

# Rules of Engagement: Trauma Informed Care

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# Imagine a place that...

- Considers “What happened to you?” instead of “What is wrong with you?”
- Honors the fact that the past can be triggered by the present
- Is committed to supporting people as they heal
- Leaves a person feeling edified



# What is Trauma?

- Intense and overwhelming experiences that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well being
- Experiences that may occur at any time in a person's life; may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over many years.
- Experiences that often overwhelm the persons coping resources; leads the person to find a way of coping that may work in the short term but may cause serious harm in the long term.



# Traumatic Events

- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in childhood or adulthood
- In childhood:
  - Neglect or abandonment (food, shelter, basic needs, money)
  - Death of a parent
  - Divorce
  - Family life including addiction, parental incarceration, violence
- Rape
- Serious medical illness or disease
- Combat, frightening events with threat of death like violence, terrorism, storms

# Impact of Trauma

- ACE study
- 10 year study over 17,000 people
- Looked at the impact of adverse childhood experiences including trauma over a lifespan



# Impact of Trauma

- Increased risk of neurological, biological and/or social difficulties:
  - Changes in brain neurobiology
  - Social, emotional & cognitive impairment
  - Adaption of health risk behaviors as coping mechanisms (eating disorder, smoking, substance use, gambling, self-harm, promiscuity, violence)
  - Severe and persistent behavioral health, physical health and social problems, early death.
- (Felitti et al, 1998)

# Why is Understanding Trauma Important?

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# Important Because:

- Current problems → related to traumatic experiences
- Sensitivity to situations → people, places, things that trigger
- Triggers can be in our organization and lead to distress and avoidance



# Triggers:

- An external event that causes discomfort or distress:
  - SIGHTS: lab coats, medical equipment, restraints, room's configuration
  - SOUNDS: dental drill, sirens, activity in the environment
  - SMELLS: from people, from equipment

# Triggers:

- Invasive procedures
- Removal of clothing
- Touch
- Personal questions
- Power dynamics
- Gender of provider
- Vulnerable physical position
- Loss of privacy or lack of privacy

# Signs of Distress:

- Emotional reactions (anxiety, fear, worry, anger)
- Physical reactions (nausea, dizzy, increase BP, increase heart rate)
- Behavioral reactions (argumentative, restless, unresponsive, uncooperative, crying)
- Cognitive reactions (memory impairment, forgetful, unable to give history)

# Leads to:

- Avoidance of services
- Non-adherence to treatment
- Postponing treatment
- Overuse of emergency services and pain medications

# What can we do to Provide Trauma Sensitive Practices?

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# Understand the Barriers:

- Lack of time
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of tools
- Lack of training
- Misconceptions/discomfort

# Trauma Informed Integrated System:

- Screen and assess for trauma
- Communicate a sensitivity to trauma issues
- Train ALL staff about trauma, sensitive practice and share critical information
- Create a safe and comfortable environment
- Provide services in a trauma informed manner



# Principles of Sensitive Practice:

- Respect
- Taking time
- Rapport
- Sharing information
- Sharing control
- Respecting boundaries
- Fostering mutual learning
- Understanding non-linear healing
- Demonstrating awareness and knowledge of trauma

Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Care Practitioners, Schachler et al





# Brief empathic validating response:

- “I’m sorry that happened to you”
- “That must have been very difficult”

# Communicating Sensitivity

- Trauma related materials in waiting rooms
- Posters inviting the conversation
- Asking question about trauma and or needs before and during the session
- Giving permission to stop the session

# Staff Training

- **Awareness:** Everyone knows the role of trauma
- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety
- **Trustworthiness:** Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, and maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **Choice:** Respect and prioritize consumer choice and control
- **Collaboration:** Maximizing collaboration and sharing of power with consumers
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing consumer empowerment and skill-building

# Safe and Secure Environment

- Client feedback AND Staff feedback
  - Survey the client experience from reception to exit
- Do no harm: prevent re-traumatization
- Provide trauma sensitive practices and care

# Practical Tips

- Engagement over time, building on trust, be ok with slow
- Provide calm and soothing office environment
- Give relaxed unhurried attention
- Talk about concerns and procedures before doing anything
- Give as much control and choice as possible
- Validate any concerns as understandable and normal
- Allow a support person to be present
- Explain and get consent; what to expect next
- Always consider culture (ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation) and situation (homelessness, poverty)

