

Trauma-Informed Care

The Four “R”s in a Trauma Informed Approach:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma informed **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; **recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeks to actively **resist** retraumatization. (SAHMSA, 2014)

In practice **realizing** the impact of trauma means:

- ◊ Asking people about their experiences and whether they need support (this will not make things worse)
- ◊ Noticing how children are playing. Play helps children make meaning out of their experiences.
- ◊ Allowing children to play. Play supports positive, healthy development. A lack of play opportunities with toxic stress has negative impact on executive functioning and learning pro-social behaviors.



In practice **recognizing** the signs and symptoms of trauma means:

- ◊ Knowing what to look for and letting families know if you have concerns by:
 - Demonstrating empathy
 - Asking open ended questions
 - Stating your concerns in a clear and direct manner

In practice **responding** to trauma means:

- ◊ Offering emotional support, love, and positive role-modeling by:
 - Identifying specific, labeled positives in the child, even when the child is expressing feelings of guilt, anger, or sadness
 - Giving choices to take breaks or to do independent activities while also encouraging them to join the group
 - Assisting children in identifying emotions
 - * Using feelings charts/emojis, rating intensity
 - * Use words to describe how you are feeling
 - Having a designated coping space
 - * Fidgets, bean bag chairs, pillows/stuffies, lowered lights, minimal noises
 - Assisting children in setting appropriate social boundaries
 - * Having rules about personal boundaries (hula hoop distance apart)
 - * Asking permission for any touch

- ◇ Offering security, stability, consistency, and structure by:
 - Having clear rules, boundaries, and limits
 - Having a consistent visual schedule to follow
 - Having a good morning and goodbye ritual
 - Being proactive and transparent about schedule changes
 - Implement transition warnings
- ◇ Responding to irritable outbursts or oppositional behaviors by:
 - Ignoring it as long as they are safe
 - Praising calm body behaviors
 - Keeping language focused on behavior and not on the child's personality or characteristics
 - Considering the purpose of the behavior in order to meet needs and determine next steps. Outbursts can happen:
 - * To escape a situation
 - * To get a tangible need met
 - * To gain attention of an adult or to test the attachment of the adult
 - * To self-stimulate (due to an under-stimulated or "numb" nervous system)
- ◇ Helping children learn about: How to be a good friend, trust, expressing emotions, and safety.



In practice **resisting** re-traumatization means:

- ◇ Remembering that children are resilient and will likely bounce back from trauma exposure:
 - Express empathy but do not make their identity focused on their trauma (self-fulfilling prophecy could occur otherwise)
 - Be supportive but continue to encourage age-appropriate autonomy
- ◇ Building social connections among children to promote self-esteem, problem-solving, and effective communication
- ◇ Considering collaborative, non-competitive, group-focused games where children work together
- ◇ Providing expectations for positive coping
 - "What would your favorite superhero do?"
- ◇ Being willing to be a part of the safety plan

References:

- Holmes, C., Levy, M., Smith, A. et al. A Model for Creating a Supportive Trauma-Informed Culture for Children in Preschool Settings. *J Child Fam Stud* 24, 1650-1659 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-9968-6>
- Lynn A. Barnett (1990) Developmental Benefits of Play for Children, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 22:2, 138-153
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach (2014). HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- What Every Child Needs." Children's Hospital Colorado, <https://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/parenting/parenting-articles/what-children-need/>