



Youth Restoration Project

Cultivating Relationships; Restoring Community

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Trauma-informed Prevention Strategies

Introduction: Of the vast scientific research on the effect of trauma on the brain, the key fact to know is that trauma shuts down the brain's language and executive-functioning centers. All attention and energy must go to survival -- flight, fight, freeze. So, when trauma is triggered, rational decision-making is not an option. This doesn't excuse hurtful behavior, but distressed people often aren't making conscious choices. Focus on de-escalation and avoiding triggers. "Trauma-informed" responses to any unwanted behavior are healthy, restorative and maximally effective, whether or not trauma is present.

Try to strengthen these practices:

- Assume the presence of trauma. You can't know for certain, so you might as well take the possibility for granted.
- Use a lower-register or velvet voice, restorative questions, eye contact, patience.
- Put your own feelings aside. Be there for the other person.
- Try the excellent question: "What do you need right now?"
- Understand that they don't feel safe.
- To help them be safe, start with how they feel. (Again, restorative questions, velvet voice, etc.) Can they calm down and be re-integrated or do they need a higher level of attention or even clinical service?
- Use time-in. Time-outs just make things worse, unless it's a quick cool off. Help the person breathe and self-soothe. Be there whole-heartedly; be "in" with them.
- Sometimes -- check your gut -- it helps to share ways you use to cool off. Count to ten; think of someone you love; pray; sing a certain song; focus on relaxing...
- If they've been insulting or harming, ask how they think they can make it right -- but Only if and when it seems they're ready.
- Know yourself. We each need to be aware of our own triggers
- Apologize if, unfortunately, you are triggered.

Practices to avoid are on the back page. They are at least as important.



Trauma-informed Prevention Strategies

(Continued)

Try to avoid these practices:

- Resist taking it personally. It has nothing to do with you.
- Resist getting mad. Your anger can trigger traumatic response, so take 5 minutes if you need them. Your anger clouds your thinking just as their trauma clouds theirs.
- A power struggle can trigger the fight or flight response. Avoid physically blocking their way if they're fleeing, getting louder; or arguing.
- Give them choices so they don't feel trapped and needing to fight. If/then choices can help, like: If you're swearing or yelling at me, I can't hear what you're trying to tell me, and I want to hear. If I can't help, who can?
- Avoid giving time-outs which trigger feeling unsafe, abandoned, alone, rejected.
- Avoid random consequences (punishments) which don't teach anything other than that the person is bad. Consequences often trigger "fight" responses -- righteousness, opposition, anger... Try questions like: Since harm was done, how could things be made right?
- Be wary of any sort of touch, empathetic or directive (hand on shoulder to get them where they need to be). Touch might have been associated with their trauma. If you know they are big huggers and they rush into your arms, well... But don't initiate.

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