

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

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- **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 - Withdrawn/tired (sad, depressed)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

Discussion Questions

1. What systems are already in place at your camp to address campers with high behavioral needs?
2. If you have an ongoing concern about a camper, who would you talk to/check in with as a first step?
3. Who may benefit from incorporating a trauma-informed approach to engaging with campers?
4. Based on your knowledge of trauma's impact on cognitive and emotional/behavioral functioning, what would you shift in your approach to being a camp counselor/leader/administrator? What would you keep the same?
5. What are some strategies you can use to calm and ground yourself if you feel challenged, overwhelmed, frustrated, etc...by campers in the moment?
 - a. Would you benefit from different strategies for a short-term, in-the-moment approach vs. a more long term or continuous practice?
6. What do you do for ongoing self-care? How can you ensure this is a regular practice?
7. In considering SAHMSA's trauma-informed approach, what are some ways to increase the following domains within the culture of your camp?
 - a. Safety
 - b. Trustworthiness and Transparency
 - c. Peer Support
 - d. Collaboration and Mutuality
 - e. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
 - f. Culture, Historical, and Gender Issues

References:

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