



Safe Supportive Learning
Engagement | Safety | Environment

Building Trauma-Informed Communities for Youth

Kathleen Guarino, LMHC and Gwen Willis-Darpoh, Ph.D.

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- **This is a “Listen-Only” online event.**
- **Opportunities to participate include:**
 - Q&A periods
 - Chat box
- **Shared materials will be emailed and posted online within a week after the event is over.**

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Welcome and Introductions

Michael Smith, The White House--Special Assistant to the President
and Director of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative

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Today's Presenters

Gwen Willis-Darpoh



Kathleen Guarino



Today's Agenda

1 Types and Prevalence of Trauma among Youth

2 Impact of Trauma

3 Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

4 Closing



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Types and Prevalence of Trauma Among Youth

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Introduction to Trauma

- Definition of trauma
- Types of trauma youth may experience
- Prevalence of trauma among youth

What is Trauma?

An experience that is perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, overwhelms our ability to cope, and causes intense reactions such as fear, helplessness, and loss of control.

Introduction to trauma

Types of Trauma

- **Natural Disasters:** Hurricanes, fires, floods
- **Human Caused Disasters:** accidents, wars, displacement
- **Terrorism**
- **Community Violence:** robberies, shootings, assaults
- **School Violence:** threats, shootings, bullying
- **Interpersonal Violence:** abuse, neglect, domestic violence
- **Poverty**
- **Homelessness**
- **Sudden or anticipated loss of loved one**

Citation 2, 3

Introduction to trauma

Types of Trauma

Historical Trauma: The collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a particular group across generations still bearing the effects.

Racial Trauma or Race-based Traumatic Stress: Potentially traumatic experiences related to race may include:

- direct experiences of racial harassment including threats of harm or injury and being humiliated;
- witnessing racial violence towards other people of color and other ethnicities such as hate crimes, violence by law enforcement;
- experiencing discrimination and institutional racism often in the form of racial slurs, being followed in a store, communications that convey rudeness.

Youth may experience these in school or in other community settings.

Introduction to trauma

Prevalence of Trauma

- **In community samples, more than two thirds of students in the U.S. report experiencing trauma by age 16, such as a serious accident, natural disaster, or experiencing or witnessing violence.**
- **Approximately two out of three children have been exposed to violence, crime, and abuse in their homes or communities.**
- **50% of youth report more than one form of victimization.**

Citation 7.8

Introduction to trauma

Prevalence of Trauma

- **Youth of color ages 12 to 19 are victims of violent crime more than their white peers.**
- **Youth of color are**
 - **3x more likely to be victims of a robbery.**
 - **5x more likely to be victims of a homicide.**
- **Homicide is the leading cause of death among youth of color ages 15 to 24.**
- **Youth of color living in poverty are at increased risk for trauma, particularly violent trauma.**
- **African American youth living in urban, low-income communities are more at risk of exposure to violence than any other population in the United States.**



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Impact of Trauma

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Impact of Trauma

- Impact of trauma on youth
- Impact of trauma on families, communities, and systems
- Factors that influence resilience for youth

Impact of trauma

Human Stress Response

“THINKING BRAIN”

checks things out to confirm the threat and goes off-line.

“EMOTIONAL BRAIN”

takes over to initiate the release of hormones (adrenaline, cortisol) that help us to respond (fight or flight) and recover.

The amygdala (smoke detector) senses threat and sets off the alarm.

Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

- Fear, anxiety, and worry about continued danger
- Intense mood swings, irritability, and aggression
- Feelings of sadness, guilt, shame, anger, responsibility, embarrassment
- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches, change in eating/sleeping)
- Concern about how others will view them
- Decline in school performance
- Increased risk-taking (alcohol/drug use, fights, self-harm)
- Increased thoughts/comments about death or dying
- Withdrawal from family, peers, activities

Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

Triggers: Reminders of past traumatic experiences that automatically cause the body to react as if the traumatic event is happening again in that moment.

- Loud noises
- Physical touch
- Authority figures
- Hand or body gestures that appear threatening
- Changes in routine
- Confusing or chaotic environments
- Emergency vehicles or personnel
- Anniversary times
- Loss

Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

Thinking brain frequently off-line. Less well-developed

- Thinking, planning, focusing, organizing
- Problem-solving
- Coping
- Self-regulation
- Future thinking/ cause and effect
- Communicating
- Learning new skills

Emotional brain remains in survival mode

- Heightened baseline state of arousal
- On alert for threat
- Reactive
- Sensitive to triggers/reminders of the event
- Focused on safety and survival

Constant threat

Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

- **Relationships:** Difficulty trusting others and forming safe, healthy relationships.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing feelings. Always on alert for threat.
- **Behavior:** Easily set off by others or the environment (especially if reminded of previous trauma). Responses are extreme ranging from aggression to withdrawal. Trouble following rules or guidelines; reactive towards authority figures.
 - Youth exposed to trauma are more likely to be suspended or expelled for behavioral issues.

Citation 13, 16, 17

Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

- **Cognition:** More difficulties with activities related to learning. Traumatized youth have poorer academic performance, increased risk of failing, poorer test scores, and higher rates of referral to special education.
- **Dissociation:** Disconnection from the present moment as a way to manage overwhelming stress. Blocking out difficult thoughts and feelings often means blocking out most feelings, including positive emotions.
- **Self-Concept and Future Orientation:** Low self-esteem and poor self-image are common. Lacking a sense of hope and control over the future making goal setting seem pointless.

Citation 13, 16, 17

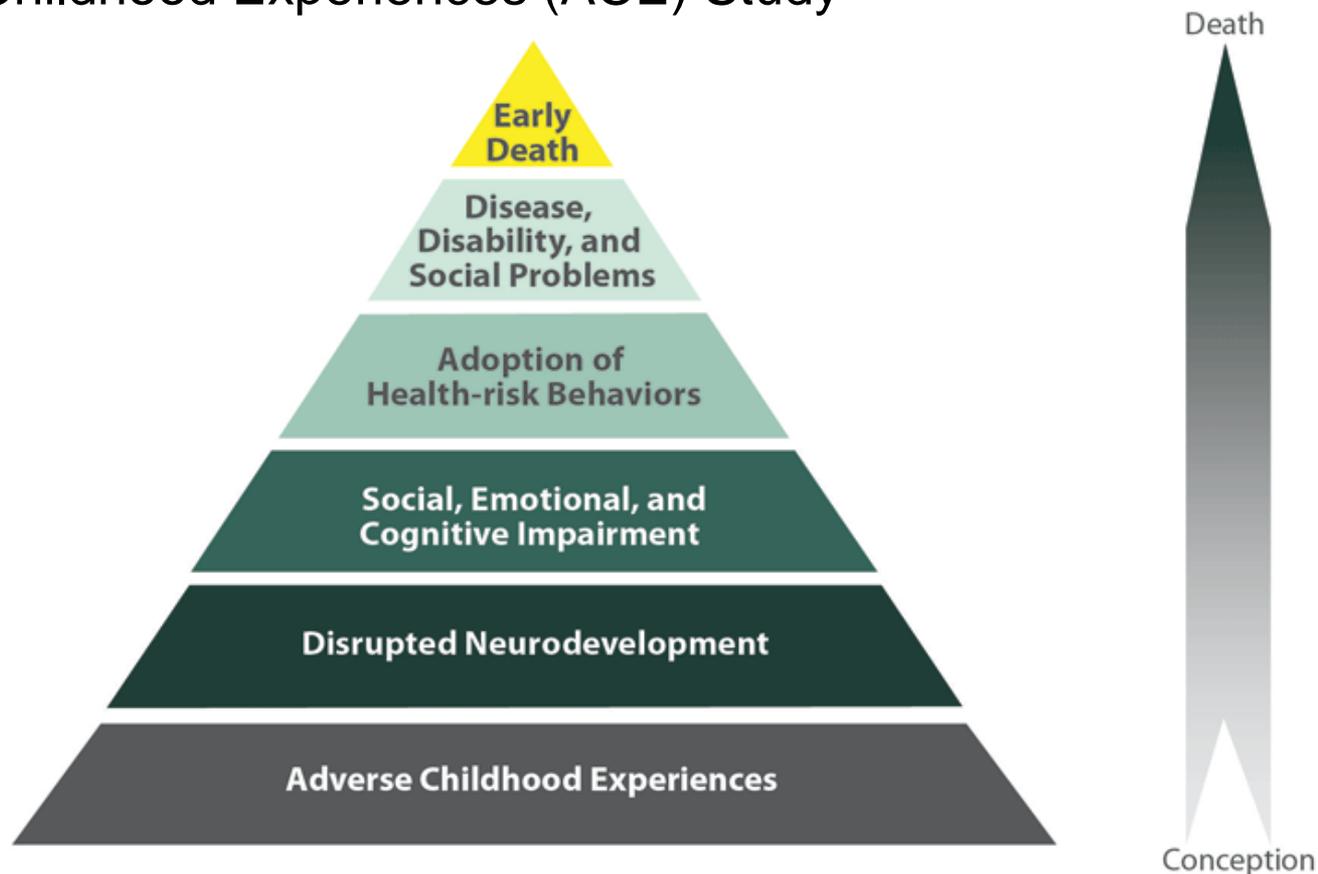
Impact of trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth

- Community violence exposure among urban youth is associated with higher rates of post-traumatic stress, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and aggression.
- Youth victimization increases likelihood of becoming a perpetrator of violent crimes including intimate partner violence; drug use; and property crimes.
- 90% of juvenile justice-involved youth have experienced trauma, often multiple traumas from an early age.
- 96% of adolescent psychiatric inpatients have histories of exposure to trauma.
- More than 70% of adolescents in substance abuse treatment have a history of trauma exposure.

Impact of Trauma

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study



Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Impact of Trauma

Impact of Trauma on Families

Parents with histories of and/or current exposure to trauma are at increased risk for a number of challenges including:

- Substance abuse, depression, and PTSD.
- Negative or unsafe interpersonal patterns such as abuse, neglect, and domestic violence that become the source of trauma for youth.
- Difficulty trusting others and building relationships with community providers and educators, which impacts their child's ability to trust other adults.
- Feelings of embarrassment, shame, fear, or guilt about getting outside support for their children that may result in negative interactions with providers/educators.
- Mistrust of systems that have contributed to traumatic experiences.

Impact of Trauma

Impact of Trauma on Families

Consider current societal and institutional factors and inequalities that increase risk of trauma for families of color:

- A disproportionate number of children and families live in poverty.
- Living in poverty is accompanied by stressors that can be traumatic and can increase risk for multiple exposures to trauma, particularly violent trauma.
- Ongoing experiences of racial trauma/Race-based traumatic stress.
- Lack of culturally-competent services.
- Mistrust in social institutions (schools, education, government) that impacts help-seeking.

Impact of Trauma

Impact of Trauma on Communities

Combined historical and contemporary trauma without the opportunity to heal has detrimental effects on communities of color as a whole.

Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS):

- Lower self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and depression, self-destructive outlook.
- Increased anger and violence towards self, others, and members of one's own group.
- Internalized racism – learned helplessness, distorted concept of self, disconnection or aversion to things related to your own cultural/ethnic group.

Impact of Trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth-Serving Systems

- **Direct exposure to trauma:** Community providers and educators may bring their own histories of trauma to their work or experience trauma on the job.
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress:** Individuals who work with highly traumatized groups are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about another person's trauma and witnessing its negative effects.
- **Vicarious Trauma:** Changes in a helper's inner experience over time as a result of responsibility for an empathic engagement with traumatized clients.

Impact of Trauma

Impact of Trauma on Youth-Serving Systems

Traumatized systems respond similarly to traumatized individuals, which creates an environment that perpetuates trauma responses.

Examples:

- Students exposed to trauma are more likely to escalate and act out.
- Adults may misunderstand and mislabel student behaviors.
- Adults may become increasingly crisis-driven, reactive, and punitive to maintain control.
- Difficult to maintain a safe environment most conducive to learning.
- Schools risk re-traumatizing students by creating environments and situations that mirror or replicate other trauma that students have experienced.

Resilience: Positive, adaptive response to significant adversity.

Combined environmental and individual factors that help children achieve positive outcomes in the face of adversity include:

- The availability of at least one stable, caring, and supportive relationship with an adult.
- A sense of mastery over life circumstances.
- Strong social and emotional skills such as problem-solving, self-awareness, self-regulation, and relationship skills that can be supported in school and community settings.
- Affirming faith or cultural traditions.
- Environments that are safe, engaging, and supportive.

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

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Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

- What is a trauma-informed approach?
- Why is a trauma-informed approach critical to supporting youth?
- What are the core components of a trauma-informed approach?

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

What is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach across youth-serving systems and communities means all people at all levels of the system:

- **Realize** the prevalence and impact of trauma on youth, families, communities, and systems.
- **Recognize** the signs of trauma in those they serve.
- **Respond** by integrating knowledge of trauma into policies, procedures and practices.
- **Resist** re-traumatizing youth and families by creating environments that mimic past trauma, cause additional trauma, and compromise resilience and well-being for all.

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

What is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

Traditional Perspective

- A youth's challenging behaviors are the result of individual deficits (e.g., what's wrong with you?).
- Understands difficult behaviors as purposeful and personal.
- Focuses on changing the individual to "fix" the problem.
- Support for youth exposed to trauma is provided by counseling professionals.

Trauma-Informed Perspective

- A youth's challenging behaviors may be ways of coping with trauma (e.g. what happened to you?).
- Understands difficult behaviors may be automatic responses to stress.
- Focuses on changing the environment.
- Support for youth exposed to trauma is the shared responsibility of all youth-serving systems.

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

Why is a Trauma-Informed Approach Critical to Supporting Youth?

- Minimizes risk for causing additional harm.
- Ensures support for all youth.
- Benefits all in the system.

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

What are the Core Components of a Trauma-Informed Approach?

1 Build Trauma-Informed Knowledge and Skills

2 Establish Safe and Supportive Environments

3 Provide Trauma-Informed Assessment and Intervention

4 Involve Youth and Families

5 Promote Trauma-Informed Procedures and Policies

6 Collaborate Across Systems

1 Build Trauma-Informed Knowledge and Skills

- Community stakeholders, leaders, and staff across youth-serving systems are educated about trauma and its impact and trauma-informed practices.
- Includes education about particular traumatic experiences and impact for youth, families, and communities of color.
- Youth and families receive education about trauma and its impact.

2 Establish Safe and Supportive Environments

- Create safe physical spaces for youth.
- Develop safe and supportive environments and relationships:
 - Ensure youth and families of color are consistently treated fairly and respectfully.
 - Minimize potential triggers in the environment.
 - Intervene to address negative comments/perceptions based on race.
 - Employ staff with similar backgrounds to the youth and families served.

3

Provide Trauma-Informed Assessment and Intervention

- Screen for trauma (including racial trauma) and assess for impact.
- Plans for youth consider ways to address trauma (e.g., behavioral health treatment plans, Individualized Education Plans, plans to support employment).
- Youth have access to trauma-specific mental health interventions when needed.
- Interventions are adapted to meet the needs of youth and families of color.

4

Involve Youth and Families

- Include youth and families on agency boards, advisory groups, working groups, and other decision-making bodies in youth-serving systems.
- Adopt formal mechanisms for seeking regular input from youth and families.
- Involve youth with similar life experiences in your programming.

5

Promote Trauma-Informed Procedures and Policies

- Develop a mission and vision statement that includes a commitment to a trauma-informed approach and meeting the specific needs of youth of color.
- Eliminate retraumatizing procedures and policies.
- Adopt and enforce nondiscriminatory policies.
- Ensure the system responds promptly to acts of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, and violence.
- Review policies and practices regularly to ensure full alignment with the mission and goals of a trauma-informed approach (include youth, families, staff).

6

Collaborate Across Systems

- Provide cross-system learning, skills-building, and resource sharing related to trauma and trauma-informed practices.
- Ensure consistent level of understanding and support for youth of color across service systems.
- Promote consistent policies and practices across youth-serving systems (e.g., non-discrimination policies; practices to support positive youth development).
- Create partnerships with community members who specialize in working with youth of color.

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

Next steps for leaders

Step One

- Identify a group that is invested in leading this process within/across service systems (trauma work group).
- Develop a process for meeting and learning.

Step Two

- Educate staff.
- Explore how to align these efforts with others in schools, agencies, and communities.

Step Three

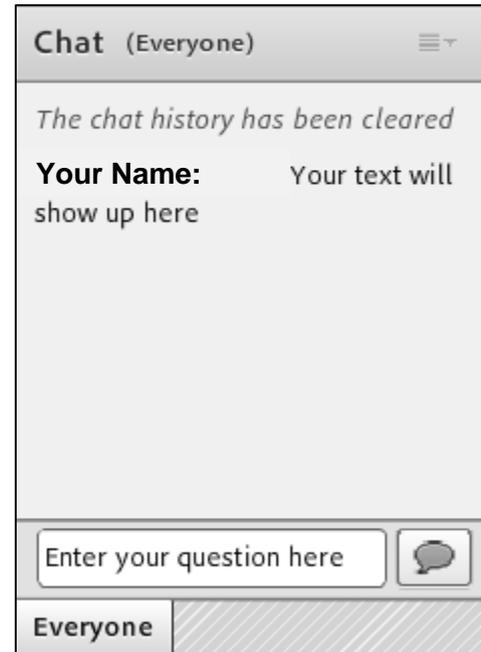
- Identify areas for goal setting.
- Develop a plan for monitoring progress on goals.



“Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence. Not only can trauma be healed, but with appropriate guidance and support, it can be transformative . . . How we handle trauma (as individuals, communities and societies) greatly influences the quality of our lives.”

Peter Levine

Questions?



If you have a question for the presenters, please type it in the Chat Pod.

Closing

Michael Smith, The White House--Special Assistant to the President and Director of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative

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Thank You!

Thank you for participating in today's webinar.

- Slides, archived recording and Q/A will be posted here within 1 week:

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/building-trauma-informed-communities-youth>

- [Details on whom to contact with additional questions to be added prior to event]

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Additional Resources

- U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments resources on trauma at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/search?keywords=trauma>
- U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments resources on response and resilience at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/hot-topics/response-and-resiliency>
- Coming soon: Department of Education's National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments *Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package*
- SAMHSA Treatment Improvement Protocol: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services at <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA14-4816/SMA14-4816.pdf>
- SAMHSA's National Child Traumatic Stress Network at <http://www.nctsn.org>
- Centers for Disease Control's overview of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University at www.developingchild.harvard.edu

Additional Resources

- Cole, S.F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools*. Massachusetts Advocates for Children. Retrieved at <http://www.traumasensitiveschools.com>
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- University of California San Francisco Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) Program at http://coe.ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf_hearts.html
- San Francisco Department of Public Health Trauma-Informed Systems Initiative at <http://www.leapsf.org/pdf/Trauma-Informed-Systems-Initiative-2014.pdf>
- The Philadelphia ACE Project at <http://www.healthfederation.org/portfolio/philadelphia-ace-project/>
- Trauma-Informed Community Building <http://bridgehousing.com/PDFs/TICB.Paper5.14.pdf>