

Trauma-Informed Care

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, trauma is defined as “experiences that result in adverse effects on functioning and mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” Trauma can be experienced in childhood, adolescence, or as an adult. Trauma can affect anyone and have lasting effects on all body systems.

Examples of Trauma:

- ✓ Exposure to violence
- ✓ Experiencing natural disasters
- ✓ Physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse
- ✓ Sudden loss of and/or separation from a loved one
- ✓ Poverty, food insecurity, and/or discrimination
- ✓ Motor vehicle accidents
- ✓ Having a family member with a mental health or substance abuse disorder
- ✓ Sudden reduction or loss in physical ability, self-efficacy, or social participation
- ✓ Onset of dementia or other cognitive impairment
- ✓ Prolonged hospitalization
- ✓ Transition to living in an institutionalized setting

Trauma & COVID-19

COVID-19 may have resulted as a traumatic experience for many in our world—in communities, as well as healthcare facilities. With the world in the wake of a pandemic, individuals may have experienced loss of loved ones, prolonged hospitalization, prolonged isolation, sudden loss in employment, food insecurity, neglect, and/or a sudden loss in physical or cognitive abilities.

The rehabilitation team should always implement the core principles of trauma-informed care (TIC) into their practice to ensure that every patient and his or her life experiences are understood and respected.

The Core Principles of TIC:

- **Empowerment, voice and choice** involves honoring the patient’s choice and preferences, including identification and incorporation of the patient’s strengths throughout their plan of care.
- **Peer support and mutual self-help** involves providing the patient the opportunity to participate in support groups organized by a qualified professional.
- **Collaboration** involves inclusion of the patient, family members, and the IDT in the plan of care.
- **Safety** involves creating and maintaining an environment that supports the patient’s physical and emotional safety.
- **Trustworthiness and transparency** involves establishing clear expectations with patients regarding treatment and who will be providing services.



The ‘4 Cs’ of TIC are another useful approach which includes use of calm demeanor, containing details of trauma history and referring to appropriate staff as needed, caring for the patient through validation and support when they disclose trauma, and encouraging use of healthy coping strategies.

Discipline Specific Considerations:

Physical Therapy	Occupational Therapy	Speech Therapy
Clearly communicate purpose and process of treatments that involve hands-on approach (manual therapy, passive stretching, etc.).	Assist the patient to identify roles and routines in their daily life, and problem solve through ways to adapt when unexpected disruptions occur.	Ensure patient has effective means to communicate wants and needs and educate caregivers on strategies utilized.
Provide patient with strengths-based home exercise programs to facilitate a sense of ability while addressing identified deficits.	Identify healthy coping strategies for patient use when experiencing trauma or re-traumatization.	Train the patient in implementation of memory strategies to improve awareness and feelings of safety.

Re-traumatization from past experiences can occur in the healthcare setting. As a healthcare provider, ensure that you are attentive to reemerging signs or symptoms of trauma and include any known triggers in the patient’s care plan.

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