

Trauma Informed Approaches in Public Safety DPSST Analysis and Tasks

Prepared by: Staci Yutzie – DPSST Training Coordinator

What is a trauma informed approach?

A trauma informed approach means that a program (or system) recognizes trauma (the impact, signs and symptoms) and responds appropriately (through staff training, minimizing re-traumatization, and in “doing no harm”).

Who is impacted?

Offender/suspect/client/inmate-

- May have experienced trauma and that in turn may relate to the reason they are coming to our attention.
 - Trauma is related to substance abuse, depression, anxiety, anger and hostility.
 - “The high rates of trauma exposure among persons, particularly women, with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system require a systemic response that views trauma history as the norm rather than an exception”
From: Adapting Evidence-Based Practices for Persons With Mental Illness Involved With the Criminal Justice System
Fred C. Osher , M.D.; Henry J. Steadman , Ph.D.
- The symptoms of trauma may impact a person’s response to us (patrol officer, jail staff or probation officer). It may contribute to a lack of cooperation, aggression or other acting out.
- Trauma interferes with a person’s ability to benefit from programs. This is known as a responsivity factor in Evidence Based Practices (risk/need/responsivity). There are programs/services that research has found been found to be effective in working with these individuals.

Victims-

- May have experienced trauma and that in turn may relate to the reason they are coming to our attention.
- It may contribute to their cooperation or lack thereof.

- Victims need to be handled with compassion, they need to be connected with resources, they need to have appropriate follow up, they need to understand what is happening and what will happen in laymans terms.

Our fellow officers-

- May have also experienced trauma, vicarious or otherwise, which impacts their response to situations and results in burn out and other problems.

What does a trauma informed approach look like?

According to SAMHSA, a trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Note: The similarities to conversations surrounding procedural justice, diversity and in general how we treat the people we interact with.

How does this relate to our basic academies?

Trauma informed approaches are interrelated with so many other concepts that we talk about and many of which we already cover here in our basic classes.

- In both BP and BCL (and some in BPP) we cover trauma as it is related to veterans (including PTSD and trauma).
- In BP we cover mental illness and disabilities (responding to mentally ill persons), critical incident stress awareness (including PTSD, critical incident stress incidents, secondary trauma), resiliency and emotional survival (vicarious and officer trauma). Trauma informed approaches are also a part course content on child abuse and sexual assault investigations.
- In BPP we cover Mental Health Crisis Assessment, Stress First Aid (vicarious and officer trauma), cognitive behavioral interventions (EBP response to persons with trauma), reducing recidivism by focusing on risk factors/criminogenic needs (tailoring approaches for individuals, including assessing for crisis and other needs), responsivity (trauma is a responsivity factor), de-escalation and conflict resolution, communicating with stakeholders (including victims), domestic

violence (including a practical skills application in a scenario in responding to a victim who has experienced trauma).

- In BCL we cover mental health and disabilities (which includes some about trauma and responses), resiliency and emotional survival (vicarious and officer trauma).

What we can cover-

- Awareness: what is trauma, what are the symptoms
- Response: techniques for interacting with a traumatized person, kinds of responses as well as practicing responses in scenarios.

Steps we should take:

- Update materials and add a section on trauma to BP Mental Health & Disabilities, currently it covers brain trauma and crisis response. This material should explain the concept of trauma and how it may appear in the suspects and victims police encounter as well as discuss interactions.
- A similar update as above should be made with BP Interview and Interrogation.
- Add a scenario to BP Mental Health & Disabilities regarding interacting with someone who has experienced trauma.
- Add a scenario to BCL Mental Health & Disabilities regarding interacting with someone who has experienced trauma.
- Add a section in BPP Mental Health Crisis Assessment to include an appropriate trauma response.