

Offering Brief Education on Trauma as a Universal Precaution *Facilitator's Training Packet*

Step 1: Welcome and Engage the Client

Step 2: Introduce Brief Education on Trauma

Directions: Choose one person in your group to be the facilitator and one person to be the participant.

- *Facilitator* – follow the steps below to introduce and conduct the Brief Education on Trauma.
- *Participant* – follow the Facilitator's lead and actively participate in the conversation as if you were the client.

1. *Facilitator says to participant:*

One of the things we are doing at [agency] is offering some information to help people understand what trauma is, and how it can affect their lives, sometimes even long after the event. We are offering this to all our clients because trauma is very common—much more so than people think. I won't ask you to share any personal information with me. It should take somewhere between 6 and 8 minutes.

2. *Ask permission to begin:*

Is it okay if I start?

Step 3: Give the Brief Education on Trauma

Read through the Brief Education on Trauma flip tool with participant.

Talking Points:

Thanks for taking the time to talk with me about trauma.

Why are we talking with everyone about trauma? Trauma is very common:

- 6 out of 10 people have experienced a traumatic event during their lives.
- For people with HIV or substance use disorder, that number is even higher: 9 out of 10.

Trauma can create challenges in someone's life - even if it happened a long time ago.

- Trauma can alter how a person sees themselves, their behaviors, and their emotions.
- For example, it can affect a person's ability to:
 - Control their reactions in stressful situations
 - Trust others and develop relationships
 - Hold a job
 - Take care of their health
 - And may even make them feel like they are "weird" or "crazy"

What is trauma?

- Trauma is when something happens that a person experiences as harmful or life threatening, that then has a long-lasting impact on their thoughts, feelings, reactions, behaviors, and ultimately their well-being.
- What is traumatic to one person may not be traumatic to another person.
- For kids, trauma can be especially frightening.
- Sometimes a person even experiences trauma and doesn't remember it, especially if it happened when they were very young, or it was a very severe kind of trauma.

Learning about trauma can help a person:

- Connect the dots between what happened to them in the past and the way they think, feel, react, and behave in the present
- Gain more control over their thoughts, feelings, reactions, and behaviors to give them more options for how they respond to their life
- Better understand their reactions to stress and stressful situations
- Develop a more positive self-perception
- Handle relationships better

Trauma has a big impact on people.

- When a person experiences trauma, it has a lasting impact on their brain.
- Conscious or unconscious reminders of past traumatic events can cause them to have physical and emotional reactions that are very severe.
- Their brain also becomes extremely sensitive to feelings of stress and perceptions of threat and disrespect.

Those feelings can cause people who have experienced trauma to be very reactive, and they can get so upset to the point where they "explode" or go completely the other way and shut down.

- When we say that people are sensitive to stress, it means that they may experience situations that others find mildly inconvenient or frustrating as completely overwhelming. Under many of these circumstances they may also feel disrespected, criticized, or ignored.

We refer to these situations that make someone feel stressed, disrespected, frustrated, angry, scared, or upset and can cause extreme reactions as *stressors*.

- For someone who has experienced trauma, a stressor may include a range of things that can be perceived as disrespectful, like:
 - Having to wait in a long, slow line at the grocery store
 - Their doctor is running 15 minutes behind schedule for their appointment
 - The internet goes down in the middle of a show they've been watching
 - A partner doesn't text to say they're going to be 20 minutes late
- These types of situations can cause someone who has experienced trauma to react by doing things like acting out explosively or aggressively or shutting down and withdrawing.

Even if someone knows something is a stressor that might cause them to react in an explosive or shutdown manner:

- They may feel like they can't do anything about it because the whole thing seems so out of their control.
- They may think this is just "who I am," or "what I do," when in reality, that is not the case.
- This can cause a person to then have negative thoughts and feelings about themselves, other people and things that happen.

A person who suffered a traumatic event may have physical, emotional, and/or behavioral symptoms, when they are exposed to stressors or reminders of trauma, such as:

- Feeling intense anger or rage and reacting in a way that they later regret
- Feeling agitated, emotional, scared, or confused, and not being able to fully understand what's going on
- Withdrawing from others or "spacing out" a lot
- Avoiding certain people, places, or activities
- Feeling intense sadness or a sense of dread, to the point that the person can't leave their home or communicate with the outside world
- And having flashbacks and nightmares
- These can all be symptoms of trauma.

Trauma symptoms can impact many areas that are important to one's life, including:

- Getting or holding a job
- Having healthy relationships
- Taking care of one's health

- Going to the doctor
- Believing in the ability to make changes in one's life

There are things a person can do to change the effect that trauma has on their life.

- For example, people can:
 - Understand how trauma can impact a person and how stressors work.
 - Start noticing their own patterns and identifying their stressors.
 - Learn techniques and skills to manage their reactions, especially in stressful situations.
 - Learn to better understand and manage their emotions so that they and those close to them can have a more consistently calm and healthy environment.

We have some classes and activities that help you learn these types of skills and how to apply them.

- It's important to remember that people who have experienced trauma have a lot of strengths and skills.
- And these classes or activities will help you identify and build on those skills.

What are your thoughts?

- Would you like to try classes or activities to learn more about skills that can help you during stressful situations?

Step 4: Check in with the Client

Following the Brief Education on Trauma, ask:

- What was it like to get this information? What stood out for you?
- On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being calm and 10 feeling really upset, where are you?

Note: If the client provides a high number, or seems agitated or disengaged, invite them to do a few deep breaths, keeping eyes open. Do this (or another grounding activity) with the client as you lead them through it. When finished, ask:

- Where are you on the scale now?

Step 5: Introduce Skill-Building Classes

Directions: Choose one person in your group to be the facilitator and one person to be the participant.

- *Facilitator* – use the language below to introduce skill-building classes.
- *Participant* – follow the Facilitator’s lead and actively participate in the conversation as if you were the client.

If, after the Brief Education on Trauma, the participant would like to be referred to the skill-building classes, the Facilitator can mention the following:

Example language:

We mentioned there are many things people can do to minimize the impact that trauma may have in their lives. Our agency offers opportunities to learn more about what to do through:

[Choose the items that apply to your agency.]

- One-on-one classes
- Group classes

The [*classes, group*] help people identify strategies or skills they already have that they can use to reduce the impact or symptoms of trauma, and new skills to help people take charge of their life and achieve their goals. These [*classes, group*] are free, and are done in a series of meetings with one of our staff. The focus is on three things:

- What’s important to you and what you want for yourself;
- How trauma may or may not be impacting you today in terms of reaching those goals; and
- Building your skills and tools to help manage the impact of trauma so that you can have more control of things in your life.

The information and materials are very practical and can be used easily on a day-to-day basis.

How does this sound to you? What questions do you have? Would you like to try it?

If client is interested, begin the process to schedule an appointment or refer them to the staff who will teach the skills. If not, thank them for their time and let them know that if at any point they would like to try the classes, to please let you or another staff member know.