

Trauma and Its Impact

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The comprehensive resource on domestic violence

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

***BEST PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS FOR OHIO'S
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS***



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Trauma-Informed Care: Best Practices and Protocols for Ohio's Domestic Violence Programs

- Go to www.odvn.org
- Click on “resource center”
- Go to “publications”
- Scroll down for link to PDF copy of trauma-informed care manual and webinar

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Traumatic experiences often are:

- **Defining** and **organizing** experiences that can form the core of an individual's identity. The **far-reaching impact**, and the attempts to cope with the aftermath of the traumatic experience, comes to define who the trauma survivor is.”

Harris and Fallot, 2001

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It can impact:

- My brain
- My body
- My thoughts
- My behaviors
- My responses
- My worldview
- My relationships
- How I seek help
- How I cope
- How I communicate and interact
- How I respond to people
- What helps me feel better
- My spiritual life

Psychological and Cognitive Reactions to trauma

Trauma also impacts how people think and the ways in which they process and understand information. Especially when people are accessing services, many survivors have recently experienced traumatic events and their body and brains are focused on survival and safety (the DOING part of the brain), not thinking and planning (the THINKING part of the brain). Being sensitive to the normal reactions to abnormal experiences will make services more effective and empowering to survivors. When working with survivors, taking the following trauma reactions into account is critically important to effective advocacy with survivors. Below are some of the ways in which trauma impacts how people think:

- ✓ Difficulty concentrating
- ✓ Slowed thinking
- ✓ Difficulty making decisions
- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Difficulty with figures
- ✓ Blaming self or others
- ✓ Poor attention span
- ✓ Mental rigidity
- ✓ Disorientation
- ✓ Uncertainty
- ✓ Memory difficulties
- ✓ Difficulty with problem solving
- ✓ Nightmares
- ✓ Flashbacks
- ✓ Intrusive thoughts
- ✓ Distressing dreams
- ✓ Suspiciousness

Trauma can make such everyday tasks as concentrating, organizing, focusing on something for long periods of time, or remembering details overwhelming. Trauma can inhibit learning, problem solving and making decisions.

Advocates may need to help survivors compensate for this by using memory tricks, writing things down, having survivors repeat important information back, and using other strategies to support survivors in achieving their goals.

Page 40, TIC Manual

Emootional Reactions to Trauma

Below is a list of ways in which survivors react to trauma emotionally. Historically, many helping professionals have viewed these reactions negatively, or have viewed these as evidence that something is wrong with the trauma survivor. A trauma-informed approach understands these reactions as the survivor trying to process their experiences, attempting to cope with extremely difficult situations, and does not view them as evidence of a survivor's problems, bad decisions, personal shortcoming, or weaknesses.

- ✓ Shock and disbelief
- ✓ Fear and/or anxiety
- ✓ Grief
- ✓ Guilt or shame
- ✓ Denial or minimization
- ✓ Depression or sadness
- ✓ Anger or irritability
- ✓ Panic
- ✓ Apprehension
- ✓ Despair
- ✓ Hopelessness
- ✓ Emotional detachment
- ✓ Feeling lost or abandoned
- ✓ Increased need for control
- ✓ Emotional numbing
- ✓ Difficulty trusting
- ✓ Mood swings
- ✓ Feeling isolated
- ✓ Intensified or inappropriate emotions
- ✓ Emotional outbursts
- ✓ Feeling overwhelmed
- ✓ Diminished interest in activities
- ✓ Hyper-alertness or hyper-vigilance
- ✓ Re-experiencing of the trauma
- ✓ Desire to withdraw
- ✓ Spontaneous crying
- ✓ Exaggerated startle response
- ✓ Feelings of powerlessness

Page 39, TIC manual

As an advocate, you should be expecting to work with survivors who are having any of the feelings listed above. A key skill an advocate must develop is the ability to accept a wide range of emotions and feelings--even ones that are difficult to deal with, such as anger, irritability, or intense emotions. All of these emotions are normal responses to experiencing trauma, and helping survivors understand them that way validates survivors' experiences, empowers them and supports their healing and recovery.

TIC Manual, Page 39

Common Physical Health Issues Related to Trauma

Nervousness

Stomach aches/
nausea

Headaches

Numbness

Gynecological pain

Fatigue

Difficulty
sleeping

Compromised
immune system

Sources: Moses, DJ, Reed, BG et al (2003). *Creating Trauma Services for Women with Co-Occurring Disorders*. Washington, DC: SAMHSA; van der Kolk, B. (1996). "The Body Keeps the Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of PTSD" in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. B. van der Kolk, AC McFarlane, and L. Weisaeth, Eds. New York City: Guilford Press.

“Brain, body and mind are inextricably linked. Alternations to one of these three will intimately affect the other two,” explains trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk. He further describes that an individual body expresses what cannot be said or verbalized. And so, traumatic memories are often transformed into physical outcomes.

Van der Kolk, B. (1996) *The body keeps the score: Approaches to the psychobiology of PTSD. In Traumatic Stress: The effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, body and Society.* B. van der Kolk, AC McFarlane, and L. Weisaeth, Eds. New your City: Guilford Press.

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Behavioral Reactions

Trauma and the effects of trauma can impact trauma survivors in multiple different ways. One of the biggest areas of life in which trauma impacts individuals is how they act with others, which directly relates to their relationships with other people, with helping professionals, and even their understanding of their self and the world. Because recovery from trauma occurs in the context of relationships, it is important for trauma survivors to be able to re-establish safe connections with others.

- ✓ Change in interaction with others
- ✓ Withdrawal or isolation
- ✓ Decrease of humor
- ✓ Irritation with others
- ✓ Lack of patience
- ✓ Change in how people relate with each other and the world
- ✓ Avoiding people, places and things that remind you of the event
- ✓ Impulsivity
- ✓ Self-injury
- ✓ Alcohol and drug use to cope with uncomfortable trauma symptoms
- ✓ Trying to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the trauma

TIC Manual, Page 43

Many of the behaviors associated with attempting to cope with trauma and the impact of trauma (such as alcohol and drug use, self-isolation, not wanting to discuss traumatic experiences, and making impulsive decisions) can be challenging for helpers in domestic violence programs. But by reinterpreting these behaviors as common trauma reactions and attempts to cope with their situation, helpers can better understand these reactions as normal and work with survivors in a spirit of collaboration and empathy.

TIC Manual, Page 43

Spiritual issues

- Questioning one's purpose
- Self-blame, self-hatred, guilt and shame
- Trauma has damaged thoughts and beliefs about the meaning of life
- No longer have a faith in a higher power
- Might have lost an important community of faith
- Don't feel like there is a purpose or a reason for life

Worldview issues

- The world is an unsafe place to live in.
- Other people are unsafe and cannot be trusted.
- The survivor's own thoughts and feelings are unsafe.
- Survivors anticipate continued crises, danger and loss.
- Lack of belief in self-worth and capabilities.

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Relational and social issues

- Lack of connection to others due to hyperarousal, intrusion or constriction
- Self-isolation
- Loss of relationships due to the isolation of abuse
- Emotional issues negatively impact relationships
- Loss of trust in others
- Connection to children disrupted

Trauma and memories:

“There is evidence that trauma is stored in the part of the brain called the limbic system, which processes emotions and sensations, but not language or speech. For this reason, people who have been traumatized may live with implicit memories of terror, anger, and sadness generated by the trauma, but with few or no explicit memories to explain the feelings.”

Sidran Traumatic Stress Foundation

Thank you!!



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