

THE POWER OF CONNECTION

RESOURCE KIT FOR LEADERS
IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

- ✓ Handouts for staff training
- ✓ Culture of care survey
- ✓ Accreditation & quality standards crosswalk



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WHAT'S INSIDE

In this resource kit you'll find supports for advancing your organization in trauma-informed care, including:

- Staff Handout #1: "The Helping Relationship in Trauma-Informed Care"
- Staff Handout #2: "Three Ways to Build Connections in a Helping Relationship"
- Accreditation and Quality Standards Crosswalk
- Organizational Culture of Care Survey

Feel free to use these resources within your organization in any way you find helpful for your mission and service to youth and families in your community.

And when you do, drop me a note - I'd love to hear what sparks of thinking and action they helped you and your team discover.

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THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

James Freeman, MA, CYC-P

The concept of a helping relationship was defined by Carl Rogers in the late 1950s as a special type of relationship where at least one individual shows up with the intent to promote the growth and development of the other person. It covers a wide range of human connections that have the potential to be helping relationships (including parent-child, physician-patient, counselor-client, and teacher-student) if the intent and skill is present. The focus is not on imposition or coercion, but on empowering deeper appreciation, expression, and access to the individual's own inner resources.

In a trauma-informed care setting (whether outpatient, residential, or community-based) the ability of frontline workers to connect effectively with young people is essential for post-traumatic growth and restoration. These roles have the greatest impact on the quality of care. They are the most vulnerable to risk and often have the least education and training of everyone on the care team.

For a young person who has experienced trauma, life feels overwhelming and unpredictable. The brain and body are flooded with stress hormones and significant resources are allocated to survival. Curiosity is inhibited and there is a surge of distrust of others and one's own intuition and strengths. Skilled frontline workers are able to create space (both physically and emotionally) for the young person to express their trauma and explore new ways of living without the threat of being retraumatized.

The difficulty is that when a young person's brain and body are focused on survival their response to a helping relationship may look and feel like defensiveness or resistance. It's often more likely a lasting response to stress and an attempt to protect or avoid further pain. It takes kindness and specific relational skills to persist long enough to ease those fears.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE REQUIRES A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Experiences of trauma - especially those which occur in early childhood - impact the way we make meaning out of life. It can shape the worldview of a young person and how they understand and interact with others around them. They may come to believe that the world or people around them are unsafe. They may internalize feelings and thoughts that they are unimportant or of no value in the world.

When a person struggles there is always a reason why. It may be that behind troubling behavior there is grief, fear, anxiety, or despair. It may be that in that moment they have limited access to their own inner resources to reflect and respond to a perceived threat or stress. It's our task to recognize and respond to the need behind the behavior. Supportive co-regulation, not compliance, is the goal.

Coercive practices such as point systems, seclusion, suspension, and restricting access to healthy activities in the community must be minimized. They place the young person in a place of feeling out of control and are retraumatizing. Other than in instances of immediate safety concerns, they are simply outdated practices and the professional field now knows better.

IS IT PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL?

Meaningful connection is difficult to achieve, if at all, in rigidly prescribed roles that emphasize social and emotional distance from the young person. Authentic, genuine presence involves entering the helping relationship with our own unique personal history, strengths, and experiences. It's a profoundly personal work in the context of a professional role. It is impossible to separate these two domains because we bring our whole self to every interaction.

It's important that frontline workers get the support needed from their leaders and organization to navigate this unique and vulnerable role.

FRONTLINE WORKERS ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED IN THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

Young people affected by trauma have valuable things to teach us and contribute to the world. Their healing and restoration aren't facilitated by the provision of a service, or the application of a model or treatment. It is nurtured by the experience of themselves in connection with other caring individuals in their everyday lives who support them in giving voice and meaning to their experiences.

The experience of the relationship is always the most influential factor, regardless of the practice setting, specific role, or program model. It is something that trained, skilled frontline workers are uniquely positioned to offer.



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on-demand course

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3 WAYS TO BUILD CONNECTIONS IN A HELPING RELATIONSHIP

James Freeman, MA, CYC-P

What do connections look like in a helping relationship? How do we offer repeated evidence that we intend no harm and create the experience of safety? These three foundational elements are the starting point for nurturing high quality, trauma-informed interactions.

MEET YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Everyone needs an environment where they can feel accepted and valued without judgment for who they are and where they are on their journey. It requires we adjust the balance of power and control in the relationship. It involves seeking to understand, an openness to differences, and ongoing reflection on how our values, perspectives, and power influence our interactions.

Every encounter with another person is an opportunity to show them they are valued and respected. A high-five, touch on the shoulder, hug, or warm smile communicates a lot. The way in which we welcome and receive one another has the potential to strengthen connection and open up communication when we embrace the diversity of our personalities, manners of expression, and cultural traditions.

2 SPEND TIME HANGING OUT TOGETHER

Spending time together builds shared experiences and feelings of safety. It can be in the midst of everyday activities such as doing a project or task together, going places, or sharing a meal. It can also be in focused activity like the sharing a hobby or playing a sport. Shared experiences with freedom from the ordinary demands of schedule and structure can open opportunities for connection and restoration.

Sharing in experiences where life unfolds involves joining with others and learning about their culture, customs, and routines. It requires an openness to learn about places, people, and interests that are most important to them. It positions us for partnership to challenge structures of inequity, discrimination, and oppression alongside them in their communities.

3 FOCUS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CONNECTION

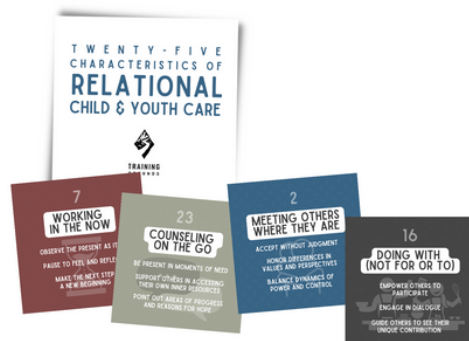
Creating opportunities for others to experience themselves in the context of connection facilitates post-traumatic growth and healing. Be available and responsive to the other person. Protect them from unnecessary distance, invasive presence, or exploitation. Each person brings a different history, context, identity, needs, and culture to the relationship which shapes the mutual connection. It's rarely easy and we can expect mutual challenges and growth.

We all feel empowered when people work in partnership with us. We empower others when we engage in supportive dialogue. Partnering together (rather than imposing or enabling) brings out the unique gifts and perspectives each person brings to the experience. It's process of doing things together that provides opportunity for learning and trying out new skills.



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ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY STANDARDS CROSSWALK

This crosswalk provides a summary of nationally recognized accreditation and quality standards you can use to assess organizational activities. Use this snapshot to review the critical importance of supporting frontline workers in their uniquely situated role and the responsibility of leaders at all levels in the organization to create a trauma-informed environment.

ENTITY	STANDARD
Association for Child and Youth Care Practice Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners - Relationship & Communication [IV(B)(2)]	Practitioners assess the quality of relationships in an ongoing process of self-reflection about the impact of the self in relationship in order to maintain a full presence and an involved, strong, and healthy relationship.
National Council for Mental Wellbeing Fostering Resilience & Recovery: Trauma-Informed Care Action Items [p. 5-8]	Implementing trauma-informed approaches includes providing training to all staff on trauma-informed principles, creating a culture of compassion resilience, and fostering trust through trauma-informed interactions.
Child Welfare League of America National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare (Exec. Summary) - Engagement & Participation Standards (p. 6)	Every entity should work to ensure that families feel physically and psychologically safe [and] use trauma-informed approaches. Everyone should recognize that having a trusting relationship is preliminary to engagement.
Council on Accreditation (COA) Service Delivery Standards - Training & Supervision [TS 3]	Direct service personnel receive training on engaging service recipients, including building trust, establishing rapport, and developing a professional relationship [and] the impact of trauma on individuals, families, and personnel.
Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) General Program Standards - Program/Service Structure [2A 18 & 27]	The program implements...an emphasis on building positive relationships with the persons served [and] interaction...that strengthens self-regulation [and] arranges training to all personnel on trauma-informed practices.
The Joint Commission Behavioral Health Care Standards - Safety Systems for Individuals Served [SSIS]	[P]erson-centered care [is] a top priority throughout the organization [including staff] skills, knowledge, and competence in compassionate communication [and] trauma-informed/recovery/resilience concepts/principles.

The standards are listed for educational purposes and copyright is owned by each respective entity as indicated.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF CARE SURVEY

Leaders in trauma-informed organizations have a responsibility to create a culture that supports the development of trauma-informed relationships. This includes selecting, training, and retaining the right people for the task, as well as constant evaluation of policies and procedures.

Use this checklist to assess your organizational context and vision and identify any gaps between where your organization or program is performing and where you want it to be.



ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY

RARELY	SOMETIMES	EVERY TIME	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults do everything in their power to prevent harm to youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults interact with youth in ways that are collaborative rather than controlling
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults create a welcoming, comfortable, psychologically safe environment
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults initiate and respond to opportunities for connection with youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults engage young people in fun and meaningful activities
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults reduce stress in the environment by minimizing coercive interactions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults provide supportive co-regulation when youth are stressed or overwhelmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults utilize hopeful and optimistic words and tone in their communication
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults creatively send signals to youth that they are valued and matter
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adults demonstrate self-awareness and self-control when things are going well and in times of conflict



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LEADERSHIP ROLE IS TO ACTIVATE THE ONE
CRITICAL RESOURCE MANY LEADERS IGNORE.**

Book a no obligation 30-minute conversation with James Freeman to discuss more. Call/text 805-334-8955 or book online.

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James Freeman, MA, CYC-P has distilled over 30 years of professional experience in trauma-informed care with youth and families into a framework for mentoring rising leaders in health and social services.

He has trained around the world and his advocacy in the field has been recognized with a president's award from the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice and a career achievement award from the National Staff Development and Training Association.

His focus on the interpersonal process and integration of organizational psychology equips others to lead mission-driven teams and organizations with clarity, alignment, and impact.



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