

A GUIDE FOR PROVIDERS ON SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO CREATE TRAUMA-INFORMED ENVIRONMENTS

As a provider for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), you may already be aware of the value of trauma-informed care within your organization. You may even have included training for your Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and Front Line Supervisors (FLS) on trauma-informed care. One audience you may not have considered for this type of training is family caregivers of the people your organization supports.



The way you inform families about a trauma-informed approach is distinct from the way you might train an employee. Trauma-informed environments which include staff AND families can be spaces of healing for the people your organization supports. Try to think of this not as another task on your already-full list, but a way of providing more holistic support to people. Trauma-informed environments can be spaces of healing for the people your organization supports.

Access to trauma-informed environments may reduce a person's trauma responses and behavioral support needs. Having consistency across different settings— such as the person's Community Integrated Living Arrangement (CILA), day habilitation program, and family home— will help the person's overall feelings of dignity, respect, and safety.

Below are some tips for how your organization can include families of people supported in training on trauma-informed environments, including information about a free video resource developed by the Illinois NTI.



1) Make Training Accessible

Teaching families about trauma-informed environments does not need to be a discrete event where families all gather at the same time. In fact, it's probably better that families have an opportunity to learn asynchronously (that is, on their own schedule). We have developed this fact sheet and a video training for families which can help serve this purpose. If your organization has any sort of parent support group associated with it, you may consider providing these resources with that group, or offering to have someone from the organization talk with the group about trauma-informed environments.



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2) Be Sensitive to Families' Needs

Some families may respond to the word “trauma” with defensiveness. They may feel you are accusing them of not keeping their family member safe. It’s important that you are sensitive when approaching families, ensuring them you are not blaming them in any way. Explain that trauma is complex, and while the event itself is significant, what distinguishes trauma is often how the individual reacts and responds to it. People with IDD are more prone to adverse events which might be labeled trauma. They may also be more vulnerable to be experience events as trauma due to inadequate coping skills or reduced social supports. We know that the more social support systems someone has, the more resistant they are to the negative effects of traumatic events.



3) Act as Partners

Sometimes, families can feel they no longer need to be involved once their family member is at a disability service agency. When the organization and families of people supported act as partners, they can create a supportive environment where everyone feels valued, heard, and respected. This ensures the person supported receives consistent high quality person-centered supports across settings.



4) Emphasize this is a Supplement to Other Types of Treatment

Creating a trauma-informed environment is not a replacement for the person’s therapy or other type of mental health treatment. However, it can be an important part of someone’s healing journey. According to psychologist Judith Herman, therapy alone is not effective without safety, connection, and empowerment. You can provide some of these key elements in the person’s life within your organization, in partnership with families.

The Illinois Training Initiative to Support People with Dual Diagnosis has developed a resource you may be able to share with families of the people you support.



This approachable 25-minute video training was created for parents and family caregivers of people with IDD about the importance of creating a trauma-informed environment. It covers the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)’s 6 principles of trauma-informed care and gives families practical steps to use these with their family member.



Access the video training here, or visit:
www.Illinoisdualdiagnosis.com



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