Mail: adnb@tbb-berlin.de

LesMigraS

Antidiscrimination and anti-violence department
of Lebensberatung Berlin e.V.

Adresse: Kulmer Straße 20a – 4. Etage 10783 Berlin

Telefon: 030 215 2000

Internet: www.lesbenberatung-berlin.de

E-Mail: info@lesbenberatung-berlin.de

Telefon: 0049 179 544 1790

(please also contact us through the messaging apps Telegram or WhatsApp)

GLADT e.V.

Self-organised queer anti-racist migrant association

Adresse: Lützowstraße 28, 10785 Berlin

Telefon: 030 587 684 9300

Internet: www.gladt.de

E-Mail: info@gladt.de

KOP e.V. - Kampagne für Opfer rassistischer Polizeigewalt Campaign for victims of racist police violence

Internet: <https://kop-berlin.de>

Email: info@kop-berlin.de

Psychological Counselling for Victims of Right-wing, Racist & Antisemitic Violence
is a project from ARIBA e.V.



Remember...

- ... many relatives, loved ones and friends feel the same as you do. It's not easy to see a beloved person suffering. The associated stress and helplessness are often heightened.
- ... feeling better doesn't happen overnight; it takes time! How long the process of healing takes is very individual and depends on the person.
- ... even if your relative and you are struggling at the moment, no condition lasts forever.
- ... be patient and don't give up hope!
- ... you are not alone.
- ... encourage your loved one to seek out counselling and support.

If you want to talk to someone and need counselling, please make an appointment with us. Moreover, you and your relative are more than welcome to come talk to us together.

 **OPRA**
Psychologische Beratung
Für Opfer rechtsextremer,
rassistischer & antisemitischer Gewalt

Heinrich-Heine-Str. 15
Annenhöfe, 3. OG
10179 Berlin
(Aufzug vorhanden)

Tel: 030 9221 8241
info@opra-gewalt.de
www.opra-gewalt.de

