

NAVIGATING POLITICAL CONFLICT



Executive Summary

Regardless of our political stances, none of us knows what will happen in the coming months, even years, with any degree of certainty. All we know is what we've already experienced: that somehow, we've managed to stumble, sleepwalk, and force-march our way through the brain-fog of a year that few of us would have imagined was possible.

A global pandemic. Lockdowns and closures. Months of civil unrest and uprisings in cities, towns, and suburbs. Families and lifelong friendships torn apart by distance, and in some cases, irreconcilable differences. Loved ones lost to the unrelenting force of the virus. Hurricanes. Wildfires. Foodbanks. Moments of brief calm punctuated by the wailing of ambulance sirens. Days spent working from home. Virtual meetings interrupted by breaking news alerts. To say that 2020 has been a "stressful year" is a disservice to everyone who has endured it and is now reading this – to say nothing of the hundreds of thousands whose lives have been lost.

Which brings us back to our current reality. We've seen enough from this year to know that the internalization of heightened anxiety around external events and times of conflict takes a toll emotionally, psychologically and even physically. Team members will try their hardest to do their jobs – and may still struggle to concentrate. Co-workers will be hurting and angry. Some will be traumatized, frightened for their lives, furious, or wondering what happens next. Some will feel the physiological effects of fatigue and extreme stress. To everyone across IPG, we see you. We hear you and feel you because, quite frankly, we are you. No matter how you identify politically at a moment like this, we wish we had all the answers to help you. Unfortunately, like you, we're only human and we don't. That said, we will help you as best we can because that's what we do for one another. We've developed a guidebook with mental health resources to help process the external stress factors and ensure our teams are taking care of their mental and emotional health.

We've included resources and recommendations for:

- Ensuring psychological safety during escalated times of polarization.
- The impacts of political and social unrest on mental health- especially mental health amongst marginalized communities.
- [Direct links to mental health resources.](#)
- [A manager's guide for what to avoid and what you can do.](#)

Please know we're rooting for you as individuals, as teams and as IPG. You've come this far in 2020. Keep going. Together, we've got this.

Psychological Safety

One of the most important ways to support your team as we all navigate these complicated times is to create an environment of psychological safety. **An environment that fosters psychological safety for teams is one in which teams feel empowered to focus on goals rather than self-preservation and are encouraged to speak up without fear of retribution.** It's an environment where every member of the team feels they belong. There are many actions employees, and most important, team leaders and managers, can take to create an environment where all employees feel safe taking risks, sharing vulnerabilities, making mistakes and embracing change.

It's unfortunately common in times of high anxiety for communication within a team to suffer, which leads to further erosion of well-being. As our partners at Gartner explain, "During a disruption such as COVID-19 or a highly contentious election, the quality of two-way communication can have a direct impact on not just an employee's ability to perform, but also the physical and emotional well-being of the employee."

Long before this current divisive political environment, many people of difference were fearful of authentic self-disclosure and felt pressure to assimilate, worrying that their concerns or perspectives might be shut down or dismissed. Some of us may have been hiding or covering for outsider status such as gender identity, culture or nationality, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, age, disabilities, health status or even our family obligations. We feared the consequences of judgment or lost opportunities if our guard were let down.

The ultimate test of belonging is not when we support each other on issues we can personally identify with, or what we have in common. The ultimate test of belonging happens when we support each other when our experiences, needs, feelings, and even new ideas are different from most of our colleagues, especially when we differ from those who have power over our careers. Communication, trust-building and consistent checking-in on teams are vital during times of uncertainty, and always, to ensure an atmosphere of security.

Psychological Safety

Connecting with Co-workers

Most IPG employees will almost certainly be experiencing intense degrees of passion for the future of their communities and their lives. This rule will be multiplied for employees who are frequent targets of marginalization. Recognize that some people will hold political beliefs diametrically opposite to your own - beliefs you may not fully understand. In these instances, you should never feel pressured to engage in political discussion.

Managers

Employees are looking to you for leadership at this moment. Be sure to allow all voices and perspective to be heard, and in situations where conflicting viewpoints are being expressed, work to find common ground wherever possible. At a moment like this, relying on and tapping into your organization's core values can help drive and guide conversations. "We are committed to creating workplaces that are free from harassment and harmful behaviors that degrade and limit potential." We've also created a managers guide geared to help maintain a commitment to inclusive behavior.



Psychological Safety

Action Strategies



Build trust with your teams

Remember that transparency and clear communication are the best ways to gain your teams trust, even when it's not all positive. Being vulnerable is the best way to show teams they can be vulnerable too. If you're afraid or worried, share that with your team. It helps remind them that we're all experiencing this together.



Take the pressure off

Communicate that you recognize that employees hold strong political beliefs – and may feel demoralized as a result of the election. Anticipate that productivity will be lower than usual right now.



Always seek to understand before trying to fix a problem

Practice empathy by avoiding assumptions and trying to problem solve. Sometimes people are just looking to share concerns and feel validated. Celebrate conversations that take courage.



Check in regularly

Try creating weekly pulse surveys to check in with your team. Host meetings with no agenda. Connect with your team on a human level, ask about their families. Let teams know their options for taking time off for mental health.

Impact of Unrest

Protests, marches, social unrest and uprisings among the oppressed have been a part of the human condition throughout history. The bedrock of social unrest to create significant change is what many people believe Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. meant when he said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

However, what remains relatively unknown are the impacts of what it takes to eradicate systematic racism, public macro-aggressions and workplace micro-aggressions. We can't know what it will take to bend the arc of justice amid of a contested election that will be amplified by hyper-partisan streams of political commentary and social media. Each microaggression by itself is difficult enough to deal with for those affected. The convergence of these microaggressions into a relentless, punishing stream can leave you overwhelmed. Some may look for answers to questions you have never posed to yourself or anyone in your family or circle of friends – let alone to your office colleagues, agency partners and IPG families.

What is known

There are strong links to PTSD, depression and anxiety for individuals in areas with ongoing unrest and political uncertainty. The reality is that political unrest to demand change shakes an entire community, even those not directly taking part, and especially those advocating for decades.

While we can't predict what will transpire in the coming days, weeks and months, we can say with certainty that crackdowns and racist reprisals taken by police against Black, Latino/Hispanic and Indigenous communities do have disproportionate impacts on the mental health of people of color in the United States. There is a reason Audre Lorde wrote in her work, *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Lorde wrote these words because she understood the psychological toll that protests and other forms of political unrest take, especially on the people most affected by the circumstances catalyzing the protests in the first place. Taking time for self-care and self-preservation are vital to maintaining the fight for justice.

Impacts of Unrest

Marginalization and subtle discrimination, compounded by the increasingly challenging times we find ourselves in, point to significant reasons why individuals from marginalized communities are likely experiencing trauma-level mental health and psychological impacts. As diverse employees, daily life, even under “normal” circumstances, can trigger or exacerbate anxiety due to how we might be perceived or treated and whether we are safe to voice our needs and concerns.

Members of certain racial and ethnic groups, as well as older employees, people with disabilities, non-binary and transgender people are especially likely to have difficulty finding support during times of uncertainty and unrest. Additionally, the simple act of reaching out for support, or acknowledging mental health conditions is often stigmatized within communities of color. It’s important to recognize how all these factors overlap and intersect for each person in unique ways; this allows us to move forward and utilize tools to better help ourselves and each other through these increasingly polarizing times.

Action Strategies



Leverage social support

Remember, you are not alone! If you’re experiencing any of the stressors described above, seek out a virtual community. As a result of being home, there are more resources, webinars and online communities available for marginalized folks than ever before. See below for a list of resources.



Find a support buddy

If you know of a co-worker or someone close to you who is a strong ally or has similar experiences to you, consider asking them to be your “accountability buddy” and regularly check in with them. Knowing you’re in this together makes it easier to tackle some of the harder issues as a team.



Communicate with your team

Reach out to your team and express some of the issues you may have. Especially if it pertains to your emotional or psychological state, there may be ways to address or even resolve some of the problems you’re facing.

Conclusion & Resources

Especially during these difficult times, it's critically important that we remember our values as individuals, as a company, and how those values inform the way we treat one another. We must find the capacity for patience and understanding, especially for people whose backgrounds, beliefs, experiences and ideas differ from our own.

The purpose of this guide is to emphasize the importance of self-care and to share insights into accessible ways in which we can seek help and support. Supporting co-workers from marginalized communities can be as simple as letting them know you're there for them. Advocate to your supervisors for mental health days off from work. Create a group chat and research new ways to advocate on behalf of your most vulnerable team members. Make use of the [resources](#) compiled and as always, please reach out to us at diversity@interpublic.com for additional support.

Above all, be kind to one another and engage in respectful dialogue. In the words of Michael Roth, "Now is the time for us to come together as a workplace and as a community. We will all be stronger for it."

Post-Election Support

Managing stress related to political change

Ways to cope with the transition of power and the rapid speed of political change may cause stress and anxiety about the political environment and the future of our nation.

Amid Division & Derision, Beware Your Bias, Think Critically And Act Decently

Beware your confirmation bias, and have the courage to step into the shoes of those with whom you may never agree with.

Fear: A powerful motivator in elections

The use of fear is an effective way to influence voting behavior, but there are ways we can resist how it affects us.

Election day + post-election guides

The APA comprehensive Election Messaging Guide to help prepare internal and external communications before and after Election Day.

Resources

Resources for BIPOC mental health

Therapy For Black Girls – Powered by Vivd

Topicals brand skincare is covering free therapy sessions.

Shine Text

Black owned anxiety healing and motivational text platform.

The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation

A directory of mental health providers and programs serving the African-American community.

Betterhelp & Thoughtful Human

If you need support, please use this opportunity to receive one FREE month of therapy from a BetterHelp licensed therapists. You will be matched with a therapist and can access therapy anytime, anywhere via messaging, chat, phone, or video sessions.

Support Channels

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Services

Whether you have a diagnosis or not, if you or a family member is experiencing symptoms that are impacting your daily life and interfering at work, this resource provides practical information and webinars, and connects you with a mental health professional who can support you. There is no cost, and more important, no shame, in accessing this benefit. EAP offers employees support through various psychological and emotional needs. For more about IPG's EAP, call 1-800-833-8707 or visit myccaonline.com (Company code: IPGUS).

Talkspace

A new service for UnitedHealthcare members, Talkspace lets you regularly communicate through text or live video with a licensed therapist online or via the Talkspace app. It's private, confidential and covered under your behavioral health benefit. You can use your FSA or your HSA to cover the cost of the co-pay or the cost of the visit up to your deductible. See your official health plan documents for more information. To get started, visit talkspace.com/connect. On your first visit, you'll go through a simple registration process. Once you've chosen a therapist, you can start therapy within hours.

Resources

Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line Counselors are available to help you move from a hot moment to cool and calm- international, totally free & 24/7. Their model leverages kind, empathetic people with a WIFI connection from the comfort of their own home. "We're here. We're ready. We were made for this."

- Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor Crisis
- [Text Line Website Link Covid-19 Resources](#)

Trevor Project

Trevor Project is a confidential and secure resource that provides live help for LGBTQ youth with a trained

specialist, over the phone, text message, or online chat

- Call TrevorLifeline at 1-866-488-7386
- Text START to 678678.
- [Get Help Now Website Link](#)

