

Trauma-Informed Supervision – Helping Teams Heal

As community safety nets decrease, client needs increase and can often exceed institutional capacity. Growing client distress and provider feelings of powerlessness increase the risk of burnout and vicarious trauma. Trauma-informed supervision helps prevent these negative outcomes and supports a stabilizing and restorative environment.

Trauma-informed supervision begins with the understanding that people—whether providers, children, or caregivers—do not experience stress or hardship in a vacuum. Their histories, identities, social contexts, and lived experiences shape how they show up at work, how they cope, and how they heal. For many providers this means that current and past traumas, fears and uncertainties are intertwined.

Utilizing the same trauma-informed framework implemented with clients, supervisors can apply principles to help teams heal and restore their own sense of safety, connection and agency.

At its core, trauma-informed supervision is an approach to supervising staff that integrates the six principles of trauma-informed care into the supervisory relationship; it shifts the supervision space from being a task-oriented check-in to a collaborative relationship where supervisors and staff work together to make meaning of their experiences. It recognizes that supervision is a partnership in which both parties bring strengths, growth areas, and personal histories that influence the dynamic.

Trauma-informed supervision, like work with families, begins by recognizing how trauma affects staff and team dynamics. A trauma-informed supervisor should be attuned to behavioral and emotional cues of their staff such as fatigue, withdrawal, irritability, decreased productivity, and tensions within the team as potential signs of stress, overwhelm, moral injury or vicarious trauma. With this awareness, supervisors can actively respond with support through the six principles of trauma-informed care:

1. **Create safety** – Staff supporting children and families frequently encounter emotionally charged stories, crises, or reminders of their own past experiences; they may also be facing uncertainty around their own job security during institutional changes. Providers may also be impacted by distressing local and world events that impact their community in the United States or their home country. Creating a safe environment for staff should include listening, validating and addressing immediate staff needs. Safety may also mean predictable routines such as weekly scheduled sessions, offering confidential and calm spaces for supervision, and providing up to date information to increase transparency.
2. **Build and maintain trustworthiness** – Supervisors can build trust with teams by communicating consistently and effectively. Staff benefit immensely when supervisors

explain not only decisions but the “why” behind them—especially when those decisions impact workloads, exposure to emotionally heavy content, or programmatic changes affecting children and families. Being transparent about what is known, what is uncertain, and what steps are being taken to support the team reduces fear and prevents misinformation from filling the gaps.

3. **Offer opportunities for peer support.** Working with forcibly displaced children and families is a unique experience that can be rewarding and taxing. Team members with shared experiences can provide valuable support, validation and consultation to each other. Supervisors can offer opportunities for peer support by connecting teams either in regular group sessions, by debriefing together after difficult incidents or simply by encouraging staff to seek out team members for support. These actions can help reduce feelings of isolation and increase team cohesion and resilience.
4. **Collaborate.** Supervisors can invite staff into decision making processes and planning so they can provide their lived experience, professional insight, and personal strengths. Providers who have their own histories of migration, conflict, or trauma may carry deep empathy for the children and families they serve but also face a higher risk of re-traumatization. Support staff autonomy by allowing them to decide how best to manage their tasks and time; and how much of their own experiences they feel comfortable sharing.
5. **Share power.** Identify areas where you can share power with team members and provide choices, such as options for scheduling work hours, assigning caseloads, and seeking feedback. During individual or team sessions supervisors should encourage feedback from staff, explore staff professional goals and develop opportunities for growth.
6. **Honor cultural and historical context.** Trauma and stress responses show up in a variety of ways across cultures, and so does healing. Supervisors should explore how individual staff experience and express stress and what approaches are most supportive for that individual. This awareness helps prevent misinterpretations, supports more accurate understanding of staff reactions, and strengthens the team’s capacity to serve families. Supervisors can also celebrate cultural diversity by communicating and celebrating important events and holidays to foster inclusion.

Trauma-informed supervision is a simple but powerful way to build healthier teams and stronger programs. Using this approach helps staff manage stress, stay connected, and provide better support for the families who depend on them.