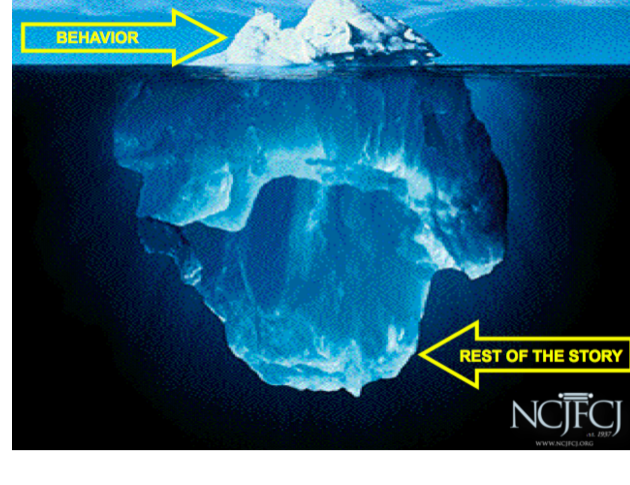




Trauma Responsive Juvenile Justice Systems

What is trauma, and what causes it?

Maltreatment, other victimization, exposure to violence, and many other life experiences can be categorized as traumatic experiences, which can contribute to youth becoming part of the juvenile justice system. According to the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) (NCTSN), trauma is “a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child’s life or bodily integrity.” Some of these events may include abuse, neglect, an accident, or other disturbing events. Traumatic events can cause disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and other psychological and developmental challenges that make these youth harder to serve. More than 80% of youth in a large urban juvenile detention facility reported that they experienced trauma, and many of these youth have had more than one instance of trauma.¹ Some of these youth may have been or are involved in the child welfare system, as well. Many of these consequences of trauma are connected with behavioral problems that make it more likely for these youth to become involved in the juvenile justice system.² In order to properly serve these youth, juvenile justice practitioners need to be aware of what trauma is, what trauma-responsive practices are, and how to implement these practices.



What does it take to become a trauma-responsive organization?

In order to best serve families and youth, care providers should ensure that their practices are trauma-responsive. Trauma-responsive or trauma-informed practices are actions taken by the court, service providers, or juvenile justice practitioners that take traumatic experiences and their consequences into consideration when making decisions and providing services. Trauma-responsive organizations build meaningful partnerships that are based on sharing feelings and experiences with children, families, and professionals and also focus on how trauma intersects with culture, race, gender, and other factors and respond to the unique needs of individuals and diverse communities.³

To make your organization more trauma-responsive, consider these tips to get started:⁴

1. Create a shared definition of trauma so that everyone involved in the juvenile justice system understands and can recognize trauma.
2. Provide training on trauma and how it can impact behavior. Resources regarding trauma and its effects should also be available to families that are involved in the juvenile justice system.
3. Screen for trauma and the symptoms related to trauma. This can be done by implementing a researched-based, culturally-responsive trauma screening tool to administer to youth and families during intake or any other point where it seems appropriate. Ensure adequate follow-up is available depending on the results of the screening. This should include getting to know the youth and family and identifying their [potential triggers](#).⁵ Once these triggers are known, make sure you do not put youth and families in a situation that is likely to be triggering.
4. Prioritize secondary traumatic stress by explaining that staff can experience secondary trauma by hearing about and seeing others’ trauma. Encourage juvenile justice personnel to take care of their mental health in order to avoid and mitigate secondary trauma and ensure services are available to staff to help in these efforts.
5. Recognize that courts and other juvenile justice service buildings often contribute to the traumatic stress of participants. Look for ways to improve signage and make physical spaces more pleasant and inviting.
6. Provide separate waiting rooms for opposing sides of cases so that youth and families do not have to be in spaces with opposing parties, and create an environment conducive to limiting stress.
7. Promote diversity in court professionals by recruiting those with different lived experiences and in order to create an environment that reflects the community, which will be less traumatizing for children and families as they interact with the juvenile justice system.
8. Promote a healing environment that will strengthen protective factors through positive interactions in the court and during one-on-one interactions. Using a strength-based approach when working with youth and families can help to keep these interactions positive.
9. Work to reduce or eliminate the use of restraints and isolation or solitary confinement, which causes trauma in youth and can trigger previous traumatic events. Similarly, juvenile defendants should not be shackled except in the most extreme circumstances. For more information about shackling youth, see the NCJFCJ’s [Resolution Regarding the Shackling of Children in Juvenile Court](#). (In 2015, Nevada ended the practice of automatically shackling youth during court proceedings (NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 62D.415 (2015).) Similarly, the use of isolation, also called solitary or room confinement, for youth in residential settings can trigger trauma responses. See the NCJFCJ [Resolution Regarding Reducing the Use of Solitary Confinement for Youth](#) for additional information.
10. Promote using trauma-responsive practices across services and use interdisciplinary collaboration, which should include input from community members.
11. Match services to the unique needs of youth and families by utilizing individualized case management based on risk assessment, traumatic experiences, and the strengths of the youth and family.

Additional Reading

In order to assess how trauma-responsive your organization/court is, use the NCTSN and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judge’s (NCJFCJ) [Trauma-Informed Juvenile Court Self-Assessment](#), to see where your organization/court could improve.

If you are a judge or would like to learn about what judges are recommended to do in order to make their courts more trauma-responsive, access this NCTSN and NCJFCJ [Bench Card for the Trauma-Informed Judge](#), [Ten Things Every Juvenile Court Judge Should Know About Trauma and Delinquency](#), NCJFCJ’s [Resolution Regarding Trauma-Informed Juvenile and Family Courts](#), and Performance-based Standard’s [Implementing Trauma-Informed Care: What Staff, Youth, and Families Say](#).

For more information regarding the use of isolation, refer to Performance-based Standard’s [Reducing Isolation report](#).

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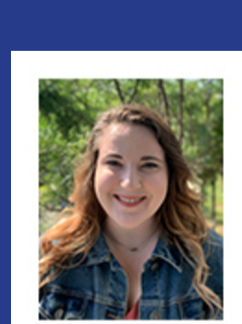
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