



WALKING ALONGSIDE YOUNG PEOPLE

Acknowledging and Honoring their Individual Journeys

Reaching Out to Wounded Youth with a Trauma-Informed Approach

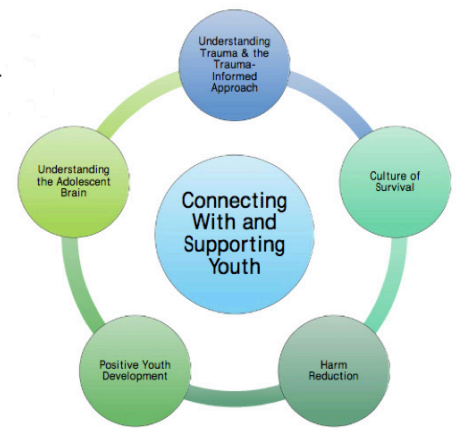
StreetWorks, Training 4

SUMMARY

Childhood trauma, the neurobiological, emotional and behavioral impact of trauma on youth affects the day to day work of people who provide service for youth. There is an intersection between Positive Youth Development, Harm Reduction and Trauma-Informed Care.

KEY POINTS

- Trauma, especially repeated, complex trauma negatively affects brain development. It is important to keep this in mind while working with youth who have been sexually exploited or trafficked.
- **Trauma wires the brain to expect danger.** It is easy for youth with traumatic experiences to be triggered into flight, fight or freeze mode. Trauma can negatively affect sleep, focus, memory and the ability to establish healthy, trusting, long-term relationships.
- Trauma can create behavioral problems that may lead youth into the juvenile justice system. It may also cause mental health issues such as anxiety, panic, depression, suicidal ideation, and dissociation issues.
- Explaining to youth how trauma affects brain development, as well as common symptoms of trauma, can be empowering for them.
- **Culture of Survival** – Doing whatever one has to do to survive. Finding survival mechanisms in chaos shows how resilient youth are. “Hidden resilience” is shown when the behaviors a youth uses to cope do not match society’s expectations.
- **Culture of Sexual Exploitation/Sex Trafficking** – the main goal in this culture is to obtain money or something of value *for the exploiter*. Everything else that happens in that culture supports the values and the rules required to meet this goal.
 - In order to ensure everyone follows the rules, exploiters use manipulation and threats. Professionals cannot use those same tactics. Even if it seems like those tactics are working, and they are being used to try to help the youth, it can be damaging to them.
- If professionals understand how the nervous system works, both the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, they will be able to help youth learn how to transition from a sympathetic state of stimulation to a parasympathetic state of calmness.
- **Universal Precautions** involves providing unconditional respect to the child and being careful not to challenge him/her in ways that produce shame and humiliation.
- **Harm reduction**
 - Empowering youth by offering a support system that allows youth enough control to make their own positive decisions and then space to safely see the outcomes of these decisions.
 - Harm reduction for youth means meeting a youth where they are in life and letting them make decisions about what they need and about the services they receive.
- Practicing **emotional regulation skills** can have a significant positive impact on a youth’s life. These skills will help youth have a number of different strategies available to manage uncomfortable emotions.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Physiology and Impact of Trauma on Adolescent Brain Development.

1. How does trauma affect brain development? How can skewed brain development impact a youth's perceptions? How can it affect their relationships?
2. How can traumatic experiences play out in a youth's daily life even if the traumatic events have ended?
3. What are some of the diagnosis often assigned to traumatized youth?
4. In the video, *Through our Eyes*, several behavioral and mental health issues that follow traumatization were discussed, can you name them?

Behaviors Impacted by Trauma

1. How does understanding a culture of survival help to understand a traumatized youth's behaviors?
2. What does the term "hidden resiliency" refer to?
3. What are some anti-social coping skills a youth may display that are actually helping them to survive?
4. What is the main goal in a sexual exploitation/sex trafficking culture? What perceptions and behaviors might be displayed when a person is forced to follow the rules of that culture?
5. Discuss the feelings, both physical and emotional, that may be felt by a youth when they are triggered.
6. Children who have been repeatedly traumatized may constantly be using their parasympathetic system which means they would be easily triggered. What are some common triggers for exploited youth?

Trauma-informed Care and What It Means in Day-to-Day Staff Interactions with Youth

1. What are the dynamics of trauma bonding, or Stockholm Syndrome?
2. What are some of the techniques exploiters and traffickers use to create trauma bonds?
3. In what ways might helping professionals use those same tactics in order to try to help a sexually exploited or trafficked youth?
4. Why don't scare tactics often work with sexually exploited youth? If scare tactics do work, why is it a dangerous technique?
5. Knowing that trauma impacts memory, what are some things we can do if a traumatized youth is having difficulty processing information, or remembering things they need to do?
6. What is a basic, easy, calming technique we can teach children?
7. We should always treat a youth with respect, without producing shame and humiliation. In what ways might we inadvertently cause shame and humiliation? What are some personal behaviors you could change to ensure you are not causing additional shame?
8. Using the harm reduction model can be difficult for helping adults. What are some reasons why it may be difficult to allow more autonomy for youth?
9. What does it mean to "meet a youth where they are at?" In what ways might this look different for a sexually exploited or trafficked youth?

FURTHER RESOURCES

- **Safe Harbor Resource List for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare:** (Link to list trainer handed out) - <http://www.streetworksmn.org/videos/lss-streetworks-reaching-out-to-wounded-youth-with-a-trauma-informed-approach/>
- **Introduction video:** *Through our eyes: Children, violence and Trauma:* introduction video - <http://ovc.gov/pubs/ThroughOurEyes/index.html> (Other trauma information also available on this website)
- **Book:** *Nurturing Hidden Resilience in Troubled Youth.* Author: Michael Ungar

