

Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

The four Rs

Apply the four Rs — realize, recognize, respond, and resist — to your practice's approach to trauma:¹

- **Realize** the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery.
- **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma in patients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
- **Respond** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
- **Resist** retraumatization of clients and staff.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach

Practices must be prepared to safely and promptly address experiences of trauma, including ongoing cases of trauma, such as interpersonal violence, that require immediate attention and compliance with mandatory reporting laws where applicable. But even past traumas can cause devastating effects on health outcomes.

Using a trauma-informed care approach can:^{1,2}

- Increase patient engagement
- Increase the likelihood patients will return for future appointments
- Empower practice staff
- Help develop better relationships between providers and patients
- Potentially support higher-quality health care and improved outcomes

Remember:²

- There is no universal definition of trauma, and everyone's lived experience is unique.

- Ongoing training around sensitivity and trauma-informed care is critical for all practices.
- Recovery requires mutual respect, transparency, collaboration, and hope.

Principles of trauma-informed care

It's important for practices to adopt these key principles:¹

- **Safety.** At every patient touchpoint, practices must promote a sense of safety for their patients, both physically and psychologically.
- **Trustworthiness and transparency.** A practice's operations and decision-making should be clearly understood among staff and patients alike.
- **Peer support and mutual self-help.** Promoting peer support for trauma survivors among others who have experienced trauma (or trusted family members in the case of children) can help promote trust, safety, and mutual support opportunities.
- **Collaboration and mutuality.** Staff and personnel at all levels must be aligned, because every patient interaction, no matter how small, can impact a patient's care.
- **Empowerment, voice, and choice.** Practices must support the voices and lived experiences of patients who have experienced trauma and help facilitate a patient's recovery on their own terms.
- **Cultural, historical, and gender issues.** Practices must be self-aware and work to eliminate harmful biases and presumptions to provide a successful person-centered, trauma-informed care plan.



Trauma-informed care has the potential to support higher-quality health care and improved outcomes.²

Post-traumatic growth

Providing trauma-informed care can help patients experience post-traumatic growth, which is defined as the “positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.”³ While we strive for our patients to experience growth through recovery, not everyone who has been impacted by trauma will experience post-traumatic growth. However, post-traumatic growth outnumbers reports of psychiatric disorders in the aftermath of traumatic events.⁴

Providers can help facilitate post-traumatic growth by:⁴

- Acknowledging the impact of the trauma on the patient
- Listening without judgment
- Being mindful of how trauma can affect a patient’s thoughts and beliefs
- Recognizing the patient’s effort to self-manage the impact of the trauma
- Being aware that even as the patient demonstrates post-traumatic growth, they may be experiencing distress associated with the trauma

Post-traumatic growth is an outcome and a process. It is about maintaining a sense of hope that a person who has experienced trauma can not only persist but experience positive life changes as a result.

Sources:

1. “SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach,” SAMHSA’s Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf.
2. “Key Ingredients for Successful Trauma-Informed Care Implementation,” Center for Health Care Strategies, April 2016, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/childrens_mental_health/atc-whitepaper-040616.pdf.
3. “What is PTG?,” Posttraumatic Growth Research Group, Department of Psychological Science, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, <https://ptgi.uncc.edu/what-is-ptg>.
4. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth: A New Perspective on Psychotraumatology,” *Psychiatric Times*, Vol. 21, No. 4, April 1, 2004, <https://www.bu.edu/wheelock/files/2018/05/Article-Tedeschi-and-Lawrence-Calhoun-Posttraumatic-Growth-2014.pdf>.