

Becoming a TRAUMA-INFORMED ORGANIZATION

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA, [Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#), 2014)

Trauma is prevalent in our society. The [National Council for Behavioral Health](#) reports that:

- 70% of adults in the U.S. have experienced some type of traumatic event at least one in their lives. This is equivalent to 223.4 million people in the U.S.
- In public behavioral health, over 90% of clients have experienced trauma.
- Trauma is a risk factor for almost all behavioral health and substance use disorders.

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH?

The overarching goals of trauma-informed care are recognizing, destigmatizing, and normalizing trauma experiences for both clients and care providers. A trauma-informed approach requires a paradigm shift at all levels of an agency to acknowledge the prevalence of trauma, avoid practices that retraumatize individuals, and provide appropriate care to promote healing. True trauma-informed care moves beyond simply writing policies and procedures to actively using trauma-informed practices while working with individuals.

Trauma-informed organizations operate with intention to respect and understand individuals' trauma experiences. Agency core values include:

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|----------------|---------------------|
| ✓ Respect | ✓ Cultural humility |
| ✓ Empathy | ✓ Collaboration |
| ✓ Flexibility | ✓ Responsiveness |
| ✓ Authenticity | ✓ Advocacy |

WHY BECOME TRAUMA-INFORMED?

Becoming a trauma-informed agency is important for clients. Trauma is woven into many behavioral, emotional, and social issues. Understanding and addressing root causes require an awareness of individuals' trauma experience. Failure to take trauma into account means that an agency and its practitioners may retraumatize clients and worsen their trauma symptoms.

Becoming a trauma-informed agency is important for staff. Trauma-informed approaches help reduce vicarious and secondary trauma for workers. Caring for staff members is caring for clients; staff can better deliver high-quality care when their own trauma-associated needs are met.

Most importantly, becoming trauma-informed helps destigmatize trauma experiences for everyone who is associated with the organization. Trauma can't be healed until it can be openly addressed.

HOW DOES AN ORGANIZATION BECOME TRAUMA-INFORMED?

Policies and procedures are a good place to start – but they are only a start. Organizations must take concrete steps to make trauma-informed service part of their everyday practice.

Think through the entire client experience, from parking and entering the building, to checking in and meeting the service providers, through checking out and making another appointment. With an attitude of profound respect and empathy, ask yourself how it looks, sounds, and feels to a person carrying trauma. Are their needs centered? Are you creating a space that feels welcoming and safe?

Based on your answers, take steps to begin shifting your agency culture to become authentically trauma-informed in everyday practice.