

Addressing Trauma and Social Determinants to Support Youth Health

A Toolkit for Trauma-Informed, Healing-Centered Practice



**The Illinois
ACEs Response
Collaborative**

a program of
**HEALTH & MEDICINE
POLICY RESEARCH GROUP**

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Introduction

Youth health and well-being are shaped by the context in which young people live, learn, and grow. Traumatic experiences, such as abuse and neglect, and social risk factors, such as housing instability, food insecurity, community violence, and racism, can contribute to poor physical, mental, emotional, and social outcomes among youth.¹ At the same time, safe and supportive environments and access to essential resources can serve as protective factors that promote wellbeing and healthy development.² By addressing the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) and cultivating trauma-informed, healing-centered health care experiences, youth-serving providers can reduce barriers to care, increase engagement in services, and ultimately improve outcomes for youth and families.

This toolkit provides a compilation of resources to help health professionals understand how trauma and SDoH intersect to shape the health and wellbeing of youth. It offers various tools for delivering trauma-informed, healing-centered approaches and addressing the social factors that influence health.

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Understanding Trauma Among Youth

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on functioning and well-being. Trauma can affect emotional, physical, social, mental, and spiritual health and may occur at the individual, family, or community level.³ Traumatic events that occur before the age of 18 are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).⁴

Trauma and ACEs can include experiences such as^{5,6}

- Abuse or neglect
- Loss of a loved one
- Bullying
- Poverty
- Racism
- Community violence

Nationally, around 76% of youth report experiencing one or more ACEs, and 19% report experiencing four or more. Young people who identify as belonging to historically marginalized populations, such as youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth, report the highest number of ACEs.⁷

Trauma and ACEs can expose young people to toxic stress, which can disrupt brain development, weaken the immune system, and affect learning, decision-making, and emotional regulation. Over time, these impacts can increase the risk of long-term effects across the life span, such as mental illness, chronic disease, relationship challenges, educational attainment barriers, and employment instability.⁸

Trauma and ACEs Facts Resources

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Trauma and Violence	Basic overview of trauma, its effects, and impacted communities	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
About Adverse Childhood Experiences	Basic facts about ACEs, their effects, and prevention strategies	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Toxic Stress	Overview of toxic stress and its effects on child health and development	Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
12 Core Concepts for Understanding Childhood Traumatic Stress	Educational materials and an online course covering key concepts for understanding and responding to childhood trauma	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Understanding the Effects of Trauma on Health	Fact sheet on trauma, health impacts, and trauma-informed approaches	Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center
We Can Prevent Childhood Adversity	Infographic on ACEs facts, statistics, and prevention strategies	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
TED Talk: How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime	Presentation by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris discussing the neurodevelopmental impact of abuse, neglect, and parental behavioral health issues	TED Conferences, LLC, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
The Pair of ACEs Tree	Visual tool illustrating the link between ACEs and adverse social environments	Center for Community Resilience

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Culture and Trauma	Collection of resources related to culture and trauma	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
How Historical and Intergenerational Trauma Shape Our Present Day Systems	Webinar on historical and intergenerational trauma and how to shift from trauma-informed to healing-centered systems change	The Wellbeing Project

Creating Supportive and Healing Environments for Youth

Youth are more likely to engage with services and experience better outcomes when health care services and programs provide care in ways that are responsive to their needs, validate their experiences, and recognize their strengths and autonomy. Trauma-informed care and healing-centered engagement are two frameworks that health providers can adopt to promote more supportive and inclusive environments for young people.

Trauma Informed Care (TIC) 101

A trauma-informed approach involves³

- Realizing the impact of trauma
- Recognizing the signs of trauma
- Responding through policies and practices
- Resisting retraumatization

TIC follows a set of six core principles³

- Establishing safety
- Building trust and transparency
- Offering peer support
- Fostering collaboration and mutuality
- Sharing power and promoting voice and choice
- Honoring culture and acknowledging historical harms

Trauma-informed Care Resources

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach	Foundational information on trauma and trauma-informed approaches	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center	Resource hub with practical tools, articles, webinars, and other informational materials for health care providers	Center for Health Care Strategies
What is Trauma-Informed Care?	Basic information on trauma-informed care, its benefits, and implementation tips	Center for Health Care Strategies

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
10 Key Ingredients for Trauma-Informed Care	Infographic explaining the causes and health repercussions of trauma, as well as strategies for becoming trauma-informed	Center for Health Care Strategies
Family-Youth-Provider Partnerships	Resources on cultivating partnerships among family, youth, and providers to mitigate trauma and improve healthcare outcomes	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
10 Ways for Providers to Promote Positive Childhood Experiences	Tip sheet for providers on using the HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) framework to support youth and families	HOPE National Resource Center
Connecting Families to Supports	Information on connecting youth and families with support following a disclosure of trauma	Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma
Trauma-Informed Referrals Guide: For Health & Social Service Professionals	Guide with practical strategies on conducting trauma-informed referrals to community resources	Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Racial Trauma Toolkit	Free 2-hour course to help youth providers understand, recognize, and respond to racial trauma	Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma
HOPE as an Anti-Racist Framework in Action	Resource with strategies and case examples on how to integrate the HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) and anti-racist frameworks to support children and families	HOPE National Resource Center

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Supporting Newcomers & Immigrant Communities	Listing of trauma-informed and culturally responsive resources for supporting newcomers and immigrant youth and families	Center for Childhood Resilience
Reimagining Migrant Mental Health	Free online course on trauma-informed, healing-centered approaches for supporting migrant families	Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health
Trauma-Informed Resources for LGBTQ+ Youth	Collection of trauma-informed resources for supporting LGBTQ+ youth	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Trauma-Informed Sports	Listing of resources on trauma-informed interventions through sport	THEN Center

Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE) 101

Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE) is an asset-based framework that builds on trauma-informed care by emphasizing strengths, culture, identity, relationships, and collective well-being. This approach validates young people's experiences of trauma while elevating their strengths and potential. HCE focuses on fostering hope, belonging, and opportunities for growth. Additionally, a healing-centered approach acknowledges the social, political, historical, and structural conditions that produce trauma and inequities and promotes holistic, root-cause solutions.⁹

HCE follows the CARMA principles¹⁰

- Culture: Identify and unify around a shared identity and community.
- Agency: Harness the capacity to act and effect positive change.
- Relationships: Develop healthy connections with others.
- Meaning: Find identity and purpose.
- Aspirations: Envision and achieve goals for personal and collective growth.

Healing-Centered Engagement Resources

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement	Article by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, the creator of Healing-Centered Engagement, discussing the framework and how it builds on trauma-informed care	Dr. Shawn Ginwright
Crosswalk: Youth Thrive and Healing-Centered Engagement	Report on applying healing-centered engagement and building protective and promotive factors in young people	Center for the Study of Social Policy
Using Healing-Centered Engagement to Address Youth Trauma & Mental Health	Webinar featuring Dr. Shawn Ginwright, where he discusses how Healing-Centered Engagement can support youth exposed to trauma	Grantmakers for Education
Recognizing Healing-Centered Community Practices as a Complement to Trauma-Informed Interventions and Services	Brief discussing community and institutional trauma, community healing approaches, and the role of trusted partners	The Praxis Project
Healing-Centered Restorative Engagement worksheet	Worksheet with reflective prompts for healing and restoring connection after harm	National Health Care for the Homeless Council

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)

The social determinants of health (SDoH) are the conditions and environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect health and well-being. These include socioeconomic stability, education, health care access, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.¹¹ When basic needs in any of these domains go unmet, such as stable housing, reliable transportation, nutritious food, or supportive relationships, young people may experience toxic stress, increased barriers to care, and adverse health effects.¹² Unmet needs can, therefore, be traumatic and compound the effects of other adversities, particularly when prolonged.¹³ Understanding the relationship between trauma and SDoH can help providers recognize barriers to health, support more holistic care strategies, and advance health equity.

SDoH Resources

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Healthy People 2030: Social Determinants of Health	Foundational overview of the Social Determinants of Health and links for further learning	Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Social Determinants of Health Resources	Collection of educational resources on how the SDoH impact child and family outcomes and well-being	Child Welfare Information Gateway
Social Determinants of Health 101 for Health Care: Five Plus Five	Discussion paper covering key considerations for health care organizations on addressing the SDoH	National Academy of Medicine
The Community Resilience Tree	Visual tool illustrating the link between equitable, trauma-informed systems and social supports and positive outcomes in children and families	Center for Community Resilience
Family Resource Guide: A Starting Point for Help in Illinois	Community resource guide for youth and families in Illinois	Health & Medicine Policy Research Group

Organizational Policies and Systems-Change

Trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches are most effective when they extend beyond the individual level to include organizational and systems-change solutions. Strategies may include revamping policies and procedures, workforce development efforts, and racial equity and inclusion initiatives.¹⁴

Organizational Resources

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach	Guidance for embedding trauma-informed approaches at the organizational level	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Creating Trauma-Informed Systems	Collection of sector-specific resources on building trauma-informed systems within child-serving institutions	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
NCTSN Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment	Free downloadable organizational assessment for organizations serving children and families	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit	Toolkit with guidance for organizations and professionals to become trauma-informed	National Center on Family Homelessness
Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Assessment Tool	Assessment tool for measuring an organization's practices within five key elements of trauma-informed care	Trauma-Informed Oregon
Trauma-Informed Policymaking Tool	Resource with guidance on applying the trauma-informed principles to the policymaking process	Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Trauma Informed Organizational Framework Policy	Template for writing a trauma-informed organizational policy	Trauma-Informed Oregon

Resource (clickable link)	Description	Developer
Trauma-Informed Care Champions: From Treaters to Healers	Series of free videos to use as part of meetings, trainings, and awareness efforts	Center for Health Care Strategies
Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations — An Organizational Reflection Toolkit	Toolkit with downloadable resources for organizations on delivering accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed care	National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health
Incorporating Racial Equity into Trauma-Informed Care	Brief discussing six considerations for health systems and providers on enhancing trauma-informed care through racial equity approaches	Center for Health Care Strategies
Healing-Centered Engagement Toolkit	Guide providing a framework for the Healing Centered Engagement approach, including an evaluation tool and worksheets.	Flourish Agenda

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About Us

Illinois ACEs Response Collaborative

Established in 2011, the Illinois ACEs Response Collaborative (the Collaborative) works to catalyze a cross-sector movement to prevent trauma and promote thriving across the lifespan and to place the impact of childhood experience at the forefront of the equity agenda in Illinois. The Collaborative envisions a thriving and equitable Illinois in which individuals, families, communities, and all systems and sectors work together to prevent trauma, heal, and flourish.

Learn more by visiting hmprg.org/programs/illinois-aces-response-collaborative/

Health & Medicine Policy Research Group

Health & Medicine is a Chicago based non-profit working to improve the health of all people in Illinois by promoting health equity. Founded in 1981 by Dr. Quentin Young, it was formed as an action-oriented policy center—nimble, independent, and focused on regional health issues. Health & Medicine's mission is to promote social justice and challenge inequities in health and health care. It conducts research, educates and collaborates with other groups to advocate for policies and impact health systems to improve the health status of all people. Health & Medicine has successfully developed health policy recommendations and implementation strategies for different public and private entities, earning the trust of the legislature, advocates, the media, researchers and policymakers at all levels of government in Illinois to become the region's "honest broker" on healthcare policy matters.

Learn more at hmprg.org

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