

THE  
**E B R I G H T**  
COLLABORATIVE

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To the Ebright Community:

Black Lives Matter. Black Trans Lives Matter. Both statements are so obviously true that the necessity of justifying them at all saddens me. Nonetheless, here we are in a socio-political climate where the backlash to these statements has been so intense – including heat directed at our team and community members – that I have decided to state our position publicly and remove all doubt.

Our country is experiencing three crises at the same time: over 115,000 dead from COVID; over 40 million unemployed; and the gruesome murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. While people of all ethnicities are impacted in various degrees by these crises, all three disproportionately impact those identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The steady stream of viral videos of unarmed Black bodies murdered in cold blood puts names, faces, and visceral stories to deeply unsettling statistics and history. Countless more examples of racism occur every day across this country that don't make their way into the public consciousness (e.g. driving while Black, viral videos of "Karens"). I have observed these realities in my personal life, clinical work, and peer-reviewed research articles, and can attest that most of the media regardless of perceived political bent has inadequately covered these realities. For any light-skinned person willing to remove their racial blinders, racism is plain to observe in statistics, our country's history, self-segregated and gentrified communities, and through conversations with just about any BIPOC individual willing to share their lived experiences with you.

Tensions are boiling over and expressions of support for one group are far too often misinterpreted and spun as being expressions against another. When tensions are high, one powerful tool in the treatment of life-threatening behavior is validation, and I believe the world needs a lot more of it right now. To validate is to accurately and non-judgmentally communicate that you understand one's position and take it seriously. My [profession's Code of Ethics](#) demands that social workers challenge racism in all its forms, and I personally have experienced an increase in invalidating responses in the past few years simply for acknowledging racism's existence.

Nonetheless, I encourage us all to strive for improved race relations, and expressing support for those impacted by the trauma of racism is the least we can do. I worked with grief and trauma survivors directly after 9/11/01. The outpouring of national support meant something to them. Never Forget, the nation said forcefully, with one voice, and without fear. Compared to survivors of similar tragedies (e.g. Lockerbie Bombing), survivors of 9/11/01 had lower rates of PTSD, and much of that can be attributed to such public validation.

Human beings need to be validated, especially their circumstances and emotions derived from trauma. When humans are invalidated, emotions and behaviors escalate. Imagine calling the fire department with your house ablaze and saying, "my house is on fire." Now imagine the person on the other end of the phone responding by saying, "your house isn't on fire" or "only a thug's house would catch fire" or "all houses are important, not just yours." Anyone in such a situation would escalate as their house is engulfed in flames. "DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? I SAID MY HOUSE IS ON FIRE!" Yet these are just some of the types of invalidating responses marginalized people get in response to genuine expressions of pain.



Claiming that racism doesn't exist might be the most invalidating sentiment of all, as it creates hopelessness and despair that real-world problems can ever be addressed.

At Ebright, we say Black Lives Matter and we say Black Trans Lives Matter. We say so without apology because members of the Ebright community and beyond could use a whole lot more of that sentiment. Verbally expressing these sentiments is only step one – like the fire department simply acknowledging that the house fire is being taken seriously. The fire department then needs to come to your house and actually put the fire out. In other words, we need to not only verbally validate that Black Lives Matter, we need to functionally validate by acting like Black Lives Matter.

Doing so is not anti-cop, anti-flag, anti-military, or anti-White. If anything, supporting Black lives is in the best interest of all of those entities as well. Validating ourselves and others verbally and functionally is an effective way to restore order and continue striving toward a life worth living together. It defuses tension and strengthens assessment. Both make all people safer in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Just as I implore you to validate one another, I ask you to validate me without assuming I am advocating for any solutions that I am not. I have no interest in self-righteous finger wagging or sorting people into racists and non-racists. Just as DBT targets behaviors and not personality, we sidestep debates over whether a person has racist intentions. We instead target actions and policies that disproportionately cause harm to BIPOC individuals and communities regardless. Literally saying Black Lives Matter is just the first step. To functionally validate, I encourage civic engagement by supporting efforts to fix the bad barrels that produce the bad apples of racism. For example, taxation without representation was a driving force in the founding of our country, yet large swaths of the United States – disproportionately made up of BIPOC individuals – experience exactly that (e.g. Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, U.S. Territories, individuals incarcerated especially for non-violent offenses).

Another example of institutional racism exists in the mental health community. People considered at risk of harm to themselves are too often treated like hot potatoes and handed off to police and institutions ill-equipped to treat them. Too few Delaware providers use evidence-based interventions for suicide and self-harm, all outpatient in nature. Instead, many mental health providers in Delaware instruct clients to call 911 on their voicemail messages. This gives pause to many individuals seeking mental health treatment, and it contributes to racial inequities by especially dissuading Black people with justified reasons to fear the police. Countless other structural problems disproportionately impact people with dark skin. We must identify them, understand them and fix them together.

This generation may not have caused all of the problems of racism, but we will need to solve them anyway. At Ebright, we are aware that our team needs to be more diverse. While the same systemic challenges that impact the world have impacted our search for a more diverse team, we will not use that as an excuse to let us off the hook. As a team of light-skinned individuals ourselves, we seek and welcome feedback from anyone willing to engage with us.

And finally, there are many communities and many situations to validate right now. To other marginalized individuals and communities, we see you, too. We encourage solidarity with the BIPOC community while following their lead at this time.

**BLACK LIVES MATTER. BLACK TRANS LIVES MATTER.**

Sincerely,

Matthew Ditty DSW, LCSW

