

Person-Centered Trauma-Informed Approach

The Person-Centered Trauma Informed Approach reflects a commitment to deliver services in a manner that recognizes the prevalence and impact of experiences of violence and trauma for the men and women being served. Trauma is defined as: *extreme stress that overwhelms a person's ability to cope and is the subjective experience of a threat to life, bodily integrity or sanity*. The use of substances and other self-injurious behaviors (cutting, head banging, eating disorders, medication abuse, unsafe sexual practices, smoking, gambling, etc.) as a means to cope is common. Sadly, the use of substances, nicotine and medication abuse can lead to addiction in which the need for the chemical takes control of a person's life. Survivors who are using have a harder time taking control of their lives and keeping themselves and their families safe.

The goal of services is **SAFETY** as the means to return a sense of the autonomy and control, lost as a result of trauma, to the men and women seeking services. Creating safety means minimizing revictimization by avoiding shaming, character/ moral judgments, confrontation, intrusive monitoring and reducing triggering situations. The advantage of *safety* as the goal of services is that it is less threatening and carries no stigma. A strengths-based approach, focusing on what is working rather than what is not, has been proven to be highly effective in promoting safety and growth. Conversations that center around *safe vs. unsafe* choice-making have been demonstrated to be highly beneficial. Some examples of this might be: "Tell me what is safe about the continued use of substances, remaining with an abusive partner, not following through with tasks/assignments, etc.; now tell me what is unsafe."

Failure to understand and address trauma often leads to retraumatization, increased physical symptoms, behavior management problems, relapse and recidivism. Trauma often is central to the development of addiction and mental health problems. It is pervasive and affects many aspects of a person's life. Trauma impacts an individual's brain chemistry, their thought process, emotional self-regulation, development of life skills, relational connection and the individual's beliefs about self, others, and the world in general. Most survivors have little trust in themselves or others and perceive the world as an unsafe place. While it is believed that clients have done the absolute best they knew how to move through the world, it is helpful to recognize that some of the attitudes and behaviors they have adopted as attempts to cope with the residual effect of trauma may no longer be useful. The service provider role is to explore and encourage alternative solutions, thus increasing an individual's menu of safe choices leading to better outcomes.