

The Webinar "Healing from Trauma -- Young Adult and Family Perspectives and Recommendations" focused on three facets of trauma-informed care: understanding the impact and lasting nature of childhood trauma, recognizing stages that youths and their families go through, and understanding several response strategies that may help.

The webinar's understanding of trauma and resilience was based on the massive Adverse Childhood Experience study which found that adverse childhood experiences were very common, and that the number of adverse experiences were correlated with much higher rates of antidepressant prescriptions, suicide attempts, adult alcoholism, and teen sexual behaviors. These outcomes happen because adverse childhood experiences lead to disrupted neurodevelopment and social, emotional and cognitive impairment, as well as the adoption of health-risk behaviors.

The study also found that integration of resilience factors -- asking for help, developing trusting relationships, forming a positive attitude, listening to feelings -- can help people improve their lives.

Definition of trauma: "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

Definition of trauma-informed: "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; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."

Stages of trauma from youth & family perspective:

Stage 1) Misunderstood & Confused.

Key issue: Families may think their child is just acting out or acting their age, and not reacting to trauma.

What could help? Caring conversations with people who care. (No judgement, fixing, overpromising 'it's going to get better' or 'it won't happen again.') Informing families of warning signs that someone may be dealing with a traumatic experience.

Stage 2) Blaming & Shaming.

What could help? Connection with others who may have or are dealing with similar experiences. Conversations that facilitate rethinking blame & shame. (Community-based.)

Stage 3) Anger & Frustration.

What could help? Let them understand their options for treatment -- ask what they need instead of prescribing. Celebrate small moments of success and good days. Encourage but don't push. Use of language -- reframe statements that may provoke.

Stage 4) Making Sense of it All.

What could help? Identify strategies to help with reminders of trauma. Develop understanding of treatments, medications and supportive services. Develop healthy strategies to manage fear, anxiety and behavior. Have a team working with the family in a strength-based way.

Stage 5) Hope & Resiliency.

What could help? Identifying a supportive network both formal and informal. On-going healthy management strategies. Allowing sharing of story to help others.

Developing a system responsive to trauma:

Listen to the story. Understand perceptions and world view may be different for each family member. Provide trauma specific interventions. Provide education to youths and families. Shift from reactive and punitive structure to a proactive prevention structure. Understand risk factors. Develop programs to overcome risk factors. Enhance factors that promote resiliency. Build resiliency in all domains -- individual, family, school, community.

Teaching Family Take-Aways:

The foundation of the teaching family model is already uniquely equipped to handle trauma as it is strength and community-based, pays attention to language, facilitates caring conversations and rethinking, and promotes resiliency.

Education of youths and families and the development of trauma-specific, healthy behavior management strategies are key to providing trauma-informed care.