

Trauma-Informed Considerations when Engaging Children and Families (TIC Toolkit)

This Toolkit is designed to support LA DCFS in engaging children, youth and families through a trauma-informed lens. The Advancing California’s Trauma-Informed Systems (ACTS) project has partnered with LA DCFS to create this Toolkit. The ACTS project is located within the Chadwick Center at Rady Children’s Hospital- San Diego and funded through the Office of Child Abuse and Prevention (OCAP). This Toolkit is designed to create collaborative partnerships between staff and families based on mutual respect and a common commitment to healing. These principles lead to increased helping engagement and successful outcomes for children, youth, and families. Focusing on engagement strategies increases family partnerships and collaborative relationships. In this toolkit you will find resources for child-welfare staff around key elements of trauma-informed engagement.

Each resource will fit into one of the five categories:



Readings/Summary Sheet: Documents to review specific topics



Research: Summaries of empirical evidence-based research



Tools & Guides: Tip sheets and infographics for quick guides



Training/Micro learning: Webinars, presentations, short micro learnings



PowerPoint: Slide decks to enhance knowledge on trauma-informed topics



TOPIC 1	Diversity considerations when talking about trauma
TOPIC 2	Trauma-informed rapport building
TOPIC 3	Trauma-informed language
TOPIC 4	Recognizing, monitoring and managing distress

TOPIC 1: Diversity considerations when talking about trauma with kids and caregivers

Goals of this section:

- 1) To educate the child welfare workforce about the impact of trauma within the context of diversity for children who have experienced trauma.
- 2) To provide the child welfare workforce with knowledge of trauma's impact in relation to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, developmental level, and physical/cognitive challenges.
- 3) To apply this diverse lens to all areas of a child's well-being

Introduction: To understand how trauma affects children, youth, and families, we must first understand how life experiences, development, and cultural backgrounds serve as key contextual elements for trauma and resilience. Without first understanding the overlap between trauma and diversity, we may find ourselves jumping to incorrect conclusions about the children and families we serve. There is a wide range of important factors to consider when thinking about engaging children and families from a cultural lens.

- First, it is important to understand the significance of race and ethnicity and the ways it influences our actions, perceptions, thoughts, and responses. Our goal is to value and celebrate diversity. If not valued, discrimination and prejudice can directly affect and cause damage to one's social and emotional well-being.
- Secondly, sexual orientation and gender identity impact a youth's overall well-being and can be discussed in a trauma-informed manner. LGBTQIA+ youth may experience challenges in the child welfare system including verbal harassment or physical violence. Caring for the whole child, including their sexual orientation and gender identity, creates a culture of physical and psychological safety.
- Third, taking into account a child's developmental level provides accurate expectations and rational for certain behaviors. The way in which trauma manifests ranges widely between infants and young adults. The ability to recognize signs of trauma and respond in a developmentally appropriate manner is crucial. Adapting our engagement with a child's abilities in mind and capitalizing on their strengths is one step closer to building a trauma-informed culture.

Section I. Race and Ethnicity

[Addressing Racial Disparity in Foster Care Placement \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Research



Topic: Foster care placement

Use: This one-pager summarizes an article that examines aspects of child welfare practices that contributed to a decrease in the number and disproportionality of African American/Black children in foster care in two child welfare counties.

[Culture and Trauma Brief: Preliminary Adaptations for Working with Traumatized Latino/Hispanic Children and their Families \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Summary Sheet



Topic: Culture and Trauma with Latino/Hispanic Children and Families

Use: This summary sheet was adapted from the NCTSN and will educate the reader on the Latino/Hispanic presence and experiences in the United States, make treatment recommendations for working with families, and think about future directions for treatment with Latino/Hispanic families.

[Cultural Humility \(STAFF\)](#)



Type of resource: Tools & Guides

Topic: Culture humility

Use: This one-page tip sheet reviews ways to create practice change with cultural humility in mind, specifically in child welfare.

[Best Practice Guide for Working with Families with Refugee Backgrounds in Child Welfare \(STAFF\)](#)



Type of resources: Tools & Guides

Topic: Refugee families

Use: This two-page guide is intended as an overview of selected topics that are relevant to providing culturally responsive services to families with refugee backgrounds and understanding their unique needs. General themes were identified through a literature review and interviews with refugee families.

[Separación traumática, niños migrantes y refugiados: Consejos para Padres, Cuidadores Primarios y Proveedores \(CAREGIVER\)](#)



Type of resource: Reading - Spanish

Topic: Traumatic separations and immigrants with Latino/Hispanic Children and Families

Use: This two-pager provides tips for current caregivers to help address the needs of immigrant and refugee children who may have experienced traumatic separation. This tip sheet outlines what children of different ages might be experiencing and how caregivers and others can help.

[Effects of Refugee Trauma \(CAREGIVER\)](#)



Type of resources: Reading

Topic: Refugee families

Use: This website reviews general symptoms that children who have experienced war trauma or persecution may experience as well as the impact of exposure to traumatic events separated by age group and developmental stages.

[Resources to Support Children's Emotional Well-Being Amid Anti-Black Racism, Racial Violence, and Trauma \(CAREGIVER\)](#)



Type of resource: Reading

Topic: Resources to address racism

Use: This reading guides users to understanding racism, preparing to talk to children about racism, listening and validating their feelings, providing reassurance and hope, and limiting media exposure.

Section II. Sexual orientation/gender identity

[Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach for LGBTQ Youth](#) (STAFF)

Type of resource: Micro learning



Topic: LGBTQIA+ Youth

Use: This 3 minute micro-learning was adapted from The National Resource Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. This resource is designed to help schools and community agencies to (1) understand why adopting a trauma-informed approach for LGBTQIA+ youth is needed; and (2) create trauma-informed environments that consider the unique trauma-related needs of LGBTQIA+ youth.

[Trauma among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Youth](#) (STAFF)

Type of resource: Training



Topic: LGBTQIA+ Youth and trauma

Use: Will need to create log in account to access this National Child Traumatic Stress Network webinar (90 min). Heidi Stern-Ellis and Al Killen-Harvey raise awareness of the vulnerability to abuse and neglect among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescents. During the presentation the stages of sexual identity development as they relate to LGBTQIA+ youth and the barriers to LGBTQIA+ youth coming to terms with their sexuality are identified. Issues that arise in the child welfare arena are also discussed.

Section III. Developmental considerations

[Child Development and Trauma Guide](#) (STAFF) and (CAREGIVER)

Type of resource: Summary Sheet



Topic: Child development and trauma

Use: This summary sheet was adapted from the Government of Western Australia Department of Communities and serves as a guide for busy workers to integrate knowledge from child development, child abuse and trauma and importantly to offer practical, age appropriate advice as to the needs of children and their parents when trauma has occurred.

[Helping Young Children Who Have Experienced Trauma](#) (STAFF) and (CAREGIVER)

Type of resource: Summary Sheet



Topic: Young children and trauma

Use: This summary sheet was adapted from Child Trends (2017; Publication # 2017-19) and describes early childhood trauma and its effects, offers strategies for early childhood

programs, and presents recommendations to support trauma-informed care for this vulnerable group.


[Developmental and Trauma-Informed Strategies in Understanding and Assessing Young Children and Families: Young Children in Care \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: PowerPoint 

Topic: Young children and trauma

Use: Presented by Connie Lillas, PhD, MFT, RN for LA DCFS, this training educates child welfare on understanding ACE's, translating brain science into practice, describing signs to observe in the red, blue, green and combo zones.

[Assessing for Safety Children 0-5 \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: PowerPoint 

Topic: Trauma assessment

Use: Developed by Darci Stahly, MSW, in LA DCFS, this training discusses the impact of trauma in babies and young children, stress and the developing brain, and integrating SDM/ICPM to the assessment of children 0-5.


[Young Children in Care \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: PowerPoint 

Topic: LA DCFS 0-5 population

Use: The Young Children in Care 0-5 Best Practice Champions goal is to reduce recurrence of maltreatment. This training reviews LA County permanency rates and shows the "Still Face" experiment to demonstrate the impact of parental engagement and relationships in the care of children.


[Helping Children Cope After a Traumatic Event \(CAREGIVER\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading 

Topic: Coping and trauma

Use: This guide provided by the Child Mind Institute was assembled by psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health experts who specialize in crisis situations. It offers simple tips on what to expect, what to do, and what to look out for. There are general suggestions as well as age-specific information.

[How Can Trauma Impact the Brain? \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides 

Topic: Stress and the brain

Use: This two-page guide reviews different parts of the brain that are affected by trauma as well as tips for helping children who have experienced trauma.

[Trauma among Homeless Youth \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading



Topic: Trauma and homelessness

Use: This brief discusses the challenges traumatized youth face when they live on the street, including the relationship between trauma and youth homelessness, and offers suggestions for service provider who want to engage these young people in treatment.

[Working with Homeless and Runaway Youth \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resources: Training



Topic: Homeless youth

Use: Will need to create log in account to access this this 90 minute webinar. Arlene Schneir and Danile Ballin provide statistics on the number and characteristics of homeless youth in the US. Presenters review the unique aspects of trauma among runaway and homeless youth and identify the key treatment implications for this population.

TOPIC 2: Trauma-informed rapport building

Goals of this section:

- 1) To educate providers on steps for rapport building specifically with children and families who have experienced trauma.
- 2) To provide the child welfare workforce guidance and information on how to build rapport through understanding how a child's trauma history may affect their behavior.
- 3) To apply these skills with the children and families in their care to build rapport as a foundation for future work.

Introduction: Knowing a child and/or families trauma history provides valuable information to understand and enhance the relationship. Building rapport is based on the foundation of trust, showing the child they are understood and heard, and increasing psychological and physical safety. Children who have experienced trauma, especially interpersonal or complex trauma, have had ruptured relationships and trust broken in the past. This has taught them to be careful of whom to trust and to keep people at a distance to protect themselves. Therefore, building trust with a child who has experienced betrayal, loss, or separation in the past is very different than building trust with a child who has not experienced a broken relationship with a caregiver. This topic area will review rapport building specifically with a trauma lens.

Section I. Building Trust with Children

[Practical Interventions to Help Children Affected by Trauma \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Micro learning



Topic: Rapport building strategies

Use: This 5 minute micro learning is adapted from Multiplying Connections is focused on teaching children's services professionals the impact of trauma on development; how to recognize children's reactions to trauma; and how to promote healing through trauma informed care.

[How to Build Relationships with Traumatized Children \(STAFF\) and \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Training



Topic: Building relationships

Use: This 5 minute video reviews steps to build trust, developing empathy, increase predictability, to increase engagement with children who have experienced trauma.

Section II. Understanding a Child's History

[Tips for Identifying and Addressing Survival Coping Strategies with Children, Youth, and Young Adults \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides



Topic: Survival coping strategies

Use: This single page tip sheet discusses survival coping strategies that children, youth, and young adults engage in to help them survive during and after traumatic experiences. Understanding these aspects of a child's history can be vital for the provider.

[Tips for Identifying and Addressing Trauma Re-enactment with Children, Youth, and Young Adults \(STAFF\)](#)



Type of resource: Tools & Guides

Topic: Addressing challenging child behaviors

Use: This one-page tip sheet defines how trauma re-enactment is when a child, youth, or young adult behaves in a way to elicit a familiar response related to their traumatic experience. This testing behavior can be challenging, but it is helpful to understand that these behaviors serve a purpose.

[The Invisible Suitcase \(STAFF\) and \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Micro learning




Topic: Understanding a child's trauma history through an analogy

Use: This self-paced micro learning was adapted from the NCTSN and educates the reader on what the "invisible suitcase" represents, how it impacts behavior, what resource parents and providers can do, and understanding compassion fatigue.

Section III. Rapport beyond Shared Interests

[What Do I Do? \(STAFF\) and \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides 

Topic: Seven steps for building rapport with children

Use: This infographic describes seven steps to walk a provider through how to create safety, regulate the nervous system, build relationships, and foster growth for children who have experienced trauma.

[Tips for Talking About and Assessing Psychological Safety with Children, Youth, and Young Adults \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides 

Topic: Safety with youth

Use: This single page tip sheet discusses defining psychological safety, helping children identify safety, and examples of ways to help create psychological safety as well as additional resources for children to access.

TOPIC 3: Trauma-informed language

Goals of this section:

- 1) To educate the reader on the importance of using trauma-informed or sensitive language with those who have experienced trauma in order to empower and not re-stigmatize.
- 2) To provide developmentally appropriate resources to discuss trauma.
- 3) To utilize appropriate language with traumatized populations.

Introduction: Language is powerful and can have a significant impact on families, especially for people who have experienced trauma. Trauma sensitive language is a vital aspect of trauma-informed care to enhance psychological safety and increase engagement. If we are not careful with our words, we can end up creating more distress and harm within the populations we serve. Reducing stigma through our word choice can have a powerful impact. This section will review developmentally appropriate resources for talking with children about trauma (e.g. books or cards), appropriate times to talk about trauma, and how to talk about trauma with a child. Lastly, it will review specific words and language to use with specific populations (e.g. sex trafficking populations).

Section I. How to Talk about Trauma with Children

[Healing Days \(STAFF\) and \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading 

Topic: Talking with kids about trauma

Use: This guide has been written for parents and caregivers and explains what is known about trauma, how it may affect young children, and what types of support can help children recover.

[Helping Traumatized Children \(STAFF\) and \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Summary Sheet



Topic: Is it OK to talk about the traumatic event with a child?

Use: This summary sheet was adapted from The Child Trauma Academy and discusses appropriate times to talk about the trauma with a child, how to talk about trauma, a child's understanding of the trauma, and developmentally appropriate interactions with children who have experienced trauma.

[Three Houses Tool \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides



Topic: Engagement

Use: The three houses tool is a mechanism for enabling a child to provide their assessment of their life. The child's own assessment is very often, far more powerful and revealing than a professional assessment of that child, and very often, has far greater effect on adults involved with the child than professional assessments.

[Talking With Your Child About Trauma: Guidelines for Foster Parents \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading



Topic: Foster parents discussing trauma

Use: This two-pager provides suggestions and tips for resource families to help a child cope with traumatic experiences.

Section II. Language to Use with Specific Populations

[Language to Use with Survivors of Youth Sex Trafficking \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools & Guides



Topic: Youth sex trafficking

Use: When working with vulnerable youth it is important to be empathic and use empowering, trauma-informed language. Language and terms should mirror the youth's language. This information can be used as a guide for conversations while working with youth potentially trafficked for sex.

[Building Rapport with Sex Trafficking Survivors \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Training



Topic: Youth sex trafficking

Use: This 7 minute YouTube clip guides the audience to know how to approach or relate to someone who has been through extreme trauma, such as sex trafficking. Tips include staying neutral in your language, self-compassion, setting limits, use of humor, and deep breathing.

TOPIC 4: Recognizing, monitoring, and managing distress

Goals of this section:

- 1) To help providers recognize trauma reactions in children
- 2) Provide information on trauma triggers
- 3) Assist child welfare staff in responding to distress and dysregulation when working with traumatized children and families

Introduction: At times, discussing difficult events or past traumatic experiences can evoke uncomfortable emotions. Having the skills and tools to recognize, monitor, and manage distress in the moment can demonstrate an appropriate and healing trauma-informed response.

Section I. Recognizing Trauma Reactions in Children

[Understanding Trauma Reactions and Behavior Problems \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: PowerPoint



Topic: Recognizing Trauma Reactions

Use: This PowerPoint presentation describes the fight-flight-freeze response and associated behavior challenges that children exposed to trauma experience. It also helps providers differentiate between general behavior problems and trauma reactions.

Section II. Understanding Trauma Triggers

[Tips for Identifying and Addressing Trauma Reminders with Children, Youth, and Young Adults \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading



Topic: Trauma reminders

Use: This resource can guide providers to help identify trauma reminders among children, youth, and young adults. It is important to explain what trauma reminders are and to know how to ask them about their possible trauma reminders.

[Understanding and Helping Children who Dissociate \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Reading



Topic: Dissociation

Use: This two-page handout describes what dissociation looks like in children who have experienced trauma and provides brief, practical, strategies providers can use to respond to dissociation. While the handout was developed for therapists, the information and strategies are relevant to all helping professionals.

Section III. De-escalation Strategies

[Simple Strategies for Intervening with Traumatized and Dysregulated Youth \(STAFF\)](#)

Type of resource: Micro learning



Topic: Strategies to help with regulation

Use: This 5 minute micro learning is adapted from Dr. Ezechukwu's presentation and describes how self-regulation and dysregulation develops, and introduces strategies to build attunement and manage de-escalation.

[Coaching on Coping Skills Handout \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools and Guides



Topic: Creating a sense of safety for children

Use: This brief handout describes the fight-flight-freeze response and ways helping professionals can create a sense of safety to help children experiencing a traumatic response de-escalate.

[What To Do with Heavy Feelings \(CAREGIVERS\)](#)

Type of resource: Tools and Guides



Topic: Emotion Regulation and Feeling Identification

Use: Quick 1-page guide summarizing feeling identification and helping children regulate a range of emotions.