

Training Description

SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation, operated by Policy Research Associates, Inc. (PRA), is known nationally for its work in regard to people with behavioral health needs involved in the criminal justice system.

Overview

Although prevalence estimates vary, there is consensus that high percentages of justice-involved women and men have experienced serious trauma throughout their lifetime. The reverberating effects of trauma experiences can challenge a person's capacity for recovery and pose significant barriers to accessing services, often resulting in an increase risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

Objectives

How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Judicial Decision-Making is a training program for court professionals to:

- Increase understanding of trauma
- Create an awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior
- Develop trauma-informed responses

Trauma-informed court responses can help to avoid re-traumatizing individuals, and thereby increase safety for all, decrease recidivism, and promote and support recovery of justice-involved women and men with serious mental illness. Partnerships across systems can also help to link individuals to trauma-informed services and treatment for trauma.

Program Participants

This highly interactive training is specifically tailored to community-based criminal justice professionals including:

- Judges
- Court personnel
- Other court professionals

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Discuss why court professionals should learn about trauma
2. List examples of traumatic events
3. Define trauma
4. Discuss how trauma is often ongoing for many individuals involved in the criminal justice system
5. Describe the pervasive impact trauma can have on an individual's life
6. List examples of the types of trauma reported by women and by men
7. List attributions that women and men ascribe to traumatic events
8. Describe how the impact of trauma can be experienced throughout life and affect various aspects of functioning and behavior
9. Describe how trauma relates to mental health and substance use disorders
10. Describe how certain behaviors may reflect a person's attempt to survive
11. Discuss how a history of trauma may result in problematic behavior
12. Discuss how some behaviors and symptoms related to trauma can be a challenge
13. Understand that there should be a universal assumption of trauma for justice-involved individuals
14. List and describe ways in which the court system may re-traumatize trauma survivors
15. Define vicarious trauma, its impact on court professionals, and strategies to address vicarious trauma
16. Discuss how to improve policies and procedures to make them trauma-informed

How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Judicial Decision-Making

Module 1 Why Learn About Trauma?

Responses to traumatic events vary and, for some, trauma may disrupt their lives. This appears to be the case for justice-involved women and men, who have very high rates of trauma. When judges and court professionals learn about trauma, they can respond in ways that avoid re-traumatizing, ensure safety of all, reduce recidivism, and promote recovery. Learning about trauma helps to ease management, helps keep people out of the justice system, and helps professionals do their jobs. When responding to someone, it is important to keep in mind that how we think about an issue will affect how we react or respond to it. Understanding trauma can shape our responses.

► **Recall:** Based on prevalence estimates, it is safe to assume that everyone who comes into contact with the justice system has a history of trauma, so judges and court professionals should take “*universal precautions*.”

Module 2 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 threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. Trauma can be precipitated by powerful life events such as physical or sexual abuse, violence, natural disasters, historical trauma, or combat. Trauma is an individualized response when an event exceeds the individual's perceived ability to meet its demands. Trauma is pervasive, re-shaping a person's worldview and affecting all aspects of life including health, self-esteem, behavior, and functioning.

► **Recall:** Trauma is the combination of **Event**, **Experience**, and **Effects**.

Module 3 Trauma's Effects

The impact of trauma is experienced throughout life and its effects are pervasive, altering various aspects of functioning. People who experience trauma may have overwhelming feelings of fearfulness, powerlessness, anger, or extreme emotional pain. Trauma survivors try to figure out how to best avoid getting hurt again. They cope and survive by adopting behaviors that may be problematic for functioning in the world. They may abuse alcohol and drugs to suppress feelings and memories; they may become aggressive in what they perceive to be self-defense even when there is no real threat; they may isolate themselves because it feels safer to be alone. Even after the abuse stops, it may be difficult to relinquish these survival mechanisms. Survivors often experience poor relationships because they have learned not to trust, to tell lies, and sex has been associated with violence rather than intimacy. The symptoms of trauma and symptoms of other mental health challenges can overlap.

► **Recall:** The coping behavior of trauma survivors can be problematic and it is often associated with criminal actions. When judges and courtroom professionals understand that many behaviors result from trauma, they can respond in a trauma-informed way. Trauma-informed responses can help increase safety for all.

Module 4 Becoming a Trauma- Informed Court

Court policies and procedures have the potential to re-traumatize. Many of the typical courtroom procedures are necessary to maintain safety, but the key often lies in how the policies and procedures are carried out. Judges and court professionals can help to increase safety, promote recovery and reduce recidivism. Take steps to formally review policies and procedures. Develop trauma screening and assessment, and treatment services. Support all staff through human resources, positive agency practices, and staff policies, and through staff training about trauma and vicarious trauma.

► **Recall:** Be clear about which policies and procedures have options. Identify policies that are no longer relevant. Be aware where you as a judge or court professional have some discretion in how to implement policies and procedures to avoid re-traumatizing, promote recovery and decrease justice involvement.

Closing

Close the training program by using optional evaluations, issuing certificates of completion, and providing your contact information.

► **Recall:** The key to becoming trauma-informed: develop understanding of trauma, increase awareness, recognize the signs, and learn how to respond. Trauma-informed responses help to increase safety, reduce recidivism and promote recovery.