

The Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed Child Welfare System

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines a trauma-informed child welfare system as one that...

1

CONTINUOUSLY EXPANDS WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ABOUT TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECTS

All Staff, including administrators, supervisors, direct service staff, and support staff, have research-based knowledge of the effects that exposure to traumatic stress has on children, youth and caregivers as well as strategies to promote resilience. Trauma-informed training for staff begins at the onset of employment, continues regularly and provides skills relevant to each individual's role.

2

ADDRESSES PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS OF THE WORKFORCE

Staff may be at risk for directly experiencing trauma (primary trauma) or be exposed to traumatic material such as seeing the impacts of trauma on their clients and hearing or reading stories about trauma experienced by children, youth or families (secondary trauma). Strategies to support workforce physical and psychological safety, effectiveness, and resilience are in place within the organization. Additionally, staff is supported to engage in individual strategies to build resilience.

3

PARTNERS WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Child welfare practitioners actively engage and involve children, youth, and families, including resource parents and kinship caregivers, during case planning. Similarly, child welfare systems and agencies intentionally and equitably integrate people with lived expertise at every level of decision-making, design, and delivery.

4

PARTNERS WITH AGENCIES AND SYSTEMS THAT INTERACT WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

When the priorities, demands, and mandates of multiple systems compete with each other, they can exacerbate existing trauma and fail to provide needed support to help children and families heal. Cross-system partners actively collaborate, coordinate services, and share information to work in conjunction toward optimal outcomes.

5

MAXIMIZES PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

For children and families who have experienced trauma helping to creating physical and psychological safety is critical to helping them heal from trauma and to engage in the daily functions of living. Physical safety involves being free from present and impending threats of danger and psychological safety is actually feeling safe and protected from threats. Strategies to support both physical and psychological safety of children, youth and families are in place in the organization.

6

ROUTINELY SCREENS FOR TRAUMA-RELATED NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Early identification of trauma exposure and related needs can significantly aid in interrupting the harmful effects of trauma across the lifespan. Child welfare practitioners routinely identify needs through both formal mechanisms, such as validated screening tools, and informal methods, including observations and interviews. The screening results are used to make important linkages to in-depth assessments and appropriate interventions to ensure trauma-related needs are addressed.

7

DELIVERS AND CONNECTS CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO SERVICES AND SUPPORTS THAT PROMOTE WELL-BEING, HEALING, AND RESILIENCE

Children and youth in the child welfare system have a high likelihood of experiencing traumatic stress responses that negatively impact their overall well-being. Child welfare practitioners work to connect children and youth to formal and natural supports, including evidence-based mental health treatment as well as other activities that help build on existing strengths, reduce symptoms, and increase the ability to overcome future adversity.

8

UNDERSTANDS PARENT AND CAREGIVER TRAUMA AND DELIVERS AND LINKS TO SERVICES AND SUPPORTS THAT PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING, HEALING, AND RESILIENCE

Birth parents often have their own trauma histories, stemming from both childhood and present-day adversity. Child welfare practitioners work to identify trauma reminders and provide trauma-informed case management that emphasizes linkage to formal and natural supports to increase their parenting capacities.