

ALIVE AND WELL DISCUSSION SERIES

A series of discussions to support our community
in embracing their mental wellness,
daring to live to the fullest of their capacity,
and having the audacity, despite everything, to be alive and well.



A FACILITATOR'S MANUAL



Copyright © 2019 by UndocuBlack™ Network.

All rights reserved. This publication, in its entirety or in part, may not be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

Table of Contents

Welcome	4
Facilitators	8
Holding Space and Discussion	12
About This Manual	20
Chapters	
I: The Family Reunion	24
II: How Can We Have Justice Without Healing?	30
III: The Art of Storytelling	36
IV: Owning the Power of Our Stories	42
V: I Am, We Are—Self-Care, Community Care and Support Systems	50
VI: True or False—Exploring Mental Health Stigma	60
VII: Digging Into and Healing from the Damage of Internalized Oppression	78
VIII: Migration and Mental Health: The Black Immigrant Experience	92
IX: The Real When It Comes To Therapy	104
X: Stress—It’s Handled (Or Is It? Let’s Talk About It!)	114
Resources	124
Thank You	132

WELCOME

**No matter how full the river,
it still wants to grow.**

- Congolese proverb

Please accept our warmest greetings and welcomes to *The Alive and Well Discussion Series*. Before proceeding through this curriculum, we are happy to share a bit of background about how we got here—the UndocuBlack Network, the Mental Wellness Initiative, and, ultimately, the Alive and Well Discussion Series.

What is the UndocuBlack Network (UBN)?

The **UndocuBlack Network** is a multigenerational network of currently and formerly undocumented Black people that fosters community, facilitates access to resources, and contributes to transforming the realities of our people, so we are thriving and living our fullest lives.

Our kick-off event was the first-ever **Undocumented and Black Convening**, a first-of-its kind national convening of over 65 Black undocumented persons in Miami, Florida in January 2016. The convening was a three-day event of facilitated workshops, strategizing, intersectional caucuses, and healing spaces.

One of the main outcomes of the convening planning was the establishment of a network that would advocate for and uplift the Black undocumented immigrant community, with a decidedly two-fold mission: 1) to “Blackify” this country’s understanding of the undocumented population and experience, and 2) to facilitate access to resources for the Black undocumented community.

Ultimately, our vision is to have truly inclusive immigrant rights and racial justice movements that advocate for the rights of Black undocumented individuals, providing healing spaces, and encouraging kinship to those with intersecting identities.

What is the Mental Wellness Initiative (MWI)?

When we think about resources for immigrants, we immediately and rightfully think of legal support services and access to basic needs for survival, such as food and housing. However, what we must also recognize is that surviving through each day, especially in oppressive, racist, and xenophobic social and environmental conditions, requires immense mental and emotional giving. Surviving and making efforts to thrive in these conditions and systems take its toll on our overall well-being, including our mental and emotional health.

Proposed by one of the co-founders, a clinical social worker with a background in mental health, the initial proposal for the Mental Wellness Initiative was a simple project to focus on mental and emotional health of our community members. What came was immense support from the team to implement a full initiative and way of living at UndocuBlack Network. The Initiative was then officially launched in October 2017 on World Mental Health Day, a day dedicated to global mental health education, awareness, and advocacy around mental health and social stigma.

As the targeting, criminalization, and deportations of our communities continue to be on the rise, the priority of UndocuBlack Network is our community’s survival. Part of that prioritization is publicly recognizing and ensuring that it is understood that our communities are impacted on a mental and emotional level by all that is going on around us. Therefore, in addition to ensuring the general public understands the increased urgency of mental wellness in this moment for our affected communities, it is an urgent matter that our communities have access to adequate mental health and healing supports and services.

The Initiative’s goals are to: Expand dialogue and raise awareness around mental wellness in our

communities; Design, create and disseminate resources; Facilitate access to established mental health resources; and, Create and develop an understanding that mental health and wellness is already a part of our work and to be more cognizant and intentional about how it is engaged and incorporated in the work.

Since its official launch, the Mental Wellness Initiative has led to the creation of the Mental Wellness Committee, a committee dedicated to supporting the initiative's goals and our community members. Additionally, we have also seen the creation, launch, and sharing of The UndocuBlack™ Guide for Mental Wellness Specialists, the Ayanda Hand in Hand program, and now the Alive and Well Discussion Series.

Why have the Alive and Well Discussion Series?

There are many reasons why creating this curriculum and launching this program was of utmost importance. If there is anything that we really want you to be able to understand and grasp, it is our why.

The first reason is because it is imperative that we continue to create safe spaces for Black people, especially specific spaces for our community members who are undocumented. These spaces allow for folks to connect and build relationships with others who may be in similar circumstances, to recognize they are not alone and are supported, and to be in a place where they do not have to explain what it means to live in the experience of being both Black and undocumented.

These spaces allow us to have open dialogue about everyday experiences, current events, and yes, even sensitive subjects, encouraging learning and exploration in a trusting honest environment, while also addressing stigma, misconceptions, stereotypes and misunderstandings, and promoting understanding of local and national resources. In so many words, Black folks can talk in their own space about their own lives.

These discussions and spaces are meant to be led and facilitated by a peer, a trained community member. It is not necessary for this person to be a clinician, but it is important that this person is able to grasp the topics and encourage conversation about them. We fully recognize that mental health clinicians and providers play an impactful and crucial role in offering services to the community. However, the community has its own role in its advocacy, awareness, and education around mental health stigma and the Black undocumented experience, and we feel it is important that people who have similar experiences and are empathetic to these experiences are in the room, leading and engaging, talking the talk and walking the walk.

Lastly, as the name “Alive and Well” alludes to, this curriculum was made in an effort to support our community in not just staying alive and surviving, but also thriving and living well. We see this — familiar connection, honest and caring conversation, safe spaces, the removal of physical and mental barriers, and uplifting the usage and access to tools and supports we need to heal—as being on the path, ultimately, to our freedom and liberation.

Thank you for taking the time to read and understand our vision and commitment, and special thanks to you for joining us in the commitment to strengthening and building our community through the art of educating, creating space, and facilitating meaningful conversation.

Sincerely,
Gabrielle Jackson, UndocuBlack Network Mental Wellness Director

ABOUT THIS MANUAL



**If your only tool is a
hammer, you will see every
problem as a nail.**

- Gambian proverb

This manual was created with the vision that safe spaces where we can engage in informed yet natural conversations around mental health and wellness are possible, that meeting people where they are, wherever they are, is a necessity, and that it is both possible and necessary to allow these kinds of “in-house” conversations to flourish so that we can thrive.

This handbook was also created with the understanding that, to our knowledge, something like this, with our community’s needs specifically in mind, has not been done before. That is to say, this manual is not perfect. But we believe it is perfectly enough.

This manual is meant to be a guide and a template for facilitators to encourage conversation about popular and sensitive topics as it relates to the mental health of our community members.

First, you’ll notice the chapter pages all have sayings, most of which are proverbs from the African diaspora. A proverb is a simple, traditional, popular, often repeated, sometimes metaphorical piece of wisdom that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs play an exceptional and beautiful role in the lives of people in the African diaspora, offering life lessons and wise insights from generation to generation. But they also get you thinking a little deeper about what the meaning is behind them. The proverbs and sayings have some significance to the chapter they are introducing. But we would say that offering these proverbs, and others like it, are also great conversation pieces. Conversation, after all, is the heart of why this handbook was created.

Next, each of the ten chapters is broken down into sections:

Overview and goals: What to expect in the forthcoming chapter and what we hope opening the topic for discussion will do.

Focus issue: The issue that is central to the chapter’s discussion.

Materials: All the things that you could possibly need to have so that holding that space and discussion is successful. Often, it is as simple as having your notes, and paper and writing utensils (because people like taking notes).

Preparation: The checklist of things you need to do before people walk into the space, including having copies of the activity and how you want to set up the room. We suggest that, at each discussion, you should have one piece of butcher paper, hung on the wall where it is visible to all, to serve as a “parking lot” for questions to be answered at a later time or statements to reflect upon.

Activity Notes: These notes give insight into how the activity (or activities) located in that day’s discussion are meant to go. For example, if you want to play Bingo, this section should explain how to play the game as if explaining to someone who has never played before.

Facilitator Notes: These are suggestions to the Facilitator on how the discussion can flow, offering things like when to introduce the activity and sample questions to encourage dialogue and successful debriefing. With the sample questions, we encourage you to take the time to follow up on participant responses to encourage further discussion.

Discussion Background Notes: Here is where you can find background information on some of the things discussed, including definitions and descriptions.

Sources and Places to Read More: Want to read more on the topic? You can simply type the source information into a search engine to read more online.

Supplemental Documents: Some chapters have information and activities that can be copied to provide to discussion participants.

In this curriculum, a few topics are related and connected to mental health, and are outlined in detail in the ten chapters offered. But these topics are far from being the extent of what can be talked about—there are so many more topics to explore! Here we offer just some of the mental health topics that come to mind:

- Relationships (platonic, romantic, etc)
- Sexuality
- Gender (identity, expression, etc)
- Age
- Financial health
- Healthcare
- Education
- Faith
- Disabilities, and differences in abilities and capacities
- Family
- Professional and personal aspirations
- Social media
- Portrayal in popular culture (movies, books, etc)
- News
- Seasons/weather
- Processing current events
- Politics
- Advocacy (including immigration)
- Local, regional, state policies
- Holidays and special occasions
- Taking care of yourself as an activist
- Inviting an outside facilitator (such as instructors in yoga, meditation, Mental Health First Aid, other mental health supportive resources)

The list could literally go on.

We hope that the template we provided offers inspiration to how you can bring forth these important conversations to our community.

THANK YOU

We want to say thanks.

Thank you for showing up and being a part of this world every day.

Thank you for letting us hear and see you.

Thank you for your resilience and strength, even when you feel most vulnerable.

Thank you for your willingness to remind yourself that you are enough and that your mental health is important.

Thank you to those who have already started having these conversations - with their families, their elders, their children, their houses of worship.

Thank you in advance to those of you who are joining us to become facilitators so that these conversations can be held more often with more people.

Thank you to the UndocuBlack Network leaders who pushed us to continue working on this project, even when it seemed like it was endless and could not possibly all fit onto paper.

Thank you to the UndocuBlack Network members (and those who have yet to find us but will find us in the future) who were the source of inspiration throughout the whole process.

Thank you to the leaders and community members for everything they do and all that they are. Because without you, there would be no Network.

Special thank you's go to Naresea Beswick and Nancy Adossi.

Thank you to Naresea for her support in getting this curriculum started; her research and initial engagement made this curriculum possible.

Thank you to Nancy for her design work, helping us pull it all together to what you see in this finished product.



The **UndocuBlack Network (UBN)** is a multigenerational network of currently and formerly undocumented Black people that fosters community, facilitates access to resources, and contributes to transforming the realities of our people, so we are thriving and living our fullest lives.

We do this by:

1. Developing the leadership of our members through tools, trainings, and programming.
2. Building power *with and for* our communities through advocacy, local organizing and building strategic alliances to advance policies that affect our daily lives.
3. Centering the humanity, dignity, and wellbeing of our communities in all aspects of our work.

The **Undocumented and Black Convening** held in January 2016 was the kickoff event for the UndocuBlack Network. The event was the first time a space had been intentionally created for those who are Black and undocumented to convene. Since the convening, we have established 3 chapters in New York, the DC/Maryland/Virginia and Los Angeles areas, where monthly local gatherings are held to allow members to build community, strategize, and plan events.

We have also joined steering committees and coalitions to advocate for policy changes on the local and national levels. In our role as the only Black undocumented organization led by directly affected people, we advocate for strategies and legislation that does not lead to the criminalization of our community and encourages intersectionality.

UndocuBlack's Mental Wellness Initiative centers the need for mental health access for Black undocumented persons, as well as raises awareness around the unique challenges our community faces. We have created an internal kinship and support program for our members, published a guide for mental health professionals, and have developed a curriculum for facilitated peer-to-peer discussions.

Ultimately, our vision is to create truly inclusive immigrant and racial justice movements that facilitate and create access to resources, healing spaces, and kinship to those with intersecting identities.