



Trauma-Informed Care for Individuals with I/DD

According to a 2022 study by the University of North Texas, individuals with I/DD are three to four times more likely to experience traumatic events when compared to the general population. These events, which can include physical or psychological abuse, being the victim of a crime, or witnessing abuse of others, can have lasting effects on an individual's mental and physical health, as well as their emotional well-being.

What is trauma-informed care?

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that involves recognizing that an individual has experienced trauma and acknowledged that their experience is affecting their daily life and the people around them, including direct support professionals and others involved in their care. The goal is not to provide treatment, but instead to offer support and any services that may be needed.

To be effective, TIC must be implemented on an organizational level and should be reflected in the organization's culture. There should be an emphasis on recognizing the effects of trauma and responding in an appropriate way to avoid triggers and re-traumatization.

6 Guiding Principles of TIC

The guiding principles provide a framework for caring for individuals who have experienced trauma while reducing the likelihood of re-traumatization. The 6 guiding principles are:

1. **Safety** – Providing an environment that makes individuals feel physically and emotionally safe while protecting their privacy
2. **Choice** – Ensuring that the individuals have choice and control, along with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities
3. **Collaboration** – Involving the individual in decisions that have to do with their care whenever possible
4. **Trustworthiness** – Maintaining respectful and professional boundaries
5. **Empowerment** – Helping individuals feel validated and affirmed



What is re-traumatization?

Re-traumatization is any situation that triggers the same kinds of feelings and reactions the individual experienced while a traumatic event was happening. The risk for re-traumatization is high for anyone who has had a traumatic event in the past, and even more so if trauma occurred multiple times.

Most of the time, re-traumatization is inadvertent rather than intentional. Triggers can include smells, sounds, certain words, or types of interactions and may not be obvious.

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Putting TIC into Practice

Here are five tips to implementing and maintaining TIC as part of your organization's culture.

1. **Get to know the individuals in your care:** Beyond just knowing that an individual has experienced trauma, learn what triggers to avoid and what makes an individual feel safe and comfortable. Because some individuals with I/DD may have communication barriers, it's important to look for clues like behavior and body language.
2. **Understand that everyone reacts to trauma differently:** Two people who experience the same event may have very different reactions. Understand that individuals have their own ways of coping and may exhibit a wide range of symptoms that vary in severity.
3. **Adjust your thinking:** Take an empathetic approach and adjust your view. For example, the University of Buffalo Center for Social Research suggests changing your thinking from "What's wrong with this individual?" to "What happened to this individual?"
4. **Share information:** A caregiver who works with an individual on a daily basis is in the best position to know what their triggers are and how to avoid them. Sharing this information with other staff will help them avoid unintentional re-traumatization. Be sure to keep individuals' privacy in mind when sharing information.
5. **Provide ongoing training:** Training can't be a one-time event. Ongoing training and open communication will help staff better understand the effects of trauma and how TIC can benefit everyone involved – individuals, staff, and their families. Eventually, TIC should become second nature.



Examples of Traumatic Events

These are a few examples of events that can have a lasting effect:

- Loss of a loved one
 - Physical abuse
 - Emotional abuse
 - Being the victim of a crime
 - Experiencing a natural disaster
 - Experiencing homelessness
 - Witnessing abuse of another person
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