



Why Trauma-Informed Care for Youth and Families Matters

By Gordon R. Hodas, M.D.

Introduction

Fortunately, there has been a significant increase in attention to the concept and practice of trauma-informed care over the last decade, with contributions from the federal government (SAMHSA 2014), individual states, service systems, provider agencies (Yatchmenoff, 2015), and others. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, many professionals working with children and adolescents (*youth*) and their families in public mental health, education, and other child-serving systems remain either uninformed about trauma-informed care or skeptical of its relevance. So there remains a need to clarify why trauma-informed care really *matters*, in particular its positive impact on those receiving services.

This article, therefore, addresses how trauma-informed care benefits youth and families – why it matters for them. Additional benefits for staff and for organizations working with youth and families are then also considered.

Twenty-Five Reasons Why Trauma-Informed Care Matters

- Trauma is very common in our society, especially in childhood and adolescence.
- Trauma can have a very negative impact on the health, wellbeing, and emotional development of youth.
- A youth is more than the sum of his/her behaviors.
- Many negative behaviors by youth have served, and may still be serving, a survival function.
- Many negative behaviors are an automatic response to stressful situations, not actively chosen by the youth.
- Many negative behaviors are a result of limited coping skills.
- Significant stress, especially for youth who have experienced past trauma, can shut down the thinking part of the brain.
- Trauma-informed professionals provide safety to youth, and help them feel safer.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth gradually regain trust in others.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth experience greater control over their life.
- Trauma-informed professionals try to understand rather than to judge.
- Trauma-informed professionals believe that positive change results from working together with youth, not from coercing or threatening them.
- Trauma-informed professionals believe that youth really want to do the right thing.

- Trauma-informed professionals can help youth understand how trauma has affected their life.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth recognize and build on strengths, so they can start to see themselves in a more positive light.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth increase their competencies and coping skills.
- Trauma-informed professionals encourage youth to express themselves and speak up, even if the words don't always come out right.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth think more hopefully about their future.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth become more motivated and involved.
- Trauma-informed professionals help youth who are hurting emotionally get the behavioral health treatment they need.
- Trauma-informed care involves working with the youth's family, whenever possible.
- Trauma-informed care means that all the professionals see themselves as needing to be on the same team.
- Trauma-informed care makes it less likely that youth will be blamed for their struggles.
- Trauma-informed care makes it less likely that youth will be re-traumatized by those in human services and education.

- Trauma-informed care promotes healing and recovery.

Discussion

Just as youth in various systems benefit from the provision of trauma-informed care, agency staff benefit from this approach in many ways as well. For example, professionals who are trauma-informed develop stronger relationships with youth. Supported youth, in turn, are more likely to achieve success. These positive developments serve to validate staff and strengthen their professional self-identity. In addition, there are other benefits when trauma-informed care is implemented at the organizational level, consistent with a parallel process whereby trauma-informed care “addresses the experience of the workforce along with the experience of individuals seeking services or supports” (Yatchmenoff, 2015). The critical dimensions of a trauma-informed approach – *safety, trustworthiness and transparency, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice*, with attention to *culture and historical and gender issues* (Flatow, 2015) – can help create empowered professionals in service settings characterized by inclusion, respect, and kindness.

Given the unmistakable benefits of trauma-informed care for youth and families as well as for service providers, buy-in by an informed workforce is achievable. The roadmap for achieving this involves vision, leadership, persistence, and, not surprisingly, a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach.

References

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