

Trauma-Informed Policies & Procedures: Organizational Assessment

All aspects of the criminal justice system can ensure safety while avoiding re-traumatizing individuals. To support this effort, each element of the criminal justice system should review policies and procedures and make necessary adjustments to promote a trauma-informed approach.

Administrative Commitment

Administrative commitment to a trauma-informed approach is a key first step. Line staff will not be invested in changing approaches without a strong commitment from administration that requires and encourages necessary adjustments.

Staff Training

Professionals at all points in the justice system should be trained about trauma, including: law enforcement, corrections officers, court officers (judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and others), probation, parole or community corrections officers, and anyone providing ancillary services to the justice system (such as specialty court counselors and case managers).

Training is necessary to help staff understand:

- The pervasiveness of trauma
- What trauma is
- The impact of trauma on behavior
- How a trauma-informed approach supports safety

Training about trauma should be ongoing and principles should be incorporated into day-to-day practices.

Review Policies and Procedures

A committee of line and supervisory staff can be convened to review policies and procedures and make recommendations to those who can formally institute changes. This review should consider if policies and procedures are trauma-informed: that is, do policies avoid re-traumatizing individuals while maintaining safety?

- Which policies and procedures should be adjusted or eliminated without compromising safety? Consider:
 - Standard day-to-day procedures and practices
 - Hiring practices
 - Training requirements
 - Linkage to treatment and support services
- Flexibility
 - Are policies flexible? Do they give officers some discretion in implementing procedures?

- Communication
 - Are rules, consequences, rights, and responsibilities clearly communicated?
 - Do people know what to expect?
 - How are individuals informed of any changes to requirements?
- Family
 - Are policies and procedures sensitive to parenting and family issues?
- Safe environment
 - Are settings free from physical and verbal abuse?
 - Do settings provide structure and safety for the individual?
 - Screening
 - Does the facility or agency screen for trauma?

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- Screening should be for the purpose of identifying how to avoid re-traumatizing or identifying individuals who should be linked to treatment and support services
- Screening should be conducted with sensitivity
- Who should be screened:
 - All inmates, jail diversion or community corrections program attendees, re-entry program participants, all on probation or parole
 - Wherever there is an opportunity to link a person to treatment

Guiding Values

Do policies reflect trauma-informed guiding values?

- Authority – while it is the responsibility of many criminal justice professionals to assume a position of authority, this should be done with sensitivity to the impact of trauma. A distinction should be made about how to use authority responsibly
- Respect – offer respect and expect it in return
- Choice – provide choice wherever possible to communicate that the person must take charge of his or her own actions
- Provide structure to promote safety
- Interact with patience for behavior, sensitivity to fear, and flexibility where appropriate

Many organizations provide guidelines for service providers about how to create trauma-informed services. Some of these may be adapted for criminal justice services.

For more information, visit:

- The National Center on Family Homelessness
- The Anna Institute
- Community Connections
- The Institute for Health & Recovery