

Action Plan: What Can You Do?

Place a check mark next to bullets that you are already doing in practice

Circle areas that you are not doing consistently and could improve upon

Trauma Impact:

- Remember that most children and families involved in the child welfare system have been exposed to multiple traumatic events
- Learn about the different types of trauma that can impact children and families
- Seek information about the particular types of traumas and stressors that affect the families you work with.

Brain Development & Developmental Domains:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of child traumatic stress and how they vary in different age groups.
- Recognize that the child welfare system interventions have the potential to either lessen or exacerbate the impact of previous traumas.
- Decrease the risk of system-induced secondary trauma by serving as a protective and stress-reducing buffer for children:
 - Develop trust with children through listening, frequent contacts, and honesty in order to mitigate previous traumatic stress.
 - Avoid repeated interviews, especially about experiences of sexual abuse.
 - Avoid making professional promises that, if unfulfilled, are likely to increase traumatization.
- Understand the impact of trauma on different developmental domains and attachment formation.
- Understand the cumulative effect of trauma.
- Ensure developmental screening for young children to identify potential trauma-related developmental challenges and the need for further evaluation and/or services.
- Consider, carefully, the potential developmental risks to young children when making the decision to remove or change placement.
- Try to avoid placement changes for children between 6-24 months of age, when safely possible, since this is when attachment is being consolidated.

- Plan transitions well to allow young children to preserve memories and maintain routines.
- Gather and document psychosocial and medical information regarding all of the traumas in the child's life to make better-informed decisions.
- Educate resource parents about the impact of trauma on children of different ages and ask them about reactions and behaviors that could be trauma-related.

Influence of Culture:

- Understand that social and cultural realities can influence children's risk, experience, and definition of trauma.
- Recognize that strong cultural identity can also contribute to the resilience of children, their families, and their communities.
- Assess for historical trauma: ask about traumas and losses experienced by family members and ancestors and their impact on the child and family.
- Assess for traumatic events that may have occurred in the family's country of origin and during the immigration process.
- Work with qualified interpreters, and allow families to choose to have an in-person or telephone interpreter based on their preference.
- When working with refugee families, assess for core stressors such as traumatic stress, resettlement stress, acculturation stress, and isolation stress.
- Seek information about different cultural and refugee populations: See Resources Handout
- Make a special effort to integrate cultural practices and culturally responsive mental health services.
- Ensure that referrals for therapy are made to therapists who are culturally and linguistically responsive.

Essential Element #1 Maximize physical & Psychological safety for the child & family:

- Create safety plans with families.
- Help the child and caregivers identify existing or potential trauma triggers for the child and coping skills to manage the child's reaction.
- Help caregivers with a history of trauma to identify and manage their own trauma triggers.
- Help the child feel safe during key transition points.

- When it is necessary to facilitate the removal of a child, ask the child what personal items he or she would like to bring from home.
- Provide the child and parents with as much information as possible about the new placement.
- Obtain information about the child's schedules and preferences from the birth parent and share this information with substitute care providers.
- Be aware of how some practices in residential care settings can be triggering and/or traumatizing and work to minimize triggers.

Essential Element # 2 - Identify Trauma-Related Needs of Children and Families:

- Use trauma screening tools with children and families.
- Gather a full picture of trauma exposure and impact.
- Identify immediate needs and concerns.
- For children at risk of medical trauma, use the Medical Trauma Assessment & Action Form.
- Ensure that families are referred for culturally appropriate trauma assessment and treatment when needed.
- Gain a better understanding of the range of available programs and treatment approaches.
- Identify and interview individuals or agencies.
- Request regular, ongoing assessments.

Essential Element #3 - Enhancing Child Well-Being and Resilience:

- Nurture child's strengths and interests by providing opportunities for sports and extra-curricular activities.
- Listen to and acknowledge the child's traumatic experiences.
- Offer the child a voice and choices in her/his services.
- Praise the child for his/her efforts and encourage parents and caregivers to do the same.
- Identify and build on parent and caregiver protective factors.
- Empower caregivers in their role in calming and reassuring children.
- Facilitate ongoing contact between the child and people who are important to the child (e.g., family, friends, teachers, etc.)
- Ensure that the child has at least one positive attachment relationship with an appropriate adult.
- Refer to mentoring programs as needed.

- As appropriate, provide the child with information about events that led to child welfare involvement in order to help the child correct distortions and reduce self-blame.
- Support the child in the development of a life book.
- Try to place children in their communities when out-of-home placement is necessary
- Seek a placement appropriate to the child's level of distress and risk
- Share the child's traumatic experiences and anticipated responses with substitute care, medical, and other service providers, as appropriate.
- Encourage resource parents to provide information if/when revelations of past traumas emerge.
- Promote resiliency through placement stability and timely permanency.
- Plan transitions carefully and prepare children as much as possible.

Essential Element #4 - Enhancing Family Well-being & Resilience:

- Identify and enhance family strengths and natural supports.
- Screen birth parents for trauma history and current trauma-related reactions and symptoms
 - Assess impact of trauma on their current functioning and parenting
- Educate parents about trauma reminders and help them develop plans for managing reactions to triggers.
- Refer parents for trauma-informed services
 - Trauma-informed training/parenting programs
 - Trauma therapy or integrated treatment approaches (addressing trauma and substance abuse).
- Facilitate partnership between birth and resource parents.
- Provide trauma education and trauma-informed parenting skills to resource families.
- Help reframe children's behaviors as trauma reactions to help resource parents see that it's not about them.
- Take the time to listen to resource parents and ask them what they need.
- Engage resource parents as vital members of the team.
- Link resource parents to support groups, mentors, and other community services.
- Ensure that resource parents have access to respite care and encourage them to use it.

Essential Element #5 - Enhancing the Well-Being & Resilience of those Working in the System:

- Be aware of how the trauma work is affecting you and know your warning signs.
- Request and expect regular supervision and supportive consultation.
- Stay connected to peers, family, friends, and community. Seek out supports and sources of enjoyment and inspiration.
- Consider therapy for any unresolved trauma that the child welfare work may be activating.
- Practice stress management through meditation, prayer, conscious relaxation, deep breathing, and/or exercise.
- Develop a written plan focused on maintaining work–life balance.

Essential Element #6 - Partnering with Youth & Families:

- Educate youth and families on their rights and options.
- Collaborate with youth and families to define their needs and address safety issues and concerns
 - Ensure that youth and families are actively involved in deciding what services would benefit them.
 - Work to address any barriers to family and youth engagement in services (e.g., provide transportation and childcare as needed)
- Engage families and youth in case planning through Family Group Decision Making meetings.
- Seek regular feedback from youth and families:
 - How are they feeling about services?
 - Are services helping? If not, what would make services more helpful?
 - Are trauma issues being addressed effectively?
- Provide training to youth and families to participate in mentoring, program development, advocacy, etc.
- Create incentives to encourage youth and family participation in programs (e.g., provide stipends or college/job references).
- Provide formal recognition for the accomplishments of youth and families in the organization.
- Involve youth and family members in developing and delivering staff and community trainings.

Essential Element #7 - Partnering with Child-Serving Agencies & Systems:

- While respecting child and family confidentiality, ensure that service providers have necessary information regarding the child and family's trauma history and its impact.
- Organize quarterly meetings with multidisciplinary team to discuss and develop a shared framework regarding trauma's impact on the family and to coordinate services.
- Provide continuous care coordination through communication with therapists and other service providers on a regular basis.
- Advocate for the child and the family to help ensure that partner agencies and systems are working to meet the child's and family's trauma-related needs.
- Participate in cross-training with other agencies and systems on issues related to child trauma and trauma-informed care.

Select three to five areas needing improvement. Translate them into goals to accomplish within the next three months:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Resources available to help me implement my Action Plan:

Potential obstacles: