

TRAUMA-INFORMED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



The **What**, the **Why**, and the **How**

What is Trauma-Informed Care?

“ Trauma-Informed Care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. ”

- Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet (2010), p. 82

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Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

1



Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery.

2



Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.

3



Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.

4



Resists re-traumatization of clients as well as staff.

Why Does a Trauma-Informed Approach Matter in Youth Engagement?



Trauma affects youth from all walks of life, from all identities and experiences.

Engaging young people through a trauma-informed approach is crucial to maintaining the safety and well-being of all young people in youth engagement initiatives.



Given evidence suggests that youth engagement can act as a protective factor, building resiliency and supporting the development of healthy coping mechanisms, there are particular benefits to engaging youth with experiences of trauma.

Key Components of a Trauma-Informed Approach to Youth Engagement:

Safety

Adult allies and youth feel safe in all aspects of engagement, from the physical environment to interpersonal interactions, with the understanding that the safety of all individuals engaged is the utmost priority.

a

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Adult allies invest in meaningful relationships with youth, based in trust and transparency. Decisions are made with clear communication and transparency with the goal of building and maintaining trust and transparency.

b



Peer Support

Peer support, among engaged youth, is important for promoting safety, building trust and enhancing collaboration. Strong peer relationships can act as a protective factor and facilitate healing.

Collaboration & Mutuality

Building meaningful relationships is crucial to a trauma-informed approach and successful youth engagement. Relationships are built on mutual interest and enable power-sharing.

Empowerment, Voice & Choice

Youth are supported to engage in decision making and to articulate their needs and perspectives. Organizations understand the importance of power differentials and barriers to youth speaking up. Youth are encouraged to cultivate self-advocacy skills.

Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues

Organizations actively strive towards an anti-oppressive approach that recognizes and does justice to the realities of oppression, including racism, colonialism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and others. Organizations recognize the healing value of cultural connection, incorporate policies and procedures that are responsive to the racial, cultural and ethnic needs of youth and that recognize and address historic and ongoing trauma.

Practical Consideration for Trauma-Informed Youth Engagement

1 *Meaningful relationships*

Strong relationships are a cornerstone of meaningful engagement and a trauma-informed approach.



Meaningful relationships are crucial to sharing power and ensuring young people are able to identify their needs, seek support when needed, and engage fully and safely.



2 *Content Warnings*

To minimize risk of re-traumatization, content warnings are provided prior to any in-depth discussion of topics that might carry significant weight or relate to youth experiences of trauma.



Prior to delving into such topics, inform those in the room of the topic, and provide an opportunity for individuals to leave the space, prepare themselves mentally, or take other steps to ensure they're able to engage with a given topic.

3 *Challenge by Choice*

In all engagement opportunities, youth are challenged by choice. Young people are never required to engage, to contribute or to discuss. Youth are encouraged to engage - but never required to do so, nor to do so in a particular way..





4

Youth Know Their Bodies Best

Youth are trusted as experts in their own needs, experiences and bodies. Young people are permitted to engage in spaces in whatever way best suits their needs and doesn't infringe on the safety and needs of their peers. Youth are allowed to leave spaces if and when they need.

5

On-site Mental Health Support

As much as possible, when engaging with difficult topics where young people are more likely to have personal traumatic associations with the topic of discussion, provide on-site mental health support.



6

Resource List

Provide young people with a list of local resources, including mental health supports, that can be accessed during or outside of engagement opportunities.



Trauma may manifest during an event or in the hours after - and ensuring young people have access to supports after-hours is crucial to maintaining their wellbeing.

Facilitation Recommendations

#1: Safer Spaces

The co-creation of safer spaces ensures spaces are created based on the particular needs of the young people in a given space and can help ensure a space is as safe as possible for youth impacted by trauma. Rather than dictated, safer spaces are created with an acknowledgement of their imperfection, and built upon a mutual agreement to maximize the safety of all in attendance as much as possible.



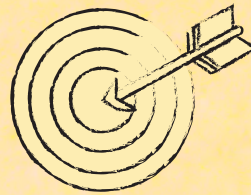
#2: Connect Participants & Project Staff

Offer ongoing opportunities to connect between participants and project staff. Consider the role of peer facilitators or peer support.



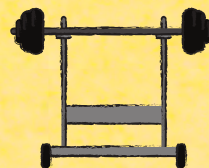
#3: Goal-Oriented Facilitation

Working with young people often involves engagement on issues of significant personal importance and relevance to their lives and lived experiences. Facilitation approaches should seek to guide conversations towards goal oriented outcomes.



#4: Strength-based

Approaching facilitation with a strength-based focus, intended to draw the successes and opportunities from discussions and experiences shared, is conducive to meaningful, safer engagement.



Considerations for Trauma-Informed Youth Engagement



What do we understand as a collective about the trauma that may be carried by individuals or communities?



How can we mitigate risk of triggering a trauma-response by creating collective principles for safety in a project or at an event?



What resources are available for mental health support?



How are we supporting key aspects of a trauma informed approach, such as:

- Trauma awareness in the organization and community
- Building community, connection and caring
- Attending to safety and wellness
- Building on strengths and skills

References

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