TRAUMA-INFORMED ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE Fact Sheet

WHEN WE OPERATE FROM THE UNDERSTANDING THAT TRAUMA IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE, EVERYONE BENEFITS.

Nearly 60 percent of children in the United States (57.7%) reported exposure to violence in the past year, and more than 1 in 10 reported 5 or more exposures (Finkelhor et al., 2015).

Three in four U.S. high school students under 18 years of age (76.1%) experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). Nearly one in five (18.5%) experienced four or more ACEs (Swedo et al., 2024).

Children exposed to even one type of violence are at far greater risk of experiencing other types of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2011).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including experiences of racism and community violence, can lead to toxic stress, the impacts of which can last a lifetime without adequate adult support (Center on the Developing Child of Harvard University).

There are several protective factors that can help mitigate the impact of harm and promote resilience in young people who experience trauma. Primary among them is the presence of "consistent, supportive, and loving" adults who create resilient environments (Futures Without Violence, 2013; Masten, 2009).

Research indicates that the damaging effects of toxic stress response can be prevented or reversed through supportive, responsive relationships and environments (Center on the Developing Child of Harvard University).

TRAUMA-INFORMED ENVIRONMENTS:

1. Acknowledge the historical and present-day experiences and impacts of trauma on individuals, families, and communities,
2. Honor the strengths, needs, and challenges that come from navigating adversity, and
3. Embrace the hope and possibility in healing and resilience.

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NRCDV welcomes your input and questions!
Connect with us at nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org

AT HOME

Children and youth who experience trauma need the same things that all children need, like consistency, hope and optimism, support, honesty, connection, and models of nurturing, respect, and compassion. They need love and nurturance, understanding and assurance, and to feel worthy and valued for who they are.

IN THE COMMUNITY

There are many community spaces that can support children and youth's needs for belonging, connectedness, and even respite. In addition to the support networks that thrive in neighborhoods, young people may draw strength and healing from participation in faith-based groups, after school programs, sports teams, and other community-based spaces.

IN EDUCATION

A trauma-informed school recognizes the role that trauma plays in the lives of the school community, including students and their families as well as educators, administrators, and staff including bus drivers, lunch servers, janitors, and security personnel. As we move through the pandemic, we can take lessons forward about the critical importance of nurturing trauma-informed educational environments that promote protective factors for students at all ages and stages.

IN HEALTHCARE

Trauma-informed care and health equity are intertwined. Especially in health care settings, each is necessary to promote and foster the other. Racism is historically embedded in our medical and public heath systems, and has intergenerational consequences. Our response patterns need to change personally and systemically, rooted in emerging principles and practices of trauma-informed care.

IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Services designed to support families in crisis must operate through a trauma-informed lens, as trauma and oppression are common drivers of the complex challenges people may face across the lifespan, beginning in childhood. This lens must be considered in outreach strategies, accessibility of programs, the design of physical and virtual spaces, the intake process, the delivery of services, and community partnerships alike.

IN EMPLOYMENT

Organizations must commit to building the infrastructure necessary to support a thriving workforce that is growing in multi-generational diversity across race, ethnicity, ability, and other identity markers. This means creating and fostering workplace policies and practices at the intersection of racial equity and trauma-informed care. Young people deserve to work in supportive, affirming, and trauma-informed environments that support their wellbeing and growth.

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For resources and tools to support your efforts to build and sustain trauma-informed spaces, see the Special Collection: Trauma-Informed Environments for Young People at VAWnet.org.

EACH OF US CAN BUILD AND SUSTAIN TRAUMA-INFORMED, EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENTS BY ENHANCING CONDITIONS IN THE PLACES WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE BORN, LIVE, LEARN, WORK, PLAY, WORSHIP, AND GROW. TOGETHER, WE CAN FOSTER ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE WELCOMING, SAFE, AND HEALTHY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE.

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