

Trauma and Housing – Making the Connections

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From SAMHSA Homelessness Resource Center:

<http://homelessness.samhsa.gov/Default.aspx>

Trauma Impacts Client's World View

- The world is an unsafe place to live in
- Other people are unsafe and cannot be trusted.
- The client's own thoughts and feelings are unsafe.
- Clients anticipate continued crises, danger and loss.
- Lack of belief in self-worth and capabilities.

Stress Response & Complex Trauma

- When danger is ever-present, alarm goes off too frequently.
- Brain treats all potential threats as *actual* threats.
- Brain continues to release chemicals, so body becomes unbalanced.

Homelessness & Trauma

- Homelessness and trauma are interrelated
- Trauma overwhelms ability to cope
- Persistent trauma impacts physical, emotional, relational, and cognitive functions
- Behaviors are adaptations to past threats
- Many who are homeless have experienced multiple traumas
- Traumatic experiences are often interpersonal in nature, prolonged, repeated & severe
- Traumatic experiences occur in childhood and adolescence & may extend over life span

Difficulties Encountered within Systems:

- Fragmented, unresponsive systems lead to:
 - Long waits and wait lists.
 - Red tape – confusing instructions, lack of information about options.
 - Lack of communication among service providers.
- Re-traumatization: Lack of respect and safety and an absence of control and choice that mimics past traumatic experiences.

Traditional Approaches	Trauma-informed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problems are discrete and separate.• Hierarchical.• Client behavior is viewed as “manipulative” or “working the system.”• People providing services are experts.• Primary goals defined by service providers, focus on symptom reduction.• Reactive – services and symptoms are crisis driven, focus on reducing liability.• Sees clients as broken, vulnerable and needing protection from themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problems are inter-related, responses to or coping mechanisms deal with trauma• Shares power/Decreases hierarchy.• Client behaviors viewed as adaptations/ways to get needs met.• Homeless families are active experts and partners with service providers.• Primary goals defined by homeless families (recovery, self-efficacy & healing.)• Proactive – preventing further crisis and avoiding re-traumatization.• Understands providing choice, autonomy and control is central to healing.

Establishing Supportive Environment

- Consistency and predictability.
- Transparency.
- Safety and crisis planning.
- Cultural competence.
- Privacy and confidentiality.
- Open and respectful communication.
- Building trusting relationships.

Components of Safe & Welcoming Physical Environment

- Locks on bathroom doors.
- Determine with clients ways for the staff to be least intrusive if they need to check on them/their spaces.
- Designate a “quiet room.”
- Create a calming atmosphere.
- Reflect the talents and cultures of the people you serve in your environment (e.g., artwork).
- Child-friendly spaces (if applicable).

Consistency & Predictability:

How can you increase consistency and predictability in your work?

How can your organization become more consistent and predictable?

How are clients informed about how your program responds to personal crises?

How are clients informed about who will be checking on them and their spaces?

What is the grievance policy for clients and how is it communicated to them?

Building Trusting Relationships

- Be patient and persistent.
- Convey respect.
- Be validating and affirming.
- Read clients' needs and respond accurately.
- Set realistic expectations and goals.
- Provide ongoing choices and supports.
- Know your role.

Adapting Policies:

Organization has written statements that:

- Acknowledge that people who have experienced homelessness have experienced trauma
- Make a commitment to delivering trauma-informed services.
- Make a commitment to hiring staff who have experienced homelessness
- Outline program responses to consumer crises (e.g., aggression to others, suicidal thought, etc.)

SAMHSA's Homeless Resource Center [Homelessness Resource Center](#)

Homelessness and Traumatic Stress Training Package

<http://homelessness.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/tilvpgay.pdf>