

The Language of Trauma: Trauma-Informed Care, Trauma-Specific Services, and a Trauma-Informed Approach

In discussing trauma, a variety of phrases are used. The phrases are often used interchangeably, however, there are some significant distinctions.

Trauma-specific services refer to a continuum of services developed to address the effects of trauma. These range from screening and assessment to treatment to recovery supports.

Trauma-specific interventions are aspects of treatment (or programs) aimed at remediating the effects of trauma. With treatment, a person will hopefully take charge of her or his life. A previous post describes some of the evidence-based treatment approaches. Providers should be trained specifically in these approaches. Of course, treatment of trauma should be integrated with treatment of mental illness and substance use disorders as well as treatment for health issues, including traumatic brain injury.

A trauma-informed approach refers to incorporating key concepts relating to trauma in the day-to-day operations of a variety of human services. SAMHSA states

“A program, organization or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.”

The phrase trauma-informed care can be defined in a similar way, but it is more often used by those providing treatment and support services. Some systems do not have responsibility for providing “care” but can still be trauma-informed (such as the criminal justice system).