

Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

Becoming an Advocate

NCTSN

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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Essential Elements 7 and 8

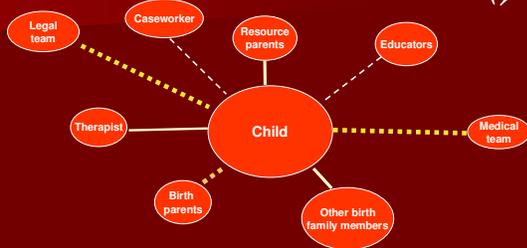
- 7. Be an advocate for your child.
- 8. Promote and support trauma-focused assessment and treatment for your child.

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Know Your Child's Team



— Strong, positive connection - - - - Weak connection ····· Stressful connection

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Working as a Team

The team members involved in your child's life:

- Share a commitment to your child's safety, permanency, and well-being
- Have distinct roles and responsibilities
- Relate to your child in different ways
- Are NOT equally trauma-informed

I would feel like I was just being passed around and not really knowing what was going on. No one explained anything to me.

I didn't even know what rights I had . . . if I had any.

No one told me what the meaning of foster care was. No one told me why I had been taken away from my mom. I knew there were bad things going on, but no one really explained it to me.

—Luis

Hochman, G., Hochman, A., & Miller, J. (2004). *Foster care: Voices from the inside*. Washington, DC: Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Available at <http://pewfostercare.org/research/voices/voices-complete.pdf>

Trauma-Informed Advocacy

- Help others to understand the impact trauma has had on your child.
- Promote the importance of psychological safety.
- Share strategies for helping your child manage overwhelming emotions and problem behaviors.

(Continued)

Trauma-Informed Advocacy

- Support the positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of your child.
- Help others to appreciate your child's strengths and resilience.
- Advocate for the trauma-specific services your child needs.
- Know when you need support.

Advocacy in Action

Help your team member understand . . .

- What child traumatic stress is
- How trauma has affected your child
- Your child's strengths and resiliency
- What your child needs

Partnering with Birth Families

- **Respect the connection** that children share with their parents and other birth family members.
- **Be prepared** for conflicted or even hostile initial reactions from birth parents and other family members.
- **Use your "trauma lens"** when interacting with birth parents and other family members.

It's been almost 11 years now since my son has come home [and] one consistent thing for my son and me has been our relationship with his foster parents.

My son has spent many nights and weekends at their house and gone on many vacations with them. . . . I've also been able to help them out by babysitting their youngest daughter. I feel especially good knowing they trust me. Now we are as big a part of their lives as they are in ours. . . . I'm no longer that angry, jealous and resentful person, but one who can appreciate that my son benefits from the caring of this family who took him into their hearts and home.

—L. M., birth mother

Heaven sent. *Rise Magazine* (2005). Available at <http://www.risemagazine.org>

Thinking About My Child

- Who are three **key players** in your child's life?
- How can you **work together more effectively** to help your child?
- How might **using your "trauma lens"** change the way you work with other team members or with the child's birth parents?

Helping Your Child Heal

- **Know** when your child needs help.
- **Learn** about trauma-focused assessment.
- **Understand** the basics of trauma-informed therapy.
- **Ask questions** if you are not sure that the therapy is working.

When to Seek Help

When you:

- Feel overwhelmed

When your child:

- Displays reactions that interfere with school or home life
- Talks about or commits acts of self-harm (like cutting)
- Has trouble falling asleep, wakes up often during the night, or frequently has nightmares
- Complains of frequent physical problems but checks out okay medically

(Continued)

When to Seek Help (Continued)

When your child:

- Asks to talk to someone about his or her trauma
- Talks over and over again about the trauma or seems "stuck" on one aspect of it
- Seems plagued by guilt or self-blame
- Expresses feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

Trauma Assessment

Trauma assessment is important for any child who has experienced trauma.

- Includes gathering a thorough trauma history
- Seeks input from you and others who know the child
- Should be used to determine the treatment plan

The Basics of Trauma-Informed Treatment

Common elements of effective treatments:

- Scientifically based
- Include comprehensive trauma assessment
- Based on a clear plan that involves caregivers
- Trauma-focused

Ineffective or Harmful Treatments

Beware of:

- Treatments that promise an instant cure
- Treatments that use hypnosis or drugs to retrieve "repressed" memories
- Rebirthing, holding therapies
- Treatments that are offered by nonlicensed providers or are outside of the medical mainstream

Trauma-Informed Therapy: The Real World

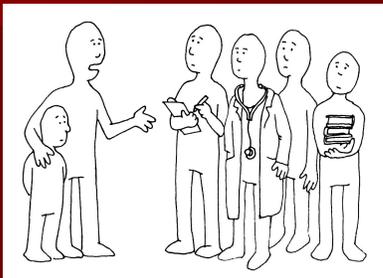
- Effects of trauma missed or underappreciated
- Goals of therapy unclear

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Trauma-Informed Therapy: The Real World

- Inconsistent care
- Therapy seems to be upsetting child
- No trauma-informed providers available

Resources in Our Community





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Essential Element 9

9. Take care of yourself.

Caregivers Also Need Care



- We are all human.
- Caring for our children can be difficult, draining, exhausting, and frustrating.
- We all deserve a little TLC.

*Yet, taught by time,
My heart has learned to glow
For other's good
And melt at other's woe.*

Homer

Compassion Fatigue: Warning Signs

- Mental and physical exhaustion
- Using alcohol, food, or other substances to combat stress and comfort yourself
- Disturbed sleep
- Feeling numb and distanced from life
- Feeling less satisfied by work
- Moodiness, irritability
- Physical complaints—headaches, stomach aches

Self-Care Basics

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat well.
- Be physically active.
- Use alcohol in moderation, or not at all.
- Take regular breaks from stressful activities.
- Laugh every day.
- Express yourself.
- Let someone else take care of you.

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Trauma experienced as a result of exposure to a child's trauma and trauma reactions

Stress and Exposure to Trauma

Exposure can be through:

- What a child tells you or says in your presence
- The child's play, drawings, written stories
- The child's reactions to trauma reminders
- Media coverage, case reports, or other documents about the trauma

When Your Child's Trauma Becomes Your Own

Exposure may cause:

- Intrusive images
- Nervousness or jumpiness
- Difficulty concentrating or taking in information
- Nightmares, insomnia
- Emotional numbing

(Continued)

When Your Child's Trauma Becomes Your Own

Exposure may cause:

- Changes in your worldview (how you see and feel about your world)
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or helplessness
- Anger
- Feeling disconnected from loved ones

(Continued)

When Your Child's Trauma Becomes Your Own

You may:

- Lose perspective, identifying too closely with your child
- Respond inappropriately or disproportionately
- Withdraw from your child
- Do anything to avoid further exposure

Getting Past STS

- Recognize safety of current situation
- Distinguish adult interpretation from the child's experience
- Focus on resiliency and building positive experiences

When Your Child's Trauma Is a Reminder

You may:

- React as you would to any trauma reminder
- Have trouble differentiating your experience from your child's
- Expect your child to cope the same way you did
- Respond inappropriately or disproportionately
- Withdraw from your child

Coping When a Child's Trauma Is a Reminder

- Recognize the connection between your child's trauma and your own history.
- Distinguish which feelings belong to the present and which to the past.
- Be honest: with yourself, with your child, and with your caseworker.
- Get support, including trauma-focused treatment. It's never too late to heal.
- Recognize that what worked for you may not work for your child.

Committing to Self-Care: Make a Plan

- Maintain a balance between work and relaxation, self and others.
- Include activities that are purely for fun.
- Include a regular stress management approach—physical activity, meditation, yoga, prayer, etc.

Committing to Self-Care: Daily

- Walk the dog
- Play with the cat
- Exercise
- Pray
- Meditate
- Read a romance novel
- Write in my journal
- Chat with my neighbors
- Deep breathe
- Listen to music in the car
