

Treatment of Trauma

The GAINS Center's training program How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses focuses on trauma-informed approaches, but some participants may have questions about the nature of trauma treatment. Most trauma treatment programs incorporate two types of intervention: cognitive behavioral therapy and psychoeducation.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on how thinking affects emotions and behavior. CBT helps the person to zero in on thoughts or ideas that are dysfunctional. That is, ideas that just don't work in terms of helping the person:

- Achieve his or her goals
- Function in the world
- Recover from trauma, mental illness, or substance use

CBT techniques help the person to identify negative thinking patterns including negative views of self, the world, or the future. These patterns (sometimes called "scripts") are then challenged and new ways of thinking are explored. The goal is to find alternative views that do not generate negative emotions such as anxiety or depression. Views to help the person get "unstuck" in moving on from trauma. The techniques of CBT are often referred to as "cognitive restructuring."

Psychoeducation simply refers to educating the person about a symptom or disorder coupled with teaching coping and/or life skills. So, in a trauma specific treatment, the person may learn about what trauma is and how it has affected his or her life. Some topics might include how trauma affects thinking and emotions or the role of trauma in substance abuse. Topics that enhance coping and recovery might include how to manage stress, regulate emotions, or handle intrusive memories.

Evidence-based trauma treatment approaches are generally integrated with treatment for co-occurring substance use or mental health disorders.

Other key features include:

- Staying safe (in relationships, from substance abuse, from self-injurious behavior)
- Focusing on the present
- Building motivation
- Enhancing life skills
- Reconnecting with others
- Developing social supports

Formats are generally flexible so that people can be treated individually, in groups, and sometimes as family units. Groups are often gender-specific.

Four evidence-based models include:

- Seeking Safety
- TARGET (Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education & Therapy)

- TREM (Trauma and Empowerment Model)
- DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy)

For more information about these evidence-based programs and practices visit the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices at <https://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/landing.aspx>.