

DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR A TRAUMA INFORMED SYSTEM OF CARE

There are various models for incorporating Trauma Informed Care across organizations, but according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

“A trauma-informed approach incorporates three key elements:

1. realizing the prevalence of trauma;
2. recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce;
3. and responding by putting this knowledge into practice.”

Trauma-Informed services must be based on principles, policies, and procedures that provide safety, voice and choice, and carried out within every part of a system and/or agency, including administration, and management. The current service delivery system needs to be assessed and modified to incorporate Trauma-Informed principles into practice. (SAMHSA, 2012)

Organizational culture reflects what the system and organization considers important, what warrants attention, how it understands the people it serves and the people who provide that service, and how it puts these understandings into daily practice. The remainder of this document outlines principles for creating a culture of Trauma Informed Care in the mental health and substance use system in New Jersey.

DMHAS TRAUMA INFORMED VALUES

In New Jersey, to have trauma-informed services, there is attention in policies, and practices; and both staff and service recipients have a sense of safety and empowerment. Trauma informed services do no harm: they do not re-traumatize or blame victims for their efforts to manage their reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible. In a trauma informed service system trauma survivors are seen as individuals who have experienced extreme situations and have managed as best they could. Trauma Informed Practice uses a strengths-based framework which is founded on five core values:

- Emotional and physical safety for all – staff and service recipients.
- Trustworthiness: Clear and consistent policies, honest service delivery with program-appropriate boundaries.
- Choice: Activities offer service users choices and control.
- Collaboration: Inclusive approach instead of a top-down hierarchical model.
- Empowerment: Self-esteem and skill building.

When an organization can say that its **culture** reflects all of the values above in each *contact, physical setting, relationship, and activity*; in both the experiences of staff as well as consumers, then the culture is trauma-informed. (Roger D. Fallot, Ph.D. and Maxine Harris, Ph.D.; July, 2009)

DMHAS GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

The following Guiding Principles for Trauma Informed Care are useful across all prevention and intervention services, settings, and populations; and are of the utmost importance in working with people who have had traumatic experiences:

Value: safety

Meaning:

“Do no harm.” Trauma sensitive and compassionate care is given from initial contact.

Principles:

- **Create a safe environment**
- **Universal Routine Screenings for Trauma**
- **Develop Strategies To Address Secondary Trauma and Promote Care for care-givers.**

Change:

1. Safety is generated by honest and compassionate communication and with a sense that crisis are handled as a team
2. Behavioral health staff members, including peer support specialists, expect organizations to be responsive to, and maintain safety within the environment.
3. Universal screening guides treatment planning; and provides a steady reminder to be watchful for past traumatic experiences and their potential influence on interactions and engagement with services across the continuum of care.
4. Trauma workers are integral in developing informal and formal agency practices and procedures to prevent and address secondary trauma.

Value: trustworthiness

Meaning:

The system provides care with the least amount of risk for re-traumatization.

Principles:

- **Demonstrate Organizational and Administrative Commitment to TIC**
- **Minimize the Risk of Re-traumatization or Replicating Prior Trauma Dynamics**
- **Use of evidence based practices.**

Change:

1. Trauma specific strategies will be embraced across the entire service delivery system to create trauma-informed services.
2. As trauma-informed providers, we anticipate and respond to potential practices that may be perceived or experienced as re-traumatizing.
3. We are able to forge new responses to specific situations that trigger a trauma-related response, and can provide alternatives to an element of treatment that may be problematic.

Value: choice

Meaning:

Individuals have input into decisions made in treatment, and that input is taken seriously.

Principles:

- **Support Choice, and Autonomy.**
- **Participation opportunities are created.**

Change:

1. We view each individual we serve as the expert in their own lives and current struggles, emphasizing that consumers and providers can learn from each other.
2. Our services focus on developing self-care skills, coping strategies, supportive networks, and a sense of competence.

Value: collaboration

Meaning:

Create relationships and participation to increase consideration of the individual element of choice

Principles:

- **Recognize That Trauma-Related Symptoms and Behaviors Originate From Adapting to Traumatic Experiences**
- **Promote Trauma Awareness and Understanding**

Change:

1. Once we become aware of the significance of traumatic experiences in a person's life, and begin to view their presentation as adaptive, our identification and classification of symptoms and behaviors can shift from a "pathology" mindset to one of resilience.
2. We will maintain a trauma-aware environment through ongoing staff training, continued supervisory and administrative support, collaboration and consumer participation, trauma-responsive program design and implementation, as well as organizational policies and practices that reflect accommodation and flexibility in attending to the needs of individuals affected by trauma.

Value: empowerment.

Meaning:

Promoting resilience; providing opportunities and understanding that individuals are competent and capable to grow and heal.

Principles:

- **Use a Strengths-Focused Perspective**
- **Provide Hope—Recovery Is Possible**
- **Foster Trauma-Resistant Skills**
- **Identify Recovery From Trauma as a Primary Goal.**

Change:

1. Providing hope involves all of us projecting an attitude that recovery is possible. This attitude also involves viewing individuals as competent to make changes that will allow them to deal with trauma-related challenges, providing opportunities for them to practice dealing with difficult situations, and normalizing discomfort or difficult emotions as manageable.
2. We each must change our language to person centered, hopeful and empowering.
3. It is important that we help individuals to bridge the gap between their mental health and substance-related issues and the traumatic experiences they may have had. A strengths-based, resilience-minded approach allows trauma survivors to begin to acknowledge and appreciate their strength, and the behaviors that help them to survive.