

TRAUMA-INFORMED ENVIRONMENTS

QRTP Infosheet: Issue Twelve

The need to create a safe environment is not new; it involves an agency-wide effort supported by effective policies and practices. Beyond identifying trauma and trauma-related symptoms, a primary goal of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is *safety, especially safety in the environment*. Although agencies are likely to identify some facility issues that could erode safety for trauma survivors, a safe environment will only be established if regular feedback is obtained from consumers about their experiences with the program.¹

Keys to safe, supportive environments

1. Create an environment that is perceived and felt as **safe**. [Consider conducting an environmental assessment or checklist.](#)²
2. Provide an opportunity for individuals who have experienced trauma or who are in trauma to successfully self-regulate their behaviors in productive ways and create a **sense of belonging** to communities around them.
3. Install routines, schedules, structures, and rules that are predictable and allow the individual to establish a **sense of competency and achievement**.
4. Demonstrate an **understanding of the effects** of trauma.
5. Promote **trust, dependability, and predictability**.
6. Respect gathering child, youth and family information through **empathetic listening and observations**.
7. Practice **cultural humility and responsiveness**.
8. Ground conversations about safety in trauma-informed approaches that **foster values of dignity, equity, and compassion** and that set the tone for behaviors, policies, structures, processes, and environments. Trauma influences how people think, feel, and interact.
9. Recognize **culturally informed safety practices** benefit everyone in an agency or organization.
10. **Recognize practices** that are retraumatizing.
11. **Transform the language used** by using language that is respectful, courteous, and compassionate.
12. **Training and retraining** staff on the impact of trauma should be a strong component to a trauma-informed environment. Traumatic experiences are prevalent in the children, youth, and families served.
13. **Help staff reframe** how they are evaluating children and youths' behaviors and determine the right type of support that would be beneficial to the youth at that time.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series 57.

² Trauma-Informed Community Network: *Facility Review Checklist*. Partnership for a Healthier Fairfax.

Six key principles of a trauma-informed approach³

A safe trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures. These principles may be generalizable across multiple types of settings, although terminology and application may be setting- or sector-specific.

	Safety	Youth need to feel safe when they are in the care of professionals. Agencies should establish settings that provide children, youth, and families with a sense of security. Staff should also feel safe when they are providing care.
	Trustworthiness & Transparency	Respectful and professional boundaries are maintained by staff and youth. The goal of the organization should be building and maintaining trust with youth and family members, among staff, and others involved in the organization.
	Peer Support	Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, serving as models of recovery and healing, and maximizing a sense of empowerment. Peer support is an approach to building safe, mutual, healing relationships among equals.
	Collaboration & Mutuality	Staff should view children (where appropriate) and youth as partners in the effort to develop treatment plans. As collaborators, staff, children, youth, and the agency work together to achieve the desired result. Through collaboration, youth and families become active participants in their treatment decisions.
	Empowerment, Voice & Choice	Provide an atmosphere that allows children and youth to feel validated and affirmed by staff and volunteers of the agency. Provide youth a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities. Youth are supported in developing and building self-advocacy skills.
	Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues	To establish safe and effective trauma-informed care, staff members need to recognize and eliminate any potential cultural, racial, gender or other biases. Cultural differences should also be recognized when youth are receiving care by implementing processes and protocols to accommodate cultural needs.

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

The importance of self-care for caregivers and safe environments

Of equal importance in a trauma-informed environment is staff and personnel self-care. Staff who interact with traumatized children, youth, and their families on a routine basis run the risk of compassion fatigue that can be experienced as physical, emotional, or spiritual exhaustion. Among the warning signs of compassion fatigue are anger, depression, physical or emotional exhaustion, physical problems (headaches, gastrointestinal problems, sleeplessness), hopelessness, harmful self-medication (alcohol, illicit drugs) or neglecting one's own needs and interests.

Self-care is not a luxury but a need for everyone. It should be part of one's daily routine. There are many ways of practicing self-care which include getting enough sleep, taking a relaxing bath, getting a massage, prioritizing healthy meals, and making sure you have enough time for relaxing and resting, as well as spending time with one's friends

The key to self-care is to give staff, volunteers, and others in the agency time to recharge their batteries on a regular basis as well as set reasonable boundaries for themselves. We cannot always fix everything we encounter with others, so sometimes the goal is to give each other a brief respite from their problems. Staff cannot take care of others if they are not taking care of themselves. It's important to prioritize self-care and find ways to incorporate it into our daily routine. Taking care of oneself can help reduce stress and anxiety, boost one's mood and self-esteem, and improve one's overall quality of life. Self-care is not selfish; it's necessary

RESOURCES

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Ohioans who are experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis and their family members can call, chat or text 988 to reach a trained counselor who can offer help and support.

Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Crisis Text Line – Text 4Hope to 741 741 for free, confidential conversation
[Crisis Text Line | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)
- Ohio Careline (1-800-720-9616) for free, confidential connection to licensed provider.
[Ohio CareLine | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#)
- OhioMHAS Get Help for a variety of resources on control, connection, and meaning.
[Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | Ohio.gov](#)
- Resources
[Resources | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)

The Wellness Project

[The Wellness Project](#) is a multimedia, multi-experiential collection of resources and practices to support and enhance your individual and organizational wellness and resilience. The purpose of this website is to discover a variety of ways for supporting helping professionals, so they can show up as the “best version of themselves.” It includes a holistic system of wellness activities such as reading, listening, watching, cooking, connecting, moving, breathing, and resting.

Trauma Informed Community Network

The Trauma-Informed Community Network (TICN) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency effort to implement and support Trauma Informed Care initiatives across the Human Services System. It is an initiative of the Partnership for a Healthier Fairfax, Virginia. The TICN has developed some resources for organizations to use to help make their spaces more trauma-informed, including [A Facility Review Checklist](#) that agencies can use to guide improvements. The checklist and resources are under the Trauma-Informed Spaces tab.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Treatment Improvement Protocol [\(TIP\) 57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services](#) was developed to help behavioral health professionals understand the impact of trauma on those who experience it. The manual discusses assessment and treatment planning strategies. These strategies support recovery and the development of a trauma-informed care workforce. While the manual is targeted to behavioral health services, it lays the groundwork for the implementation and provision of trauma-informed services in a variety of settings.

SAMHSA’s [Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) puts forth a framework for the behavioral health specialty sectors, that can be adapted to other sectors such as child welfare, education, criminal and juvenile justice, primary health care, the military and other settings that have the potential to ease or exacerbate an individual’s capacity to cope with traumatic experiences.

Trauma continues to be a cross-SAMHSA priority, given its significant role in behavioral health prevention, treatment, and recovery. Released in June 2023 SAMHSAs [Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach](#), expands the discussion presented in SAMHSA’s earlier resources (noted above), specifically focusing on tools and strategies for implementing a trauma-informed approach (TIA).