

An Introduction to a Trauma-Informed Approach: Providing a Framework for Camp Orientation

Jason S. Frydman, PhD, RDT, LCAT

- **What is Trauma?**
 - *“Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”* (SAHMSA, 2014)
 - Considers a bio-psycho-social conceptualization of reaction to adverse experience
 - *Biological*
 - Negatively impacts neuropsychological and physical development
 - *Psychological*
 - Psychological schema/reactivity
 - *Social*
 - Interpersonal difficulties/Difficulties with attuning to others

- **What Does Trauma Look Like?**
 - Exposure to traumatic events, may result in:
 - Cognitive:
 - Decreased ability to focus or concentrate
 - Recall and remember
 - Organize and process information
 - Plan and problem solve
 - Emotional/Behavioral:
 - Inability to self-regulate
 - Non-compliance or opposition
 - Anxious, worried, tense (irritability, anger)
 - Withdrawn/tired (sad, depressed)
 - Difficulty with transitions
 - Self-injurious behavior

- **What Can Camp Personnel do?**
 - For the camper:
 - Maintain a disposition of compassion
 - Be consistent in your interactions
 - Understand what calming strategy works for the camper and use it
 - Focus on developing community-building activities
 - For yourself:
 - Consult with mental health professional when appropriate
 - Identify your own preferences for personal regulation
 - Practice self-care
 - Reflect on your interpersonal style as a camp professional
 - Know your limits

- **What is a trauma-informed approach to camp?**
 - Consider the 4 R's:
 - *Realize* the widespread impact of trauma
 - *Recognize* the signs and symptoms (to the best of your ability)
 - *Respond* by bringing a trauma-informed approach to your camp ecology
 - *Avoid Re-traumatization*

- **The following six key principles from SAHMSA are supportive for campers who have been exposed to trauma and for campers in general, offering a comprehensive social-emotional system across individuals:**
 - Peer Support
 - Relying on community (at all levels) for support and affirmation
 - Collaboration and Mutuality
 - Working in consortium with campers, identifying opportunities for joint decision-making and inclusion
 - Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
 - Providing forums for campers to take an active role in expressing themselves and making choices at an appropriate developmental level
 - Safety
 - Creating a consistent and grounding environment
 - Trustworthiness and Transparency
 - Reducing ambiguity, increasing follow through, providing clear and definitive explanations of boundaries and consequences
 - Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues
 - Acknowledging the impact of negative and impactful societal legacies on children and adolescents

References

Cook, A., Blaustein, M., Spinazzola, J., & van der Kolk, B. (Eds.) (2003). Complex trauma in children and adolescents. National Child Traumatic Stress Network. <http://www.NCTSN.org>

Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Shattuck, A., & Hamby, S. L. (2015). Prevalence of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: Results from the national survey of children's exposure to violence. *JAMA pediatrics*, 169(8), 746-754.

Finkelhor, D., Saito, K., & Jones, L. (2015). Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment, 2013. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center

National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2014). Complex trauma: Facts for educators. Los Angeles, CA, & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014). SAHMSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: SAHMSA.