Providing Trauma-Informed Care: Why it Matters

Ken Kraybill

What is trauma and its impact?

What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

How might survivors you know complete these stems?

The world is...
They always think I...
I will never be...
Because of me...
I am...
If they really cared...

Kintsukuroi (keen-tsoo-koo-roy)

The Japanese art of mending pottery using gold or silver lacquer. The broken and mended pot becomes even more beautiful than the original. A compelling metaphor for how pain, grief, and trauma in our lives can transform us in positive, even beautiful ways.

Entering the Shadows

Kintsukuroi (keen-tsoo-koo-roy)

My Grandfather’s Eye

Anitra F.

“The unspeakable”

“Trauma is the most avoided, ignored, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering.”

Peter A. Levine in Healing Trauma
“No one any longer denies the fact that wars can ruin the lives of soldiers and their families. But when it comes to physical and emotional violence within the family...society continues to avoid the grim evidence.”

Mary Sykes Wylie in The Long Shadow of Trauma

“The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness.”

Judith Lewis Herman in Trauma and Recovery

“A jackhammer, a sledgehammer, a vacuum sweeper, a lawn mower”

Peter Levine

“Trauma disconnects people from their bodies. In love we are ‘swept off our feet.’ In trauma, our legs are pulled out from under us.”

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“A thief”

What get’s stolen?

sense of safety; trust; belief in goodness of self, other people and world; self-regulation, inner calm, feeling of centeredness; ability to problem-solve; ability to respond vs. react; control, autonomy, empowerment; confidence; health/protective factors; self-esteem, connection to own body...
Impact of trauma

Prevalence of Trauma: Mothers Experiencing Homelessness in U.S.

92% have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime
Two-thirds have histories of domestic violence
Compared to low-income housed women, mothers experiencing homelessness have:
  - Three times the rate of PTSD (36%)
  - Twice the rate of drug/alcohol dependence (41%)
  - About 50% have experienced a major episode of depression since becoming homeless.

Source: SAMHSA

Overwhelming demands placed upon the physiological system that result in a profound felt sense of vulnerability and/or loss of control.

Robert D. Macy

Trauma

“Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.”

– Judith Herman

“In short, trauma is about loss of connection — to ourselves, to our bodies, to our families, to others, and to the world around us… It is often hard to recognize, because it doesn’t happen all at once. It can happen slowly, over time…”

– Peter Levine

Impact of Trauma: Shattered Belief Systems

The world is unsafe.
Other people are unsafe and cannot be trusted.
God has abandoned me.
My own thoughts and feelings are unsafe.
I’m unworthy.
I’m not capable.

Impact of Trauma: Physical Health

Chronic pain
Gynecological difficulties
Gastrointestinal (GI) problems
Asthma
Heart palpitations
Headaches
Musculoskeletal difficulties

Impact of Trauma: Mental Health

Post-traumatic stress disorder
Depression
Anxiety/Panic disorder
Attachment disorders
Substance use issues
Dissociative disorders
Somatization
Eating disorders
Bipolar disorder
Borderline personality disorder
Schizoaffective
Characteristics of PTSD

Intrusion
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Recurrent images
- Intense response to triggers

Avoidance
- Constricted activities
- Avoiding reminders of the trauma

Dissociation
- Not remembering
- Feeling detached, disconnected, numb

Hyper-arousal
- Irritability
- Poor concentration
- Hyper-vigilance

A trauma-informed perspective differs from traditional views of service provision.

Traditional: Hierarchical

“In our program, we need to set certain rules, and clients have to follow them. It may not always seem fair, but my boss tells me what I have to do, and I need to make sure clients do what they have to do.”

Trauma-Informed:
Decrease hierarchy. Find ways to share power.

“In our agency we try to listen to what people perceive to be their strengths and encourage them to make their own life choices while also asking people to follow certain rules for the good of the group.”

Traditional: Behaviors viewed negatively

“I have a client who is manipulative and is always splitting staff. She goes to one person and asks for something and then goes to someone else and asks for the same thing when she has already heard “no.” She keeps a lot of secrets about her past and lies about where she has been or what she has been doing when she misses appointments.”

Trauma-Informed:
Behaviors viewed as adaptive; ways to get needs met.

“Amy has experienced very hurtful relationships in the past. She has difficulty trusting people and is understandably reluctant to reveal what’s really going on with her. Hopefully, as our relationship develops, she will become more trusting over time.”

Traditional: Service providers are the experts

“This mother has a lot of problems that she just can’t seem to see. She clearly needs to prioritize her time and efforts to succeed. We are going to have to get her to understand what she is needs to do and how she needs to change.”

Trauma-Informed:
The helping relationship is a partnership; expertise is shared

“We elicit people’s own hopes and needs and acknowledge their autonomy to make their own choices. We offer specific services such as counseling, parenting groups, and household management classes, and invite people to participate in the ones they choose.”

Traditional: Goals defined by the provider; focused on reducing negative behaviors

“My client needs to stop blaming others for his problems, deal with his anger, and take his meds the way he’s supposed to. I need to help him see the importance of these goals.”
Trauma-Informed:
Goals defined by the person; focus is on recovery, gaining confidence, and healing.

“I am talking with Jen about what goals she would like to set for herself in addition to finding housing, which is an expectation of our program. I’m interested in what’s most important to her and how to assist her in achieving her goals.”

Traditional: Reactive; crisis-driven

“There are frequently clients who are in crisis in our office. It feels like we are always putting out fires with the families. We are never sure when something is going to set someone off or why things escalate to such an intense situation.”

Trauma-Informed:
Proactive, attempt to avoid future crises.

“Guests know that this is a safe space to come when they are struggling. We have plans in place with each of them about what to do in the case of a crisis, and we’re always working with them to anticipate and plan for situations that may be tough for them.”

Traditional: Views people as vulnerable, broken, needing protection from themselves

“I can’t leave decisions up to the mothers themselves, because nothing will ever happen. They don’t know where to begin and if given the choice, they would probably make unhealthy decisions for their families.”

Trauma-Informed:
Focus on strengths, control, choice essential for success

“I marvel at the resourcefulness of our families and try to call it out whenever I can. Often, the mothers aren’t used to people recognizing their strengths. It makes them uncomfortable at first, but over time, it really builds a deep confidence in themselves.”

Activity and Discussion

“The compassion we seek is that which stands in awe at what (people) have to carry, rather than stand in judgment about how they carry it.”

Fr. Gregory Boyle, Tattoos on the Heart