

Recommended Safe Spaces for Black Males

Compiled by Sidik Fofana

The Library

Reading can be just as enjoyable as watching television or playing sports. At most local libraries—libraries are *free* public spaces—all you need is a valid address and you can start checking out books the same day. Even if you're in school, the library can supplement your education by offering books on African American culture and history that most traditional classrooms do not offer. Since many inner-city areas lack good bookstores, the library is sometimes the only place to find worthwhile literature. In addition to books, the library organizes great programs like arts and crafts, book clubs, and author readings. And it is really a great place just to sit quietly, and reflectively, where no one will bother you.

The Museum

Looking at great works of art is one of the most stimulating activities you can engage in. A trip to the museum can enlighten you

Recommended Safe Spaces for Black Males

in ways you never imagined. That's right: the visual arts will expand your imagination, make you think more critically, take you to new worlds and new adventures. For example, many writers, musicians, and actors visit the museum for ideas and inspiration. The next time you go, study the works of Romare Bearden, Kara Walker, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and other influential Black visual artists. Museums range from being free to costing very little for a visit. Be sure to read the fine print about admission, because some museums say the admission is a "suggested donation," which means you do not have to pay it.

The Park

Never underestimate the value of fresh air. Many people use the park as a tranquil oasis from the chaos of daily life. Though neighborhood parks are generally used to exercise, relax, and read in, nationally known parks, like Central Park in New York City, make wonderful mini-vacation spots. Moreover, the park is free, it allows you to connect with nature, and regular visits there will help you simplify your life and unclutter your mind.

The Gym

Working out is just as important as any mental or spiritual training. The gym offers an assortment of strength, calisthenic, and cardiovascular activities to ensure a well-rounded exercise regimen. According to the Prevention Center for Cardiovascular Disease, the average person should exercise for twenty to thirty minutes two to three times a week. The gym not only satisfies that recommendation, but it is also a nice place to network and make friends. But if you are into being in your own world there, all you have to do is plug into your iPod or the music or TV on one of the

Recommended Safe Spaces for Black Males

cardio machines and zone out. Prices vary for gym memberships, but the YMCA remains one of the best deals in America.

Hiking and Mountain Climbing

Experiencing the great outdoors is another rewarding activity. Mountain climbing is not as intimidating as it sounds, and expeditions are available at every skill level and location. As alternative lifestyles, hiking and mountain climbing can introduce adventure into your life. They can help you overcome fear, or the unwillingness to take walking seriously as an exercise (once you hike, you will understand why walking matters!).

Spiritual and Religious Institutions

In addition to being a place of prayer and worship, your church, mosque, synagogue, or temple is the positive link between you and your community. With programs such as retreats, fundraising dinners, and charity events, a religious institution can enrich you with social service projects. Meditating at home or practicing yoga at your local gym can also help you find that elusive peace of mind. There are many spiritual and/or religious institutions that are open all day every day, and are simply places where people come to pray, meditate, chant, be still, or do whatever they need to do. For example, there are many Buddhist temples that offer this. But you've got to be willing to explore what exists in your community. If you want peace of mind and a calm spirit, you've got to invest the time it takes to identify these kinds of spaces.

Recommended Safe Spaces for Black Males

Counseling and Therapy

Never be afraid to seek professional help or advice. Though the African American community has placed a heavy stigma on psychological medication and services, counseling is very essential to mental health. Even if you are not going through any stress or hardship, regular visits to a psychologist or psychiatrist can enhance your quality of life. Indulge in the opportunity to sit down and have a professional chat with your counselor for a couple of hours. And if you do not have medical insurance, be assertive and seek out free or low-cost counseling services in your community. They do exist.

Hobbies

Hobbies define who we are. How we spend our leisure is just as important as what we do during the workweek. Whether it's sports, music, or movies, hobbies bring recreation and purpose to your life. Yet, as African Americans, it is important for us to explore new pastimes as well. We can enjoy playing basketball and making music, but it's also beneficial to try activities out of our comfort zone. There is nothing wrong with feeding pigeons, stamp collecting, swimming, or taking free or low-cost classes in areas we know nothing about.

Creativity

Take every opportunity to nurture and expand your creativity. This can be as simple as keeping a journal or drawing in a sketchbook or taking photos on a regular basis. Your artistic contributions are essential especially in a world where our perspective is not always represented. Even if it's just a matter of documenting

Recommended Safe Spaces for Black Males

yourself in some form, creativity enables you to leave a piece of yourself for others to appreciate. And let's not limit creativity to the arts. It could include cooking, learning how to fix things in your home, or repairing an automobile—anything, really, that requires you to explore your inner genius outside of what you normally do from day to day.

Home (Wherever Home Is for You)

A home often reflects the character of the person who resides in it. Depending on how it is arranged and maintained, your home can have a positive or negative energy. It is an extension of you and can serve as a peaceful oasis from the grind of daily life. Keeping your home tidy and comfortable will keep your mind lighter and more relaxed. No matter what your status is economically, your home can be rich, vibrant, and a source of pride in your life.