

Being Trauma-Informed In Legal Systems

Judges, court personnel, prosecutors, attorneys, paralegals, advocates, and others can be aware and responsive to trauma while fulfilling their roles in the Legal System.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

"A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that can affect someone emotionally and physically... Responses to trauma can be immediate or delayed, brief or prolonged... In some cases, these responses continue for a longer period of time and interfere with everyday life."

- [National Institute of Health](#)

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Being trauma informed does not mean being biased. Being trauma informed is a recognition that trauma impacts each and every person and that each of us can play a role in recognizing, understanding, and responding to individuals who have experienced trauma.

By our systems being more trauma informed, individuals can more fully engage systems, feel heard within systems, and be more able to recover from whatever trauma they have experienced. With an emphasis on physical, psychological, and emotional safety, being trauma informed reduces burnout for those working in the system while engaging those more fully who are accessing the system.

WHERE DO I START?

Being trauma informed is an ever evolving process. While these four tips are a reminder or good places to start, they do not cover all aspects of being trauma informed, nor do they provide a comprehensive look at what trauma is and how they impact each individual. Being trauma informed is not a box to be checked but evolves with us and within systems. Much like trauma responses, being trauma informed is unique and must be individualized.

BE AWARE

Every individual travels through the system in their own way. Be aware of each area and how they are accessing it. Is the language in brochures and documents accessible? Is transportation available? How is information being communicated: phone, virtual, mail? Review each step in the system and how that individual is able to access it.

BE TRANSPARENT

Legal Systems are complex and complicated with a variety of processes and procedures. Whether an individual has accessed the systems before or not, each experience is unique. Share dates, times, and rationales whenever possible. Explain each step and why it is needed.

BE FLEXIBLE

Sometimes the legal systems' processes and procedures must be completed in a specific way while other times there is room for flexibility. Where is a safe place to meet? Who can be in the room? Can meetings be combined to minimize time in or out of court? Where are the places that we can individualize services and processes?

BE HOLISTIC

Treat each individual as a whole person. Individuals may have one, two, or several needs, some of which can be addressed within Legal Systems and some cannot. No system, organization, or individual can serve all needs. Provide additional resources, refer to partners, and utilize communities to support the whole individual.

LEARN MORE:

[6 Principles of Trauma
Trauma-Informed Lawyering.
Trauma-Informed Judicial Practice](#)