Implementing Trauma-Informed Care into Organizational Culture & Practice

Mrs. Dolores Comejo M.A. Ed., Fullerton College, FYSI Program Coordinator & LLN President
TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES FOR FOSTER YOUTH SCHOLARS: INTEGRATING by CA College Pathways

- Statewide initiative managed by the John Burton Advocates for Youth
- Includes CCC, CSU, UCs and Private Campuses
- Goal is to increase college access, retention & graduation for foster youth
- Provides Technical Assistance, Training, Advocacy and Support for Foster Youth Campus Support Programs
OVERVIEW OF CHILD WELFARE

Why?
Children 0-17 enter foster care due to abuse and/or neglect in the home.

Then what?
Although the goal is to move children into permanent homes, over 9000 foster youth aged 18-21 currently remain in care.

Who?
Approx. 66,000 children and youth currently in foster care in California.
ENTERING FOSTER CARE

Child abuse report made

Investigation
- Allegation unsubstantiated
- In-home services
- Removal from home

6 month hearings
- Reunification
- Adoption
- Guardianship (kin or non-related)
- Continued foster care
REFERRALS, SUBSTANTIATIONS & ENTRIES

![Bar chart showing referrals, substantiations, and entries]

- Referrals: 482,383
- Substantiations: 83,981
- Entries: 32,005

Category 1
TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS

Ambiguous loss → Brain Development Disruption → Hypersensitivity to Stressors → Increase risk for psychopathology & physical illness
MENTAL HEALTH WARNING SIGNS

- Changes in academic performance
- Inability to cope with daily problems/activities
- Drug/alcohol use
- Excessive worrying and anxiety
- Withdrawn
- Loss of interest
- Persistent disobedience and anger
THE GOOD NEWS – RESILIENCY!

- Trauma-informed interventions and practices
- Change attitudes of adults
- Acknowledge role trauma has played
- Paradigm shift

What is wrong with you?
What has happened to you?
ELEMENTS OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE
The single most important factor influencing a positive outcome for children and youth is:

A lasting relationship with a caring, attuned adult.
Many foster youth have learned that relationships are:
- Temporary
- Hurtful
- Frightening

They incorporate this into their view of themselves and others.

Relationships beget the same kind of relationships.
RELATIONSHIPS

Reinforced by current child welfare system:

- High turnover
- Unmanageable caseloads
- Interpretations of behavior
  - Disavowal of importance
  - Not ready = Resistant
TRAUMA TRIGGERS

- Physical contact
- Sounds, smells or places
- Disagreements or conflicts
- Unpredictable situations or sudden changes

Can trigger “fight or flight” response even when there is no actual threat. A sense of safety and control must be reestablished in order for the youth to think more clearly. This is not the time for a rational discussion.
FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE

○ Fight – youth struggle to regain or hold on to power, especially when feeling coerced
  ★ Mislabeled as non-compliant or combative

○ Flight – youth disengages or runs away and “checks out” emotionally
  ★ Mislabeled as uncooperative or resistant

○ Freeze – Youth gives in to those in a position of power, does not or is unable to “speak up”
  ★ Mislabeled as passive or unmotivated
WHAT STAFF & FACULTY CAN DO
WHAT HELP LOOKS LIKE

Not trauma-informed
The "helper" decides what "help" looks like. Focused on "needs" as defined by helper.

Relationships are based solely on problem-solving and resource coordination, not creating meaningful connections.

Common experience is assumed and defined by setting.

Trauma-informed
Collaboration and shared decision-making exists.

Authentic relationships are emphasized in a context of wellness.

It is recognized that people rarely have the same experience or make the same meaning out of similar events.
CULTURAL MISTAKES ABOUT TRAUMA

**MISTAKE**

Assuming everyone who has experienced violence needs professional help.

Focusing on the most extreme instances of violence as the most damaging.

**MORE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACH**

Assuming people are resilient and giving them many opportunities to tell you if they need help.

Allowing individuals to define what aspects of their experiences have been most traumatic and recognizing that this may change over time.
CULTURAL MISTAKES ABOUT TRAUMA

MISTAKE
Applying norms and standards of behavior without considering cultural context.

MORE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACH
Recognizing that trauma responses are varied and that different cultures express grief and loss and understand trauma differently; learning how different people and cultures express distress.

Applying norms and standards of behavior without considering cultural context.

Being aware that self-disclosure and help-seeking vary widely and may be dependent upon whether an individual feels safe as well as prior experiences.
RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICES

- Engagement
- Environment
- Empathy
- Egocentrism

➢ Enthusiasm
➢ Evidence
➢ Endurance
➢ Extending
ENGAGEMENT

- Being completely present
- Accepting the full range of the student’s feelings
- Attending to what is in the student’s mind
FACTORS THAT SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT

- Using empathy to understand the student
- Letting the student know you are keeping them in mind
- Anticipating disengagement – avoid surprise endings
ENVIRONMENT

- Safe and accessible space
- Family, peers, community
- Power-imbalance
ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS

- Consistent time and place to meet
- Help youth navigate external relationships
- Recognize when you are “taking it personally”
EMPATHY

- Understanding the feelings of another
- Meeting of the minds
- Acceptance rather than correction
Supports for Empathy

- Open-mindedness
- Listening more than talking
- Capacity to reflect and correct
EGOCENTRISM

- Honors the individual
- Student-centered relationship
- Self-absorption as a consequence of trauma
EGOCENTRIC SUPPORTS

- Explicit attention to student’s strengths and challenges
- Student-defined goals
- Steadfast hopefulness
ENTHUSIASM

- Curiosity
- Active listening
- Showing up is half the battle
Supports for Enthusiasm

- Breakthroughs—even small ones
- Intellectual rigor
- Professional camaraderie
CAMPUS SUCCESS FACTORS

**Directed**
Students feel somebody wants them to succeed and helps them succeed

**Focused**
Students stay on track – keeping their eyes on the prize

**Nurtured**
Students have a goal and know how to achieve it

**Engaged**
Students actively participate in class and are involved in extracurricular activities

**Connected**
Students feel they are part of the college community

**Valued**
Students’ skills, talents, abilities and experience are recognized; they can contribute and are appreciated
Trauma-informed practice:
★ Recognizes the impact of trauma
★ Engages students with empathy and understanding
★ Continually evaluates self and institution
Questions?