

# DMHAS GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING AN ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT OF STAFF COMPETENCIES TO PROVIDE TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES

The New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services recognizes the national statistics that indicate that Universal Precautions are necessary in all agencies throughout our system (43%-81% of adults in psychiatric hospitals and up to 2/3 of individuals in substance abuse treatment have experienced trauma.) Staff who work with individuals who have trauma have special responsibilities because of the nature of this work whether they are administrative, clinical, supervisory or non-clinical; staff work with service recipients to provide:

- Concrete planning and practice of coping and self-soothing.
- Separation of the present from the past.
- Empowering experiences, so that service recipients feel in control.
- Identification and understanding of individual trauma triggers
- Identification and use of internal strength.
- Safety for all within the agency.

Treating all clients in an ethical manner is an expectation of all behavioral healthcare providers. Hoge et al. (2007) identified a number of counselor competencies in behavioral health practices that are consistent with the skills needed to be effective in a trauma-informed system of care. This document contains a checklist for your internal use. It can help you determine which staff will be most helpful as you move toward a truly trauma-informed organization, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary for embracing this change. All staff should be assessed, especially supervisory staff, as they will need to be able demonstrate their understanding of these skills in order to successfully supervise the delivery of trauma-informed services. We want you to take this document as a self-assessment of your overall ability to provide trauma informed services: take a close look at their staff, and how the knowledge, talent and creativity of the existing staff can be leveraged to move toward a full array of trauma informed service. The assessment of staff readiness to provide TIC can become the foundation of a blueprint for change in implementing trauma-informed practices across time. We will be following this agency self- assessment with a short systems survey, and recommendations for screening and assessment tools. With your understanding of staff readiness, your ability to implement screening and identify your level of treatment need will be greatly enhanced.

Once you determine what skills and knowledge are currently within your staff, assign a key staff member as a champion to assist as the “go-to” person in your agency as you begin to facilitate culture change.

## Trauma Champions

Trauma champions are the individuals who mentor and coach us through change, mitigate the impact of change and new direction on workers at all levels in the organization, and provide the vital follow-through that will keep the change going. These are the individuals who are already informed, already advocating, already doing trauma work; they have expertise and training. Our champions will keep us on task and help with problem solving along the way:

“A champion understands the impact of violence and victimization on the lives of people seeking mental health or addiction services and is a front-line worker who thinks ‘trauma first.’ When trying to understand a person’s behavior, the champion will ask, ‘is this related to abuse and violence?’ A champion will also think about whether his or her own behavior is hurtful or insensitive to the needs of a trauma survivor. The champion is there to do an identified job—he is a case manager or a counselor or a residential specialist—but in addition to his or her job, **a champion is there to shine the spotlight on trauma issues.**” -Harris & Fallot, 2001.

Assigning a trauma-aware staff member who is committed to trauma informed services, will help agency efforts stay focused and on track. Large agencies like hospitals and large community behavioral health centers may want to assign a trauma team with representation from all disciplines, and including food service, maintenance/facilities staff, administration and direct care/paraprofessionals.

# TRAUMA-INFORMED COMPETENCIES CHECKLIST

## Directions:

- Select a point person to collect completed assessments and compile the results.
- The agency director will assess the management/supervisory levels of staffing. You will likely know the answers to these questions from what you already know of your managers and supervisors. You may sit with them or do this face-to-face, as a group, or do it from your knowledge base.
- As you assess your clinical and administrative staff, keep in mind those who will be key to your organization in the future as champions.
- Managers and supervisors will perform this assessment on their staff. Again they can do this from their knowledge or as an in-vivo questionnaire.
- Tell your managers and supervisors to pay particular attention to staff with the ability to become trauma champions: who has the interest? The knowledge? The passion and creativity?
- Select and announce your trauma champions: paying attention to the potential need for more than one to accommodate need and avoid burn out.
- Once you complete your self-assessment, begin to hold brain storming sessions with your trauma champions, managers and supervisors to begin to determine an action plan and direction for growth.

## AGENCY ASSESSMENT OF TRAUMA-INFORMED COMPETENCIES

- Sees trauma as adaptive; a defining and organizing experience that shapes a survivor's sense of self and others.
- Has their own self-care plan to avoid compassion fatigue and burnout.
- Establishes clinical intervention strategies that respond to each individual's experience of trauma.
- Understands **trauma-informed** services (service delivery is based upon an *understanding* of how trauma impacts the life of an individual seeking services.)
- Understands and can take the lead in implementing **trauma-specific** services (interventions and program content are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma in the individual and build skills for healing.)
- Understands the differences among various kinds of abuse and trauma, including: physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; experiences of war for both combat veterans and survivors of war; natural disasters; etc.
- Understands the effect that trauma has on human development and the development of psychological and substance use issues.
- Understands how protective factors can prevent and ameliorate the negative impact trauma has on both human development and the development of psychological and substance use issues.
- Expedites consumer-directed choice.
- Provides coaching and mentorship to build resiliencies.
- Language is consistently person centered, and contains phrases such as "How can I help?" "I believe in you."
- Acts as a mentor in the therapeutic relationship.
- Sees survivors as survivors; their strengths are recognized and used toward growth plans.
- Provides celebration of consumer achievements, and hope for recovery.
- Uses a holistic viewpoint and approach.
- Interpersonal responses are not threatening or demeaning
- Is actively using Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) and actively incorporates trauma throughout the WRAP.
- Maintains clarity of roles and boundaries, teaches development and maintaining of boundaries within provision of treatment.
- Understands the importance of ensuring the physical and emotional safety.
- Understands the importance of not engaging in confrontation.
- Identifies recovery from trauma as the primary goal.
- Understands interventions that might result in re-traumatization.
- Demonstrates knowledge of how trauma affects people throughout their lifespans.

- Demonstrates knowledge of the impact of trauma on diverse cultures with regard to the meanings various cultures attach to trauma and the attitudes they have regarding behavioral health treatment.
- Demonstrates knowledge of the variety of ways individuals express stress reactions and can teach self-soothing skills.
- Demonstrates competence in screening and assessment of trauma (within the bounds of his or her licensing and scope of practice.)
- Demonstrates an ability to identify strengths, coping resources, and resilience.
- Facilitates collaborative treatment and recovery planning with an emphasis on personal choice and a focus on clients' goals and knowledge of what has previously worked for them.
- Demonstrates knowledge and skill in general trauma-informed counseling strategies, including, but not limited to, grounding techniques, cognitive– behavioral tools, and stress management and relaxation tools.
- Recognizes when clinical need is beyond his or her scope of practice and/or knowledge.
- Makes appropriate referrals to other behavioral health and professionals who are trauma informed and capable.

Based on Abrahams et al., 2010.