

Celebrating Juneteenth: Tips for being an ally



You may have heard of Juneteenth and wondered what it's all about. Juneteenth is celebrated on June 19. It marks the day in 1865 when Northern troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, and told enslaved African Americans that they were free. More than two years before, Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation ending slavery. But the news had been withheld by slave owners who wanted it to continue.¹

The first official Juneteenth celebration took place in Galveston a year later. It has since grown into a celebration throughout the country, commemorating when all African Americans across the U.S. had learned of their freedom.² Forty-five states and the District of Columbia now recognize it as a state holiday.¹

Does Juneteenth bring up negative (or confusing) emotions?

Remember that support is available 24/7. Reach out to your employee assistance program (EAP) anytime to connect with someone who can listen. If needed, they can connect you with a therapist.



Many African American communities have Juneteenth celebrations. So see what's available near you and consider joining in. If you're not part of the African American community, keep these tips in mind. They can help make sure you're balancing the fun of the moment with thoughtfulness.

Learn. Enjoy the celebrations. But use them as inspiration to educate yourself too. Learn about African American achievements, leaders and creators. And don't shy away from learning about the history of racism in this country — from enslavement to the Jim Crow era to modern day. Systemic racism didn't end with the civil rights era.

Listen. If you want to help, make listening your top priority. What are people who have experienced racism saying? And how do they want allies to support them? Look for ways to help. Don't try to take charge and solve problems.

Discover. Don't stop with Juneteenth. Continue to celebrate African American culture all year long. Attend community events. Try new restaurants. Support African American-owned businesses. Check out art exhibits. Get outside your comfort zone and see the beauty and diversity that exists around you.

Challenge. Take an honest look at the ways you may be enabling racism to persist. Understand microaggressions and how to avoid making them. Do you harbor underlying stereotypes? Do you let racist comments go unchecked?

1. National Park Service. Juneteenth: A celebration of freedom. nps.gov/articles/juneteenth-origins.htm. Last updated June 17, 2020. Accessed May 17, 2021.

2. Britannica. Juneteenth. [britannica.com/topic/Juneteenth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Juneteenth). Last updated May 25, 2021. Accessed May 28, 2021.

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