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TRAUMA-INFORMED HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATION

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed
Healthcare Organization

Resilient  GEORGIA

Definition: What Does it Mean to be a Trauma-Informed Healthcare Organization?

Trauma encompasses any extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening experience impacting individuals emotionally or physically.¹ It is crucial to distinguish between physical trauma resulting from injury and the broader concept of trauma. While addressing physical symptoms, healthcare providers must be mindful to avoid re-traumatizing their patients. Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from asking "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" This holistic approach enhances patient engagement, improves treatment adherence, and achieves better health outcomes.²

Healthcare professionals experience trauma both personally and professionally, facing significant stressors such as witnessing death, managing severe illnesses, and making critical life-and-death decisions under pressure. This often leads to burnout.³ To support them effectively, it is essential to create a healthy working environment and provide robust resources that help healthcare workers manage their own trauma. Ultimately, this will help sustain a resilient and capable workforce that can deliver the best patient care. People that have experienced trauma are incredibly resilient, meaning they have developed skills to cope with life's challenges.

Why it Matters: Becoming Trauma-Informed

Patients may have past negative experiences in clinical settings, making trauma-informed care vital to avoid re-traumatization.⁴ Responding with empathy and understanding can significantly improve patient health outcomes by fostering an environment where patients feel safe and open to treatment.

It is essential for providers to explain the rationale behind certain procedures and sensitive questions. Organizations should proactively offer patients the presence of an advocate or family member during treatment, recognizing that this measure is intended to increase the patient's comfort and is not a reflection on the provider's competence.

By embracing trauma-informed care, healthcare organizations can create a supportive and empathetic environment that acknowledges the complex experiences of all individuals, including medical providers, staff, and patients in the healthcare organization, leading to more effective and compassionate care.

Examples of Trauma-Informed Policies and Programs

ARCHI, the Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement, works with healthcare providers, payors/insurers, funders, and social service agencies to tackle barriers to care. Together they established **Community Resource Hubs** (CRHs), real-time, closed referral networks that facilitates coordination and data sharing among clinical providers and community-based social service organizations. A CRH employs trauma-informed tactics by connecting people to health and social care resources needed for well-being and better health. By addressing people's social needs such as housing, food insecurity, and transportation and ensuring that people are connected to a primary care physician and regularly accessing affordable healthcare, people will have better overall health and reduced chronic conditions.

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta supports trauma-informed approaches in a number of ways. Their **Strong4Life** program shares tips and tools with parents, educators, and medical providers that support building resilience through their **Raising Resilience Campaign**. **Dr. Stan Sonu** provides programmatic support for Strong4Life and is the Medical Director of Child Advocacy at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Dr. Sonu's expertise and research interests include **prevention of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma-informed care education**. Trauma-Informed approaches have also been integrated into the design of **Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's new Arthur M. Blank Hospital**, helping to put patients and families at ease. The hospital includes outdoor play areas and spaces for parents and guardians to sleep and work during their visit.

The **Children's Hospital of Georgia** now includes **Positive** and **Adverse Childhood Experiences** (PACEs) training in the orientation week for all 62 pediatric residents and primary care pediatricians. PACEs, which emphasize the importance of supportive relationships, feeling safe, and engaging in positive social and recreational activities, have become a key component of their well check procedures. Since implementing this training and adopting these practices in December 2023, patient experience scores in the general pediatrics division have improved significantly, rising from an average of 3.9 out of 5 to 4.6 out of 5 stars.

Grady Health System's WeCARE is a frontline peer responder program. As Atlanta's safety-net provider and only Level 1 trauma center, Grady has always been an intense environment for frontline teams and recent years have reinforced the need for a trauma-informed approach to care. Their leadership acknowledges the effects of trauma, its widespread impact, and ways to support recovery by identifying signs and symptoms and working to prevent re-traumatization. The Grady Health System has trained 20 Grady leaders as coaches for other frontline staff in the **Community Resiliency Model through the Trauma Resource Institute**. They plan to expand the number of frontline staff trained through a "train the trainer" approach throughout the health system. They have also established an Executive Steering Committee for Trauma Informed Care, comprising of leaders from various departments such as trauma, burn, emergency medicine, human resources, rehabilitation, and patient experience.

Examples of Trauma-Informed Policies and Programs

Primary Pediatrics has worked to become the first trauma-aware pediatric provider in middle Georgia. Working in partnership with **Resilient Middle Georgia**, they began with providing trauma-aware training for all staff and providers at their Macon office. The training focused on introducing the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on health and the importance of trauma-informed care. After completing this awareness training, the Macon office implemented a new nurse call line to address mental health concerns for children and families and hired a social worker to further support the practice. In addition to the awareness training and new positions, Primary Pediatrics has been selected to participate in the **KINSHIFT** program, which further promoted the adoption of trauma-informed practices. Primary Pediatrics and Resilient Middle Georgia continue to work towards the next steps in building a fully trauma-informed practice.

View Point Health (VPH) is a local **community service board** providing a comprehensive array of behavioral health services and support in Gwinnett, Rockdale, and Newton counties. They train all staff, from direct care to administration, in trauma-informed care. To this end, VPH has implemented a range of initiatives to ensure staff are equipped to provide a safe and compassionate environment for clients that have been traumatized. VPH aims to prevent re-traumatizing clients, build on client strengths, increase resilience, and support trauma-informed principles. Specifically, VPH utilizes:

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to teach staff to educate children and caregivers on the impact of trauma. VPH teaches clients how to cope with emotions, develop stress management skills, share trauma experiences, and modify inaccurate thoughts. They also optimize the caregiver's support of child that has experienced trauma.
- Evidence-based practices webinars for professional staff, on-site trainings, and foundational training for all staff. VPH encourages utilizing Trauma-Informed Care skills in all interactions with clients.

Training Resources for Healthcare Organizations



TRAUMA-AWARE

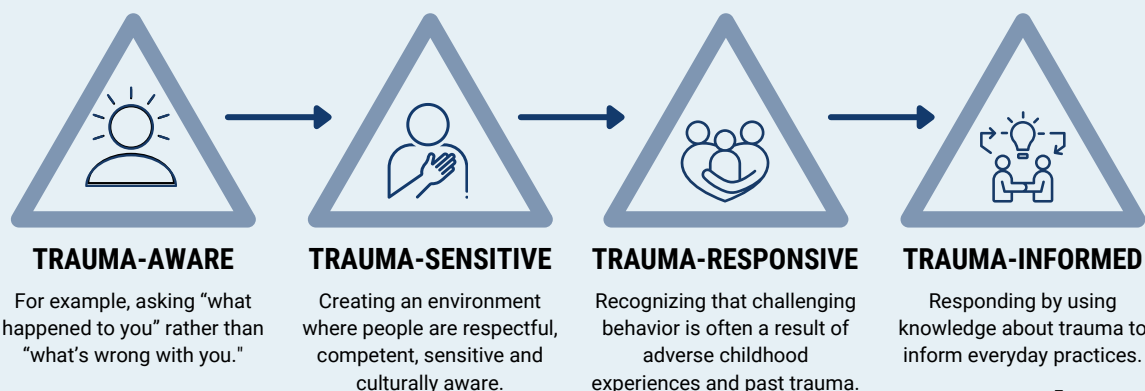
- **CDC ACEs Pediatric Medical Provider Training Module** equips healthcare professionals with the knowledge to recognize, address, and prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This 70-minute module explores ACEs' impact on children and families, outlines strategies for reducing adversity, and offers practical tools for pediatric care settings. Continuing education credits are available for participants.
- **CHRIS 180's Trauma STARS** program delivers comprehensive training for healthcare providers, allowing them to earn credits towards their current licensure. This program equips participants with essential knowledge and strategies for assessing, diagnosing, and intervening in trauma cases, enhancing their professional competence and effectiveness.



TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

- **The Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** provides healthcare providers with practical skills to enhance well-being and mitigate the effects of secondary trauma for both themselves and others. CRM fosters emotional intelligence, which is crucial for improving job performance and personal well-being among healthcare professionals. Healthcare providers and frontline workers have found CRM helpful in preventing burnout.
- **The Center for Patient Safety's Second Victim Program (for MDs and RNs)** supports healthcare providers (MDs and RNs) traumatized by clinical events. Despite unique experiences, all providers go through six recovery stages. Understanding these stages helps peer supporters offer effective assistance. Recognizing high-risk events and common stress indicators, like isolation and anxiety, enables timely intervention by trained peers.

The trauma-informed approach is a continuum that progresses through stages. The stages of becoming trauma-informed are:





TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

- **The Tend Academy's Resilience in Trauma-Exposed Work Online Course**, Secondary Traumatic Stress 101, explores secondary traumatic stress (STS) and empathic strain. This course is designed for professionals working in trauma-exposed, high-stress environments.
- **Dr. Kristen Neff's Mindful Self-Compassion Training** teaches participants to treat themselves with the same kindness they would offer a close friend. The course includes lectures, discussions, and exercises to help participants support themselves during difficult times, manage distressing emotions, and use kindness for motivation. Suitable for both the general public and healthcare providers, this training provides practical self-compassion skills for everyday life.



TRAUMA-INFORMED

- **Dr. Sandra Bloom's Sanctuary Model** has transformed healthcare by fostering a collaborative treatment environment, improving outcomes for traumatized clients. This approach reduces reliance on restraints, builds high-functioning multidisciplinary teams, and boosts staff morale. Agencies using the model see increased employee retention and renewed dedication to organizational principles.
- **ARC's Attachment Self-Regulation & Competency Training** offers global training and consultation services. ARC trainers integrate the framework into diverse settings, especially for healthcare providers. Services include conference workshops, clinical training for mental health professionals, and systemic integration of trauma-informed practices. Agencies are encouraged to commit to at least one year of ongoing training and collaboration for effective implementation.

To learn more about sector-specific training resources, please visit the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.



Additional Trauma-Informed Resources

- **California ACEs Aware Initiative's Trauma-Informed Network of Care Roadmap for Clinicians and Practices** guides clinicians in building comprehensive care networks to support ACE screening and treatment. It emphasizes assessing readiness, defining clinical roles, coordinating resources, addressing funding and technology needs, and continually improving referral processes. By leveraging existing community and healthcare resources, clinicians can create effective, cross-sector networks that provide holistic, trauma-informed care for patients and families.
- **Harvard University Center on the Developing Child's Pediatrics: Early Childhood Resources for Providers and Caregivers** provides early childhood resources for pediatric providers and caregivers, emphasizing the science of development from prenatal stages to age 3. These resources aim to support informed, effective care to promote healthy child development.
- **John Hopkins University, Academy Health and The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative's ACEs Resource Packet for Physicians** offers tools to help physicians address ACEs and foster resilience. It provides an overview of ACEs and their impact, strategies for integrating trauma-informed care into practice, and resources like the ACEs Champion's Toolkit and screening tools. The packet emphasizes building cross-sector partnerships, leveraging resilience, and using data-driven approaches to improve outcomes for children and families.

Support for Healthcare Workers

- **Calling 988** connects individuals in crisis with trained counselors for immediate mental health and suicide prevention support, available 24/7. In Georgia, all calls, texts, and chats are managed by the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL). Healthcare workers can use this service to seek immediate support for themselves or to refer patients in need. For active crisis, visit **988 Lifeline**. For more information, visit **988 GA**.
- **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)** in Georgia provide 24-hour crisis care, evidence-based practices, and seamless coordination with primary care and hospitals. This integrated approach supports healthcare workers by offering reliable, comprehensive care for both mental and physical health needs of patients.

- **Community Service Boards (CSBs)** offer essential behavioral health services, including crisis stabilization, substance detoxification, counseling, and peer support. These resources help healthcare workers refer patients to appropriate care and manage their own well-being, while providing critical support for those in mental health crises or struggling with substance use.
- **Mobile Crisis Services in Georgia** offer 24/7 on-site crisis management, including assessment, de-escalation, consultation, and referral. These services ensure immediate, personalized support and post-crisis follow-up to connect individuals with necessary services. To access these services, call the toll-free Georgia Crisis & Access Line at 1-800-715-4225. This resource is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Georgia** provides resources for individuals in crisis and offers opportunities to engage in mental health advocacy. They offer updates, online discussion groups, and ways to participate in the mental health movement.

What can I do now? Next Steps

- Take a **Trauma Resiliency Model Training (TRM)** provided by the Trauma Resource Institute, which utilizes advanced brain research to implement straightforward skills-based interventions. Additionally, participate in training to gain insights into how trauma can manifest in healthcare settings, such as challenges with patient consent and adherence to medical advice. To learn more about sector-specific training resources, please visit the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.
- Explore collaborative trauma-informed programs like **WeCARE** at Grady and **Primary Pediatrics**.
- Conduct an **organizational assessment** and consider adopting **trauma-informed practices**.
- Demonstrate **empathy** when **listening** to individuals recount their personal trauma experiences.

To learn more, access our references **here**.



FOR MORE TRAUMA-INFORMED RESOURCES, VISIT [RESILIENTGA.ORG](https://resilientga.org)

Questions or feedback?
Contact info@resilientga.org.

