

Department of Defense

Work-Life Programs

Health & Wellness



June 2024



June: Juneteenth and Mental Health

Juneteenth marks a second Independence Day in the United States and has long been celebrated in the African American community. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed and put into effect in 1863. However, it was not fully implemented across the nation, especially in those areas that remained under Confederate control, until much later. As a result, enslaved people residing in the State of Texas would not be freed until June 19, 1865. On this date, approximately 2,000 Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas and announced that more than 250,000 enslaved African Americans in the state were free by executive decree. This day came to be known as "Juneteenth" by the newly freed people. In 1980, Texas officially recognized Juneteenth as "Emancipation Day", a statewide holiday. Though many people have celebrated Juneteenth since 1866, many states did not recognize the holiday until President Joe Biden officially declared Juneteenth as a national holiday on June 17, 2021.

The historical legacy of Juneteenth shows the value of hope during challenging times. Hope is an essential part of good mental health and vital to perseverance. The observance of Juneteenth can foster healing, promote hope, and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities. Juneteenth is an opportunity to acknowledge and condemn modern examples of racial inequity in mental healthcare, such as resource disparities within the African American community. In June, it can be valuable to take an opportunity to pause and notice the systems of privilege and oppression around you. With time and self-education, you may begin dismantling these systems by committing to your mental health, investing in your communities, and choosing to celebrate and uplift yourself and others.

Holistic opportunities of celebrating Juneteenth:

- Recognizing Juneteenth allows for open conversations about the lasting impacts of slavery and the systemic racism that ensued, which can **lead to a collective understanding and healing process**.
- Recognizing Juneteenth encourages **social connection and a sense of belonging** which is a vital component of mental health. It provides an opportunity for everyone, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, to come together to acknowledge a significant moment in our shared U.S. history to foster mutual respect and a sense of unity.
- Juneteenth provides an opportunity for **mindfulness and reflection**. It is a time to recognize the progress that we have made as a country, and the steps we still need to take towards a society that values equality and justice for all.

This June 19, let us all recognize and celebrate Juneteenth, not just as a remembrance of the past, but as a catalyst for healing, understanding, and emotional and mental wellness.

Additional Resources:

- Kona Counseling: www.konaaz.com
- Psychiatry.Org: <https://www.psychiatry.org/News-room/APA-Blogs/Observing-Juneteenth-and-Supporting-Mental-Health>
- Better Help: <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/general/juneteenth-supporting-mental-health-equity-today-and-every-day>

For additional information, please email the DCPAS Work-Life Branch at dodhra.mcalex.dcpas.mbx.dod-worklife@mail.mil

