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TRAUMA-INFORMED JUVENILE JUSTICE

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed
Juvenile Court System

ResilientGEORGIA

Definition: What is Trauma?

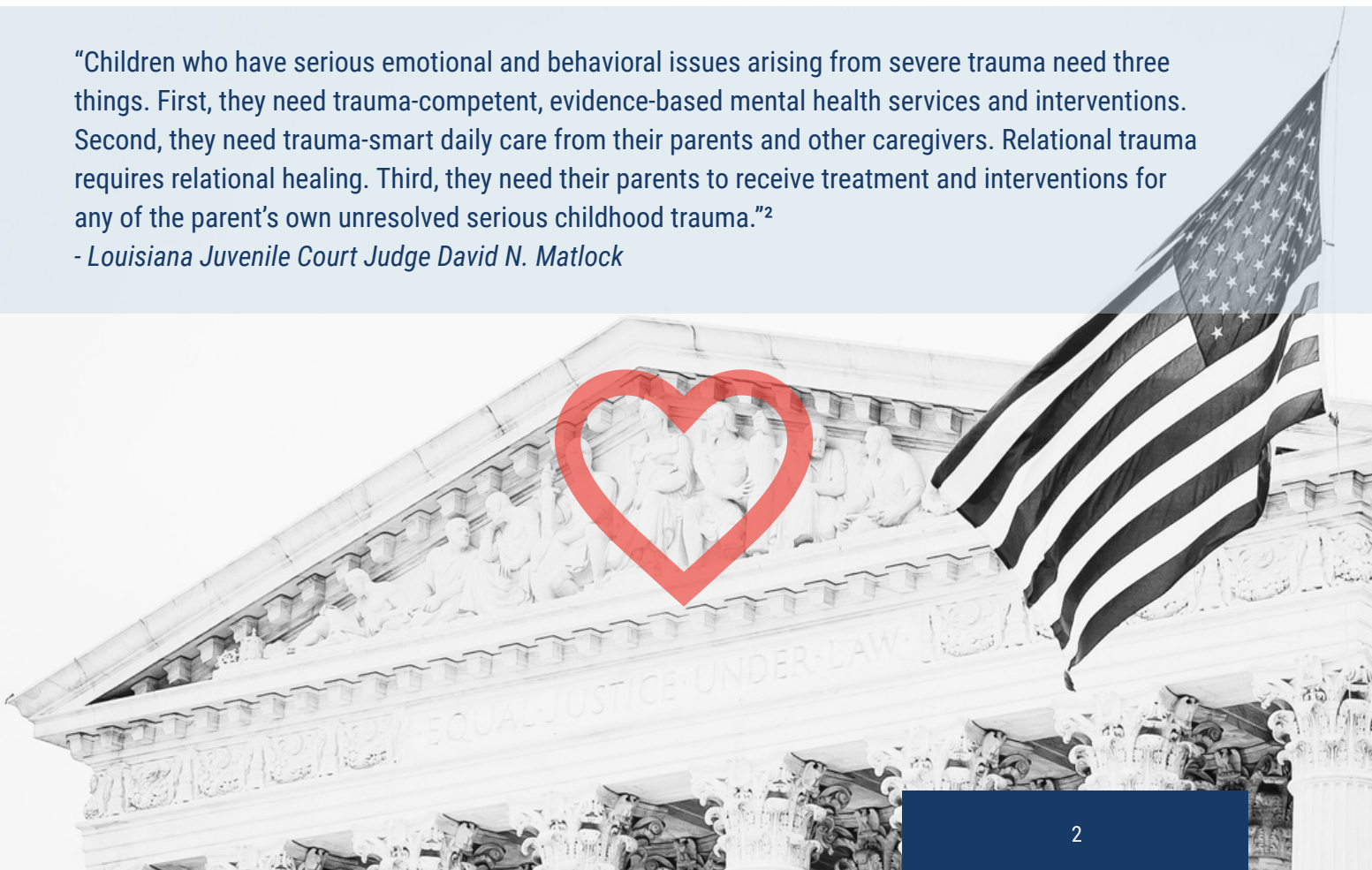
Trauma is defined as any experience that is extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening - emotionally, physically, or both.¹ Youth involved in the juvenile justice system have often experienced multiple forms of trauma, including abuse, neglect, community violence, or the loss of a caregiver. These adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are common among justice-involved youth and can significantly impact brain development, behavior, and emotional regulation.³ Reactions to trauma may include emotional distress, physical symptoms, or behaviors that can lead to system involvement.

Juvenile justice professionals, including probation officers, detention staff, attorneys, and judges play a critical role in recognizing and responding to trauma in developmentally appropriate and healing-centered ways. Being trauma-informed means understanding the impact of trauma on adolescent development and implementing practices that promote safety, trust, and empowerment rather than fear and punishment.⁴

Trauma-informed care in the juvenile justice system involves shifting the perspective from “What’s wrong with this youth?” to “What happened to this youth?” This approach includes using trauma screening tools, evidence-based interventions (like cognitive behavioral therapy or family-centered supports), and restorative justice practices to reduce re-traumatization and support youth well-being.⁵

“Children who have serious emotional and behavioral issues arising from severe trauma need three things. First, they need trauma-competent, evidence-based mental health services and interventions. Second, they need trauma-smart daily care from their parents and other caregivers. Relational trauma requires relational healing. Third, they need their parents to receive treatment and interventions for any of the parent’s own unresolved serious childhood trauma.”²

- Louisiana Juvenile Court Judge David N. Matlock



What Does it Mean to be a Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice System?

A trauma-informed child and family-service system is one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, and service providers. Programs and agencies within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies. They act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to maximize physical and psychological safety, facilitate the recovery of the child and family, and support their ability to thrive.⁶

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) has developed an extensive guide called the **Essential Elements Of A Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice System**.⁷ Below we have compiled an overview of the guide.

Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice System

1. Trauma-informed policies and procedures.
2. Identification and screening of youth who have been traumatized.
3. Clinical assessment and intervention for trauma-impaired youth.
4. Trauma-informed programming and staff education.
5. Prevention and management of secondary traumatic stress (STS).
6. Trauma-informed partnering with youth and families.
7. Trauma-informed cross system collaboration.
8. Trauma-informed approaches to address disparities and diversity.

What are Trauma-Informed Policies?

According to NCTSN's **Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice System**, trauma-informed policies make juvenile justice organizations safer by ensuring safety and promoting recovery from trauma. These policies should:

- Protect youth, families, and staff from harm.
- Mandate individualized trauma-informed safety plans.
- Provide psychoeducation on the effects of trauma and appropriate responses.
- Offer both trauma-specific clinical services and general trauma-informed programming.

Examples of Trauma-Informed Initiatives

Chatham County Juvenile Court opened the "Zen Den," a mindfulness room for staff and first responders to relieve stress. The room, equipped with a massage chair, Bluetooth speaker, and adjustable lighting, offers a space for relaxation. The initiative, part of **Resilient Coastal Georgia**, was created in collaboration with local partners to help employees manage secondary trauma and recharge to better serve youth and families. Chatham County Juvenile Court has also trained individuals in **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)** equipping caregivers, case managers, teachers, and law enforcement personnel with practical tools to build trust and establish secure, healing relationships with vulnerable youth. In the future all agencies intersecting with the Chatham County Juvenile Court must complete TBRI and **Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** training to coordinate a unified trauma-informed response across agencies.

Cobb Collaborative's partnership with Cobb County Juvenile Court supports both justice-involved families and court professionals. Their partnership integrated the **Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** as an ongoing resource. Quarterly CRM sessions were launched for families, and a Resiliency Station was installed at the courthouse, offering calming tools, sensory items, affirmations, and mental health resources to promote emotional regulation and well-being. Looking ahead, the Collaborative plans to expand access for Spanish-speaking families by partnering with a bilingual facilitator. This multi-pronged approach not only fosters emotional safety and healing but also strengthens the system's ability to respond with compassion and equity.

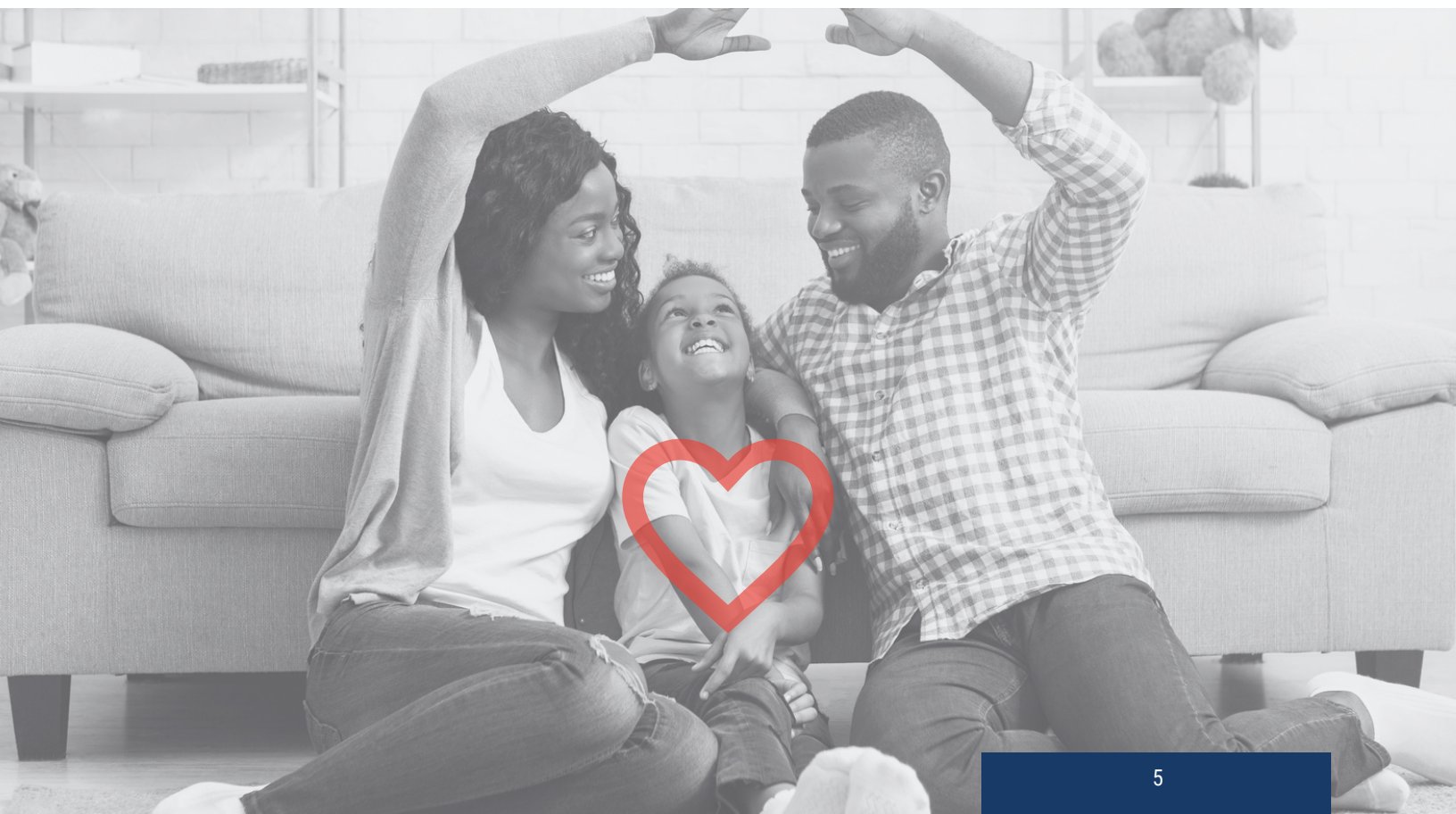
The **Community Resiliency Model (CRM) Georgia** is increasingly being integrated into Georgia's juvenile justice system to support court-involved youth. The Community Resiliency Model (CRM) is a trauma-informed approach to help court-involved youth understand and manage their stress responses. By teaching six core wellness skills focused on nervous system awareness and emotional self-regulation, CRM empowers youth to build resilience and cope with the effects of trauma and adversity.

Resilient North Georgia (RNG) and **Wellroot Family Services** supports court-involved families through evidence-based parenting programs. In partnership with the Hall, Dawson, White, and Lumpkin County Juvenile Courts, RNG delivers the **Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) Level 4** - a structured and supportive, group-based parenting program designed to strengthen parent-child relationships, build caregiver confidence, and promote positive behaviors in children. With judicial approval from multiple county judges, the program is now mandated through court orders to ensure greater impact and participation. This past year, RNG focused its efforts on expanding Level 4 offerings, engaging over 15 partner organizations and delivering the program in at least six counties. By embedding Triple P into the juvenile court process, RNG is promoting systemic change and strengthening family resilience within the justice system.

Examples of Trauma-Informed Initiatives

The **Troup County Trauma Responsive Community Collaborative**, founded by Judge R. Michael Key, reflects a strong local effort to bring trauma-informed practices into the justice system and the community at large. As a national leader with both the **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)** and the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)**, Judge Key's court was selected as a pilot site to test and implement a **Trauma-Informed Juvenile Court Self-Assessment** to improve court environments, policies, and practices. Based on the idea that most youth and families in the system have experienced trauma, the Collaborative uses assessments and data to create a court system that supports healing and resilience.

The **Waycross Family Justice Center**, operating under the Waycross Area Shelter for Abused Persons, Inc. d/b/a Magnolia House in Waycross, brings together eight agencies under one roof to support victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking across six Southeast Georgia counties. In partnership, the **Waycross Area Resilient Georgia Partnership** expands this impact by addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) through trauma-informed practices, mental health support, and cross-sector collaboration – helping to build safer, more resilient communities. To learn more about Family Justice Centers in Georgia, please visit **Family Justice Center Initiative | Criminal Justice Coordinating Council**.



Training Resources for Juvenile Justice



TRAUMA-AWARE

- **Connections Matter Georgia** is a collaborative initiative between the **Georgia Center for Child Advocacy** and **Prevent Child Abuse Georgia**, offering interactive training to help community members understand the impact of trauma and the importance of supportive relationships. Designed for parents, educators, healthcare providers, and other professionals, the program focuses on building resilience and preventing childhood trauma through stronger social connections.
- **GSU Child Welfare Training Collaborative's Recognizing & Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)** is a training to educate various helping professionals on Secondary Traumatic Stress and its impact. Participants will learn to assess STS symptoms in themselves and others, explore factors that help protect professionals from the negative effects of STS, and discover strategies to use these protective factors to manage STS.
- **Think Trauma: A Training for Working with Justice Involved Youth, 2nd Edition** provides an overview for juvenile justice staff on how to work towards creating a trauma-informed juvenile justice residential setting. This training includes four modules including 1) trauma and delinquency; 2) impact of trauma on development; 3) coping strategies; and 4) vicarious trauma, organizational stress, and self-care.



TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

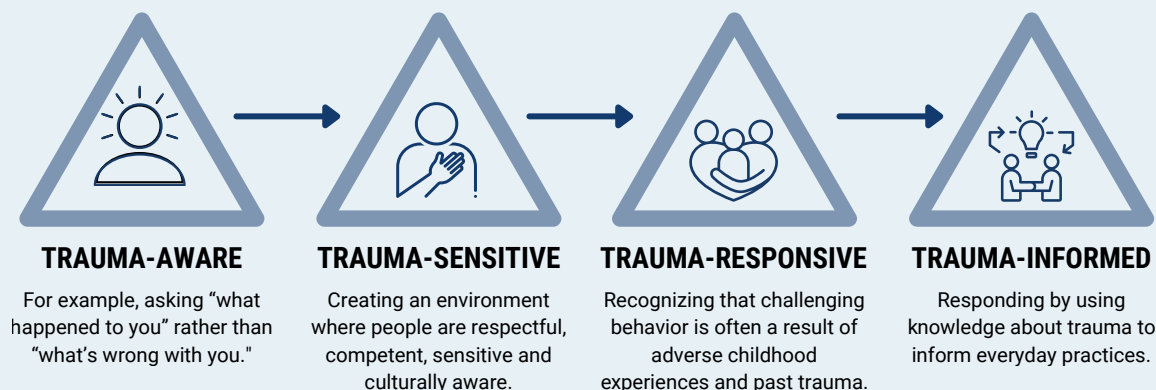
- **The Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** training can teach professionals and youth six simple wellness skills to help them recognize how their bodies respond to stress and learn ways to feel more in control. This approach supports emotional regulation and resilience, especially for youth, who have experienced adversity or are involved in the juvenile justice system.
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing's Adult Mental Health First Aid** provides adult learners how to assist fellow adults, while Youth Mental Health First Aid courses teach adult learners how to assist adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 going through mental health challenges or how to address a crisis and refer the person to get help.



TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

- **The Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse & Neglect Intervention (MD CANI)** is a two-day intensive workshop that aims to bring together professionals from various principles to enhance their knowledge, skills, and collaborative efforts in addressing child abuse & neglect. This workshop can be scheduled with Troup County Juvenile Judge, Michael Key, michael@keylaw.net.
- **TCU's Trust Based Relational Intervention Training** is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. By supporting healing and rehabilitation, TBRI can guide decisions about placement, treatment, and care that prioritize a child's long-term well-being.
- The **Preventative Legal Advocacy (PLA)** program offers family-centered legal services that address civil issues such as housing, public benefits, and education before they escalate into child welfare cases. By intervening early and providing holistic support through interdisciplinary legal teams, PLA helps stabilize families, prevent unnecessary Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, and reduce the trauma of family separation.

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





TRAUMA-INFORMED

- **Attachment, Regulation & Competency (ARC) Training** is designed as both an individual level clinical intervention, to be used in treatment settings for youth and families, and as an organizational framework, to be used in service systems to support trauma-informed care.
- **Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics (CCISE) at Life University's Compassion Integrity Training (CIT)** is a multi-part program that helps youth and adults build skills like self-regulation, compassion, and ethical decision-making to support personal and community well-being. By promoting values that encourage kindness, resilience, and shared humanity, CIT empowers individuals to live with integrity and reduce harm to themselves and others.
- **Dr. Sandra Bloom's Sanctuary Model** is a trauma-informed approach that helps organizations build safe, healing environments through systemic cultural change. Centered on four key pillars: shared knowledge, values, language, and practice - the model promotes community, resilience, and collective well-being within organizations.
- **Dr. Sandra Bloom's Creating Presence**, is a training and assessment platform helping organizations become trauma informed. It offers structured training across multiple staff roles and emphasizes shared values, emotional wisdom, and collaborative practices to foster healing-centered environments.

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



Supplemental Tools and Resources for Advancing Trauma-Informed Juvenile Courts

The report, **From Punishment to Potential: A Landscape Analysis of Georgia's Juvenile Justice System**, provides an in-depth analysis of the current juvenile justice landscape. It highlights structural complexities, key trends, and actionable recommendations for change.

The **Trauma-Informed Courts Initiative** by Duke Law's Bolch Judicial Institute provides education, research, and practical tools to help judges and court professionals apply trauma-informed practices and improve outcomes for those impacted by trauma in the justice system.

All Rise: For the Good of Children is a documentary that takes you inside the courtroom of an unconventional judge in East Texas who takes a trust-based, trauma-informed approach to healing broken families in the child welfare system.

MEDLAW Learning offers free, Georgia-approved CLE courses led by physicians that educate legal professionals on the medical and psychological aspects of trauma, abuse, and violence, with all sessions available online.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Bench Cards for the Trauma-Informed Judge, provides judges with useful questions and guidelines to help make decisions based on the emerging scientific findings in the traumatic stress field.

The Trauma-Informed Law Project is an ongoing collaborative endeavor that provides resources, training, and advocacy to promote trauma-informed practices within the legal system.





Mental Health Resources for Juvenile Court Staff

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Georgia can be utilized for mental health support, accessing free, confidential assistance 24/7 via call, text, or chat. This service connects individuals with trained counselors who provide emotional support, stress management strategies, and referrals to local mental health resources, helping court professionals manage the challenges of their work and maintain personal well-being.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) in Georgia offer comprehensive mental health services, including crisis care, to support the well-being of court staff. By having access to integrated mental and physical health resources, staff can maintain their resilience in demanding roles.

Community Service Boards (CSBs) provide essential mental health services tailored to the needs of staff, such as crisis stabilization, counseling, and stress management resources. These services help alleviate the strain of handling complex cases and support overall staff well-being.

CHRIS Training Institute, a program of CHRIS 180, offers trauma-informed training for human service professionals, therapists, and staff, including those in juvenile courts. Their training programs focus on understanding trauma, its impact on individuals, and delivering trauma-informed care. These training courses are designed to improve service delivery and foster resilience among staff members.

What Can I Do Now? Next Steps

1. Take a **Connections Matter Georgia** training and encourage families and community members to take this training too!
2. Visit the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap** to help your organization develop a training strategy.
3. Consider organizing a **Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** Training for your team, your judicial circuit or your community.
4. Develop collaborative programs like **Handle with Care** and the Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse & Neglect Intervention (MD CANI) to strengthen interagency response to childhood trauma.
5. Promote and implement an organization-wide trauma-informed policy by conducting a **Trauma-Informed Court Self-Assessment** through The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, using benchmarks to evaluate and align court operations with essential trauma-informed practices.^[8]
6. Ask someone to share their story and respond with empathy. **Brené Brown's** video on empathy can help deepen your understanding of compassionate support.

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.

