

# Trauma Informed Justice System

*Virginia Department of Criminal Justice  
Trauma Response and the Criminal Justice System Virtual Summit*

Becky Haas, Presenter

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# Learning Objectives

- Why justice professionals need to understand trauma
- Prevalence of trauma experienced by those in the justice system
- How to identify trauma - trauma behaviors
- Tips for working with trauma survivors
- Examples of trauma informed policing programs
- Reducing community trauma through cultural connections

# Why Learn About Trauma?

- Justice professionals need training about how being trauma-informed can improve criminal justice system responses
- It is NOT a program about the treatment of trauma
- Training should be specific to using a justice lens
- In the justice system, your role is not one of a counselor, however you are present in traumatic circumstances where “YOU” become the intervention
- Understanding trauma behaviors will assist you in certain criminal investigations

# Members of Law Enforcement Need Training

Jennifer Evans, Captain of Police for Special Investigations Division, Houston PD



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# What is Trauma

- Individual trauma results from an event, a series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual that are physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that have lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. ~ *Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration*
- Using a trauma informed approach in the justice system is not about having to know the story of trauma. It's about building skills to deal with the lingering effects of the trauma.
- Justice professionals should realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery.
- By understanding the prevalence of trauma in the lives of those in the justice system, professionals should use a universal precaution approach.

# Prevalence of Trauma in Juvenile Offenders

- 90% of young people in the juvenile justice system have at least one extreme stressor and usually far more.
- Based on a study from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the University of Florida. The study (“The Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) in the Lives of Juvenile Offenders”) surveyed 64,329 juvenile offenders, only 2.8% reported no childhood adversity compared to 34% surveyed in the original CDC ACEs study.
- 97% of youth had at least one ACE.
- 50% of the offenders surveyed reported 4 or more ACEs putting them in the high risk category (this compared to just 13% in the original study).

<https://www.centerforchildcounseling.org/aces-and-juvenile-justice/>

# Adults in the Justice System

- 77-90% of incarcerated women report extensive histories of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse as children and adults.
- Almost half (44.7%) of incarcerated men experienced physical trauma in childhood, and 31.5% experienced physical trauma in adulthood.
- Strong link between childhood abuse and earlier involvement in substance abuse and criminal activity
- Strong link between childhood abuse and mental and behavioral health problems

<https://nicic.gov/association-between-aces-and-criminal-justice-involvement-part-1>, National Institute of Corrections, *"The Association between ACEs and Criminal Justice Involvement"*

# Why Train Members of Law Enforcement?

- The Nature of Police Work:
  - Even though police are referred to as law enforcement officers, meaning the enforcement of criminal law, (i.e. investigating crime and apprehending criminals) this is only **one** of several functions police perform.
  - Police do fight crime, but are mainly called upon to be social workers, conflict mediators, traffic directors, mental health counselors, detailed report writers, neighborhood patrollers, and low-level law enforcers, sometimes all in the span of a single shift.
  - A New York Times Article in June of 2020, call data of 10 police agencies, including precincts with relatively high violent crime rates was reviewed. Officers responding to violent crime made up only around 1% of calls for service.



# Officer Training

- A 2016 national study of the training of 135,000 recruits across 664 local police academies found, on average, officers each received 168 hours of training in firearm skills, self-defense, and use of force out of 840 total hours.
- Another 42 hours were spent on criminal investigations, 38 on operating an emergency vehicle, 86 on legal education aimed primarily at force amendment law, and hundreds more on basic operations and self-improvement.
- Topics like domestic violence only accounted for (13 hours), mental illness (10 hours), and mediation and conflict management (9 hours).
- Topics like homelessness and substance abuse, were so rare they didn't make the data set.

[We train police to be warriors — and then send them out to be social workers; VOX, July 31, 2020](#)

# What Traumatic Stress Reactions May Look Like On-scene

- **Physical**

- Shaking
- Increased heart rate
- Physical complaints (headaches, body aches)
- Hives
- Diarrhea
- Inactivity or slow physical movement
- Physically stuck, slow/nonresponsive (or immobilized)
- Nausea and vomiting

- **Emotional**

- Inconsistent emotions that are “all over the map”
- Wailing, sobbing
- Volatile, angry
- Verbally attacking others
- Absence of feelings
- Blank stare
- Inappropriate emotions
- Sudden fits of laughter
- Giggling

# Cognitive

- Confused - Difficulty making decisions
- Loses of train of thought – has incoherent thoughts
- Talks about things that seem random or not connected to what is being asked
- Gets “stuck”
- Preoccupied with elements of the event
- Thoughts are dominated by fixed focus on particular elements of the event
- Makes pressured demands for more information, regardless of attempts at redirection
- Repeats concerns or questions in spite of information that has been made available or the fact that more information is not available
- Memory loss or inconsistent memory about events
- Poor sense of time
- Inability to recall place and identifying information regarding suspects and others involved in the event

# Behavioral

- Agitated
- Pacing
- Moving hands and arms in a nervous fashion
- Foot tapping
- Finger drumming
- Swiveling head
- Darting eyes
- Immobilized
- Inactivity or slow movement
- Withdrawn/isolated
- Seeming stunned and slow to respond to external cues and stimuli such as questions, attempts to make eye contact, etc.
- Irritable - Angry
- Verbal outbursts/yelling
- Fatigued
- Young children may be
- Clingy
- Fussy
- Running around

*(International Association of Chiefs of Police and Yale Child Study Center. 2017. Enhancing Police Responses to Children Exposed to Violence: A Toolkit for Law Enforcement.)*

# Trauma Behaviors as Corroborating Evidence

- Look for signs of:
  - Social isolation
  - Avoidance of location(s)
  - Trauma behaviors can be corroborators of the crime
- Change in:
  - School or work performance
  - Weight (gain or loss)
  - Personal relationships
  - Behavior with the suspect
  - Alcohol or drug use

# Tips for Working With Trauma Survivors

## Empathetic Statements Build Trust

- “I’m sorry that happened to you.”
- “What happened was not your fault.”
- “Thank you for trusting me by sharing your story.”
- “You are not to blame for what happened to you.”

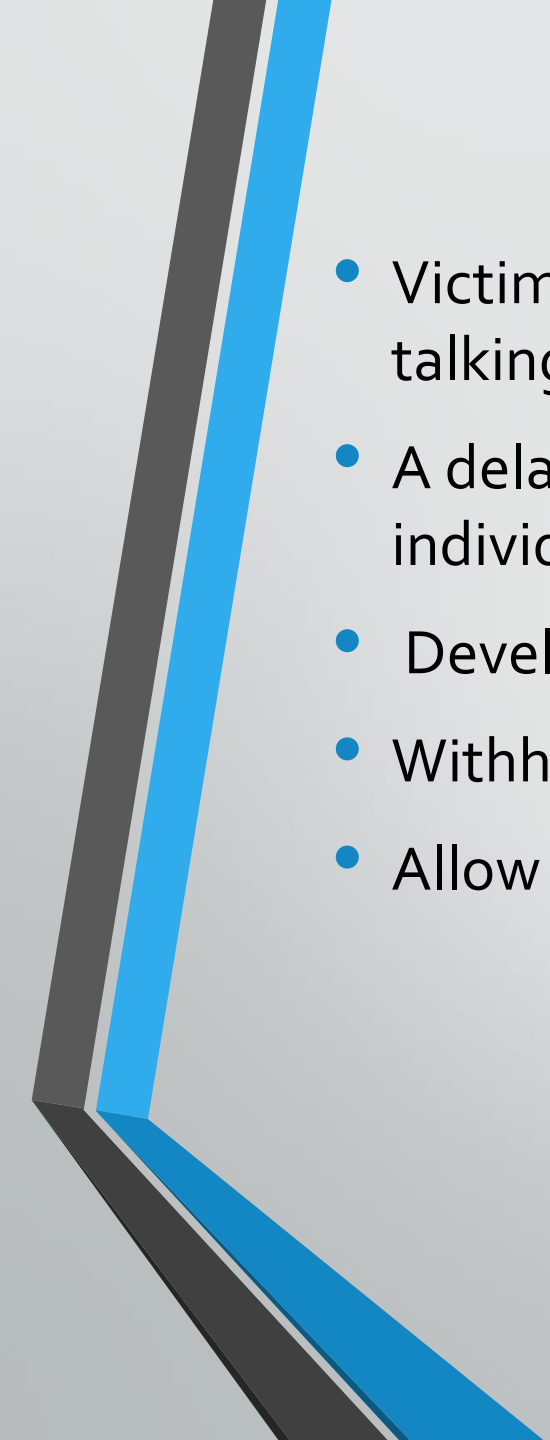
## Empathetic Listening

- Empathy Blockers
- One-Upping
- Advising/Fixing
- Educating
- Judging
- Analyzing
- Discounting
- Data Gathering

(The Relationship Foundation)

# Listening Skills

- When working with those in the justice system they need to feel they are being heard.
- It is your job to attentively listen and ensure you understand what a trauma survivor is saying. This exchange builds trust between you and a victim or survivor.
- Listening body language includes:
  - Facing the survivor
  - Making casual eye contact
  - Not fidgeting with your hands or something in your lap
  - Nodding your head when appropriate to show you understand
  - Prompt them with small “uh-huhs” or “for sures”

- 
- Victims will often talk to someone else (i.e. a friend, relative, etc.) before talking to police, medical, or advocates.
  - A delay in reporting has absolutely no affect on the credibility of the individual's story.
  - Develop a rapport with the victim.
  - Withhold judgement and don't come across as challenging to them.
  - Allow them to take time without hurrying.



# Destigmatize Help Seeking

- Reassure individuals it is normal to be nervous or overwhelmed when dealing with the justice system.
- Be sensitive to the resistance of some to receive services.
- Explain options available but always respect their decision.
- Speak to clients in a non-judgmental way.
- Provide clients community based options when possible.
- Provide details such as cost, location of services, and what individuals can expect when accessing referral services.
- (Levenson, 2017)

# Keep Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms in Perspective

- Traumatized individuals may use destructive strategies to cope. These strategies may provide short-term relief, but are not long-term solutions.
- Examples of maladaptive coping strategies:
  - Reacting in unpredictable ways like becoming aggressive, scared, or withdrawn
  - Using substances like drugs and alcohol
  - Self-harm

- Understanding destructive behaviors as a result of trauma, not a deficit in the individual, will help professionals maintain empathy and validate experiences, which foster trust. Trauma is not an excuse for drug addiction or crime, but it offers an explanation for it.
- In response to maladaptive coping mechanisms, professionals can help individuals identify choices to create resilience (i.e. Protective factors, personal support system, employment, housing, peer support groups, etc.)



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# Trauma Informed Policing



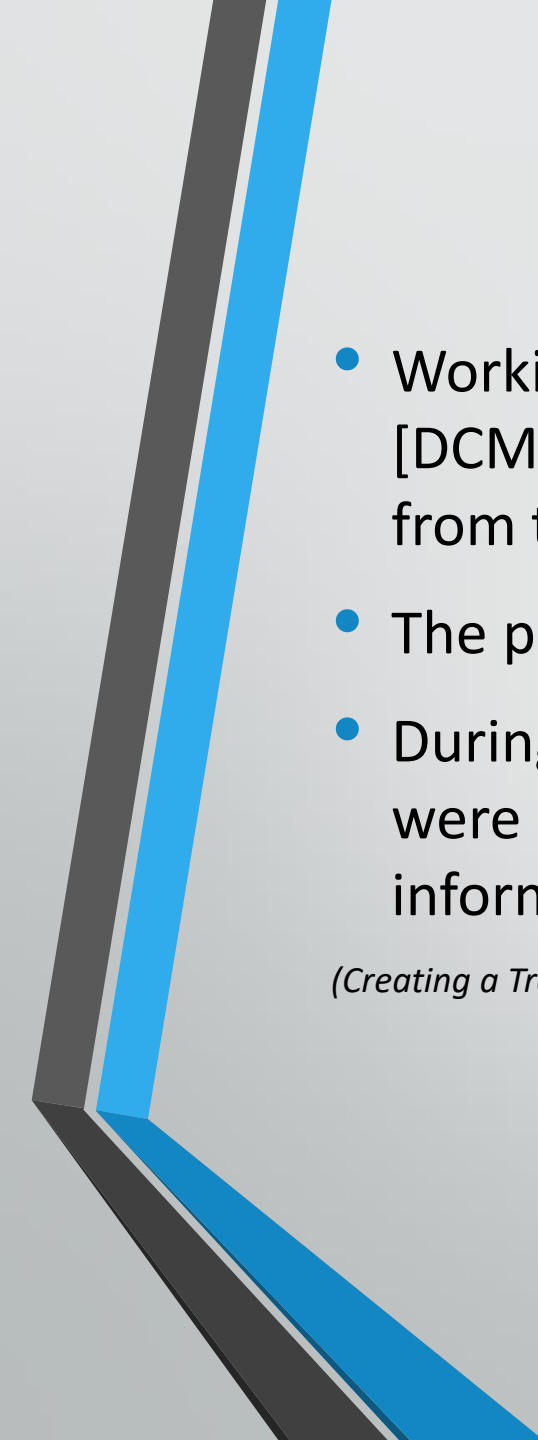
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- Safety and Security
- Validation and Ventilation
  - According to the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#), some police officers have a false but widely held view of sexual assault survivors perceiving that a high number of sexual assault cases are false reports.
  - Studies on sexual assault crime data suggests it is only 2-8% of reports filed are actually false.
- Preparation and Prediction

# Examples of Trauma-Informed Policing

- In 2005, Wilmington, Delaware police officials and public child mental health system leaders were becoming increasingly aware of both national and local data on children's and adolescents' exposures to violence.
- Wilmington's 911 reports for 2004 tallied 4,119 domestic violence calls.
- In some cases, there were no children in the household, but many included more than one child.
- Officials estimated that more than 2,000 children in the community were living with domestic violence

*(Creating a Trauma-Informed Law Enforcement System, NCTSN Service Systems Briefs v2 n1, April 2008, NCTSN.org)*

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- Working together, the Delaware Division of Child Mental Health Services [DCMHS], the Wilmington Police Department sought training for officers from the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence.
  - The program was implemented in Wilmington in January 2006.
  - During its first 16 months, more than 1,200 children exposed to violence were identified by law enforcement officers and referred for trauma-informed child mental health crisis intervention.

*(Creating a Trauma-Informed Law Enforcement System, NCTSN Service Systems Briefs v2 n1, April 2008, NCTSN.org)*



# Chattanooga Police Department

- Bigs in Blue
- Blessing Bags
- Community interaction
- Front Porch Lineup
- Coaches, Cops and Community



## Handle With Care

- West Virginia Center for Children's Justice
- Handle with Care provides school leadership with a "heads up" when a child has been identified at the scene of a traumatic event involving law enforcement





# The Martinsburg Initiative

- TMI is an innovative and police-school-community partnership focused on creating a trauma informed community working to build resilience in children so they are less likely to succumb to scientific research predictions.
- Handle With Care
- Berkeley County Schools
- Martinsburg Police Department
- Shepherd University
- Community organizations
- The Boys & Girls Club of the Eastern Panhandle
- The Washington/Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA).



# Reducing Community Trauma through Cultural Competencies

- Know cultural makeup of your community
- Be proactive to build relationships with key leaders
- Increase local capacity, develop partnerships, enables partners to develop local solutions to local problems
- Practice biased free policing by treating people in similar situations the same way.

# What is Cultural Competency?

- “To be culturally competent doesn’t mean you are an authority in the values and beliefs of every culture. What it means is that you hold a deep respect for cultural differences and are eager to learn, and are willing to accept, that there are many ways of viewing the world.”
- Okokon O. Udo, PhD.



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# Why Develop Cultural Competencies?

- Federal law requires law enforcement agencies that receive federal financial assistance to take steps to provide access to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP)
- Police serve such a diverse public, it's important to recognize cultural differences to build community trust and reduce the trauma that can result from ignoring historic trauma or overall cultural insensitivity.
- Building community trust positively impacts policing and residents are more likely to be cooperative with law enforcement when they perceive mutual trust and respect.
- Learning about cultural differences allows us to better understand our community.
- Benefits everyone and fosters community trust.

# Strengthening Police and Community

## U.S. Department of Justice

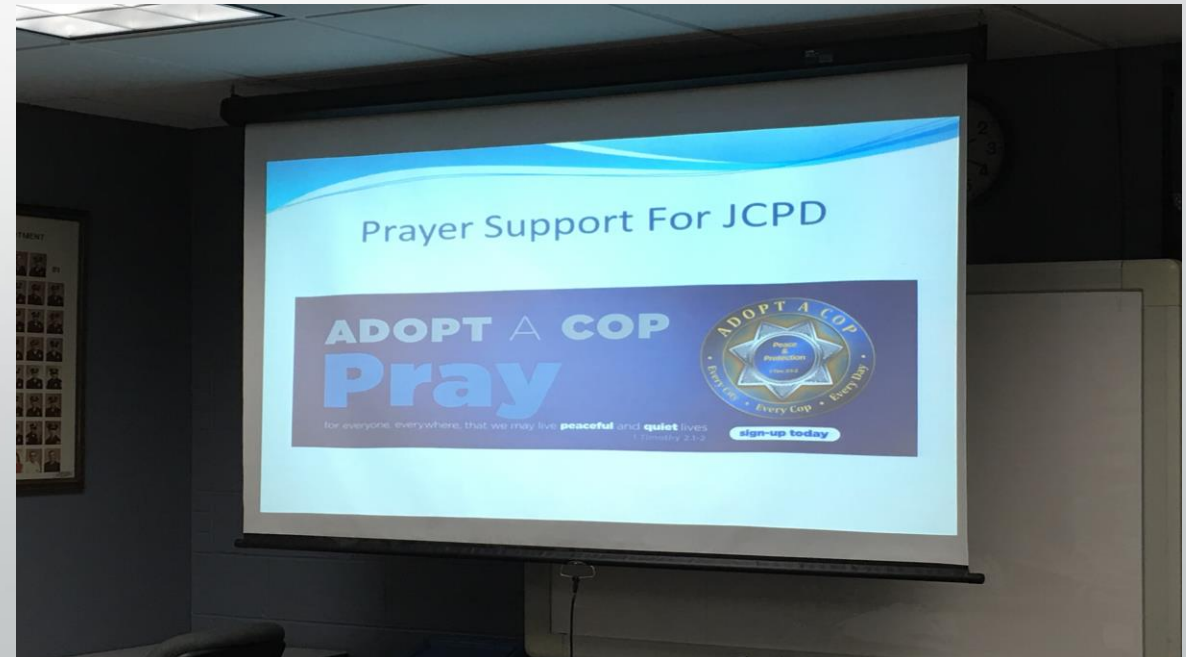


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# Connecting to Community

- Coffee with a Cop
- No agenda or speeches – just conversation
- Community Policing Roundtable
  - Key leaders from diverse groups
  - Meet regularly
  - Plan educational, problem solving and social events
- Lunch Buddies
- Cultural Events
- Umoja
- Martin Luther King Unity March
- Tri Pride Rally
- Faith Community





# Resources

- [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
- Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University
- [Vera Institute of Justice – Trauma Informed Policing](#)
- [Center for Disease Controls – Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) Study](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)



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