Warm and Welcoming Spaces:
Trauma Informed Care in Pediatric Settings

Jesse Higgins RN, MSN, PMHNP

Director of Integrated Behavioral Health

Northern Light Health

Objectives

1. I will be able to discuss the importance of creating a welcoming environment in my health care setting.

2. I will understand how to leverage principles of trauma informed care to support patients, families and staff.

Northern Light Health

Stress

Stressors are stimuli that

- Disrupt baseline functioning
- Trigger expectant defensive behavior and emotional response after repeated exposure
- Overwhelm coping skills and make it hard to return to baseline

May establish a cycle of distress where the individual learns maladaptive coping strategies and becomes less able to cope with ordinary situations.

Northern Light Health

The 3 E's of Trauma

- an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances
  - Community trauma, historical trauma, individual trauma/neglect, generational
- **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening
- has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Trauma as a barrier

- Changes childhood development and behavior
- Impacts family systems
- Affects how children and families their families interact with the health care system

3 Primary Categories of Response

Fight
(Physical Arousal)

- Aggression
- Trouble concentrating
- Hyperactivity

Flight
(Withdrawal & Escape)

- Social isolation
- Avoidance of others
- Running away

Freeze
(Stilling & Constricting)

- Constricted emotional expression
- Stilling behavior
- Over compliance and denial of needs

Impact of trauma and toxic stress

- Changes in physiology

- Changes in brain architecture & function

- Changes in skills, abilities and behavior

- Changes in long-term health and mental health

Trauma-affected behaviors by age

Ages 0-5

- Fear of being separated from parent
- Crying, whimpering, screaming
- Immobility and/or aimless motion
- Trembling, excessive clinging, frightened facial expressions
- Regressed behaviors (thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of darkness, etc.)
- Self-soothing (rocking, head-banging, etc.)

Ages 6-11

- Extreme withdrawal
- Disruptive behavior
- Inability to pay attention
- Regressed behaviors
- Nightmares/sleep problems
- Irrational fears
- Irritability
- School refusal
- Anger outbursts
- Fighting
- Somatic complaints
- Poor academic engagement (school work suffers)
- Depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt, emotional numbing

Ages 12-17

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares/sleep problems
- Emotional numbing
- Avoidance of reminders
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Problems with peers
- Anti-social behavior
- Physical complaints
- Suicidal ideation
- School problems
- Confusion
- Guilt
- Revenge fantasies

Northern Light Health

What does trauma exposure look like: FRAYED tool

F	Frets (anxiety and worry) and fears
R	Regulation difficulties (disorders of behaviors or emotions; hyperactive, impulsive, easily becomes aggressive or emotional; inattentive)
A	Attachment challenges (insecure attachment relationships with caregivers); poor peer relationships
Y	Yawning (sleep problems) and yelling (aggression, impulsivity)
E	Educational and developmental delays (especially cognitive, social-emotional, and communication)
D	Defeated (hopeless), depressed, or dissociated (separated from reality of moment, lives in own head)

Springs are objects that produce a restoring force when stretched or compressed by an applied force.

- **Neuroplasticity**- Changes in response to trauma, and in response to supportive adults

- **Neurogenesis**- the ability to grow new neurons, to increase connectivity.

- **Neural Networks**- The more intensely and frequently a neural network "fires," the stronger its "wiring." In short, repetition is a good thing.

- Recovery and healing are possible

- Protective factors facilitate healing and resilience

- *Healing occurs within the context of RELATIONSHIPS.*

Northern Light Health

What happens when we feel unwelcome?

- "Unwelcomeness" is associated with feeling devalued, othered, and stigmatized.
- Welcomeness is essential to create an environment which encourages access and engagement of patients.

(Abbott et al., 2022)

According to the World Health Organization, in welcoming health centers for youth *all* staff:

- Provide adequate information and support to enable each young person to make free and informed choices that are relevant to his or her individual needs

- Are motivated to work with young people

- Are non-judgmental, considerate, and easy to relate to

- Are able to devote adequate time to their patients

- Act in the best interests of their patients

Welcoming space for trauma survivors

- Routines/ consistency
- Choices
- Clear, firm limits for inappropriate behavior
- Sensitive to environmental cues that can trigger reactions
- Anticipate difficulties and provide additional supports
- Provide warnings
- Understand recreation of toxic relationship dynamics

Northern Light Health

Trauma Informed Care Principles

1. SAFETY

2. TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY

3. PEER SUPPORT

4. COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

5. EMPOWERMENT VOICE & CHOICE

6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, & GENDER ISSUES

Northern Light Health

# A note on trauma disclosures

Be prepared

- Expect disclosures
- Know agency policies & protocols
- Know state reporting laws
- Discuss confidentiality & reporting requirements
- Have referral info available

After disclosure

- Acknowledge & validate
- Remind about confidentiality & reporting requirements
- Follow up & stay connected

Northern Light Health.

Trauma disclosure to non-clinical team members

"I'm so glad you shared that with me. You're in the right place. We'll make sure you get the support you need."
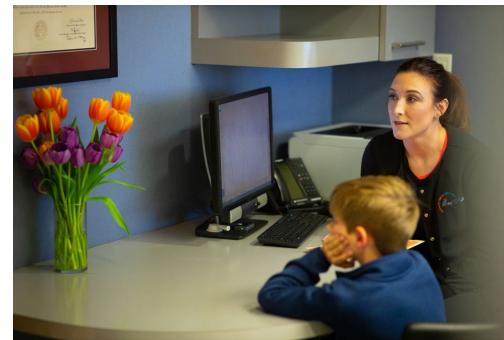
Guidelines to promote resilience

- **Reframe** negative behavior as growth opportunity
- **Review** strategies used and consider need for modified/new strategies
- **Support** autonomous decision-making and independent functioning
- **Emphasize** student's ability to make changes
- **Foster** hope
- **Celebrate** healthy insights and change
- **Provide** pro-social opportunities and encourage restorative practices, community interaction and support
- **Focus** on future strategies

Northern Light Health

The Journey to a Trauma-Informed Care Environment

Trauma Aware

Recognition of trauma prevalence and impact on child development and learning/behavior

Trauma Sensitive

Beginning exploration of TIS principles within environment

Consensus building around principles of TIS

PREPARE for change

Trauma Responsive

Beginning of change in culture to highlight role of trauma

TIS principles integrated at all levels

What does transformational change look like?

- Trauma-informed supervision training for all leaders
- Leave space on meeting agendas for rounding on wellness
- Train and reinforce person-first, patient and family centered language
- Model and promote processing rather than venting
- **Integrate values and care principle**s into annual reviews, chart audits, meeting agendas, corrective action plans...

Northern Light Health.

Healing happens in relationships ♡

References

Abbott, P., Watt, K., Magin, P., Davison, J., & Hu, W. C. (2022). Welcomeness for people with substance use disorders to general practice: a qualitative study. Family Practice, 39(2), 257-263.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) Six guiding principles to a trauma-informed care approach. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm

Covington, S. S. (2008). Women and addiction: A trauma informed approach. Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, SARC Supplement, 5, 377–385.

Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. What is historical trauma? Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/trauma-concept#:~:text=Historical%20trauma%20is%20multigenerational%20trauma,violent%20colonization%20of%20Native%20Americans

Low, N. C., Dugas, E., O'Loughlin, E., Rodriguez, D., Contreras, G., Chaiton, M., & O'Loughlin, J. (2012). Common stressful life events and difficulties are associated with mental health symptoms and substance use in young adolescents. BMC psychiatry, 12, 1-10.

Morgan, O. J. (2009). Thoughts on the interaction of trauma, addiction, and spirituality. Journal of Addictions & Offender Counselling, 30(1), 5–15.

Gerber, M. R. (Ed.). (2019). Trauma-informed healthcare approaches: a guide for primary care. Springer.

World Health Organization (2001). The World Health Report: 2001: Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope. Retrieved from https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42390

Northern Light Health