

A GUIDE TO EDUCATING CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES ABOUT TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE



Trauma-Informed
Community Network

Part of the Partnership for a Healthier Fairfax

THE FAIRFAX COUNTY TRAUMA-INFORMED COMMUNITY NETWORK

is happy to provide this resource to help the children, youth & family serving workforce develop the capacity to educate those they are serving about trauma and its impact. With the prevalence of traumatic experiences in those accessing human services, we believe that it makes sense to take a “universal precautions” approach when it comes to sharing this important information. Everyone in the human services workforce has the potential to promote healing, and every relationship that we have with a youth

or family can be restorative. Providing some basic psychoeducation to help youth and families understand the connection between traumatic experiences and current reactions and behaviors is an intervention that we can **ALL** provide that has the potential to empower those we are serving to make positive changes.

Please use this resource to develop your own language to educate those you are serving about trauma and its impact in ways that make sense in your role, and in your work setting.

For more information about the Trauma-Informed Community Network, please visit our website at <http://bit.ly/ffxTICN>

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is the emotional and physical response that occurs when a person's capacity to cope is overwhelmed by a negative event, series of events, or set of circumstances. When thoughts and memories of the traumatic

event don't go away or they get worse, they may lead to symptoms of traumatic stress, or even posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), both of which can seriously disrupt a person's life.



WHY SHOULD WE PROVIDE PSYCHOEDUCATION?

- » Normalizes responses
- » Validates emotions
- » Leads to feelings of increased acceptance
- » Results in greater compliance with treatment and service plans

The goal is to normalize the child, youth or family's response to traumatic events. It can be very comforting to learn that you (or your child's) responses following a traumatic event are not unusual!

TYPES OF TRAUMA

Trauma is caused by negative events that produce distress. These events can be physical, sexual or emotional in nature. Some of the most common traumatic events include:

- » Physical, sexual and verbal assault, including childhood abuse
- » Being threatened with physical or sexual assault
- » Witnessing violence against others
- » Long-term neglect in childhood
- » Accidents and natural disasters
- » Community violence
- » War or political violence
- » Some immigration and family reunification experiences
- » Environmental conditions like racism, discrimination and poverty



Feelings

- » Overwhelming emotion
- » Too little, or no emotion
- » Depression
- » Shame, fear
- » Anger, rage
- » Grief, sadness
- » Anxiety, panic attacks
- » Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



Body

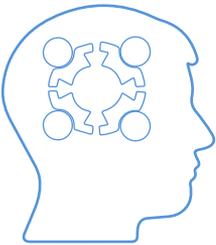
- » Body memories and flashbacks:
A feeling of reliving the traumatic experience, (e.g., seeing images, hearing voices or sounds, smelling aromas, experiencing tastes or other physical sensations)
- » Physical Complaints: Headaches, nausea, stomach aches, pelvic pain, stomach/digestive problems for which no medical cause can be identified
- » Sleep problems



Behavior

- » Self-injury (e.g., cutting, burning)
- » Addictive behaviors (e.g., self-starvation, binge-eating, drug/alcohol misuse or abuse)
- » Constantly looking for sexual relationships, or avoiding them
- » Abusive, aggressive or violent behavior towards others
- » Sensation seeking (e.g., adrenaline junkie)

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT YOUR....



Relationships

- » Not knowing how to trust
- » Being isolated and withdrawn
- » Being afraid of others
- » Having difficulty being close to people
- » Having problems in relationships
- » Not recognizing when he or she is in a dangerous situation



Thinking

- » Confused thinking
- » Memory Problems
- » Problems with attention and concentration
- » Thoughts that get in the way of daily activities



HOW CAN I HELP? TALK ABOUT...

GENERAL INFORMATION

- » If available, talk about the specific type of event (assault, witnessing violence, etc.) that occurred.
- » Facts like how frequently this type of trauma occurs, who experiences it, and what causes it can be helpful in correcting misinformation.
- » Helps survivors feel less alone as they learn that others have shared their experience.
- » This information offers emotional validation that their responses are not unusual.

TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

- » Some symptoms may be described as reminders or “triggers”, where the person is re-experiencing the traumatic event. Other symptoms may actually be attempts to avoid these reminders (substance use, social isolation, etc.).
- » Survival Response: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How have you managed to cope with that?

What have you done to get by?

Have you ever talked about this with anyone?

How has this affected you?

SIMPLE WAYS TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS

- » Deep Breathing
- » Mindfulness
- » Engaging in surroundings using the 5 senses.
- » Self-care, for example:
 - » Connecting with others
 - » Enjoying the arts
 - » Spending time in nature
 - » Prioritizing Sleep
 - » Proper Nutrition
 - » Regular Exercise
 - » Hydration

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” and to cope with stress in healthy ways. Many people are resilient and are able to use challenging life experiences to help them grow. We can all learn to be resilient!

It’s true that traumatic experiences create challenges for the survivor. But they also create new neural pathways, a different perspective on life, and coping skills... that can be positive.

We can help trauma survivors recognize the tools and life skills they may have gained from their experiences, such as:

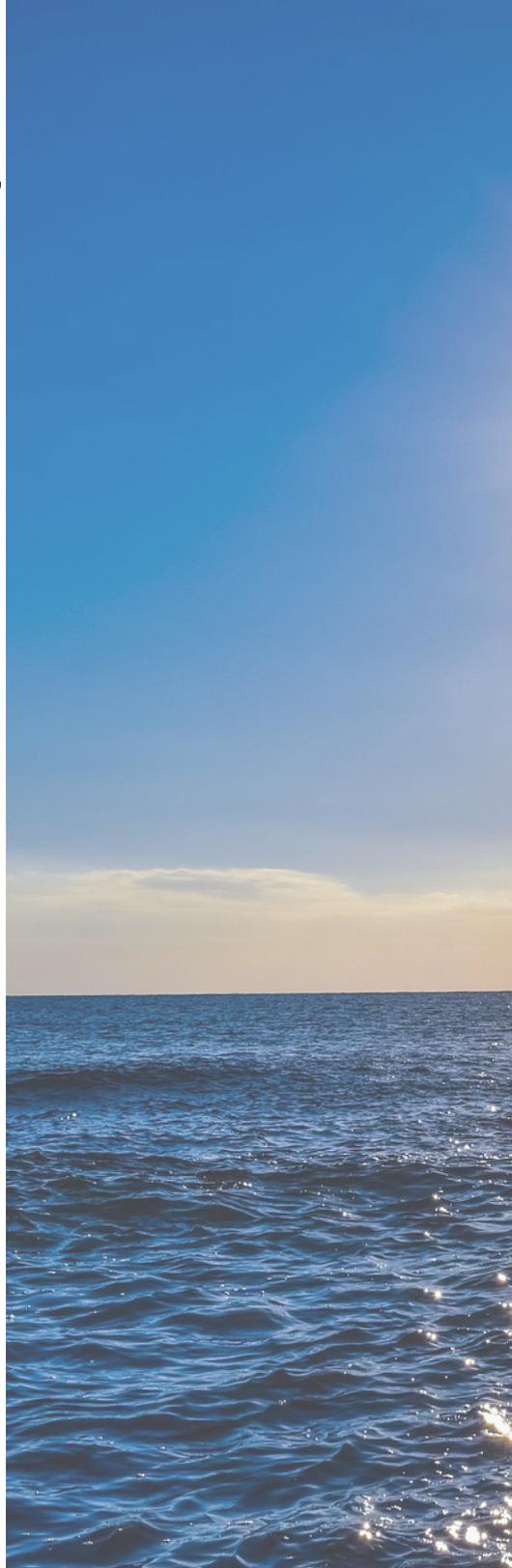
- » **Adaptability**
- » **Creativity**
- » **Empathy**
- » **Resilience**
- » **Resourcefulness**
- » **Gratitude**
- » **Passion**

People who have experienced trauma need:

- » **A Sense of Safety**
- » **Information and Healthy Coping Skills**
- » **Hope and Optimism**
- » **A Sense of Connection / Supportive Relationships**

Being Resilient means feeling:

- » **Safe**
- » **Capable**
- » **Lovable**





HOPE IS THE KEY

RESOURCES

The National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has an infographic meant to give parents and caregivers an overview of the types of traumatic stress commonly affecting children, and the effects these events have on their physical and psychological health.

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma15-4923.pdf>

The Resources for Parents and Caregivers page on the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network's website includes some great language that professionals can use to educate families about trauma and its impact.

<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers#q10>

Youth Move National has a great guide to help youth understand Trauma:

https://www.youthmovenational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Youth-Trauma-Guide-Understanding-Trauma_OnlineFinal.pdf

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