

TRAUMA IN THE LIBRARY

Trauma is a response to a negative external event(s) that surpasses an individual's ordinary coping skills. Trauma can impact brain development and behavior.

Trauma manifests in many ways in libraries and other community settings. What's most important is that professionals understand how trauma affects the brain. Sometimes individual behaviors are the result of triggered trauma and not simply a "decision" to act out.

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED LIBRARY?

"At the heart of trauma-informed care is a sensitivity to individual's past and current adverse



experiences and a deeper understanding of the individual's lived experience. Librarians can support individuals through, emotional coping skills, and asking questions like 'How can I help you' rather than 'What's wrong with you?'"¹

Trauma sensitivity will look differently at individual libraries. A shared definition can bring librarians, community members and policymakers together around a common vision.

Six key principles of a trauma-informed approach include

- Safety (physical & psychological)
- Trustworthiness & Transparency between librarians and families
- Peer Support & Mutual Self Help
- Collaboration & Mutuality (staff to administrators)
- Empowerment, Voice & Choice (recognizing strengths and skill development)
- Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues (considers/leverages language and cultural traditions, is gender-responsive, addresses historical trauma)¹

¹ Unlocking the door to learning: Trauma-informed classrooms & transformational schools. <https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf>

² Trauma and the brain: An introduction for professionals working with teens. <https://centerforadolescentstudies.com/trauma-and-brain/>

³ Dotson, L. (2017). The Transformative Power of Trauma-Informed Teaching.

<https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2017/11/22/the-transformative-power-of-trauma-informed-teaching.html>

⁴ www.traumasensitiveschools.org

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/topics/trauma-violence/samhsas-trauma-informed-approach>



CREATING A CARE-BASED LIBRARY FACILITY

The library is perceived as a safe space in the community. Many individuals need the solace and protection the library offers. The library can also provide positive community interaction that leads to a safe space for all. When the community contribute to the definition of a library, the facility becomes a judgement-free, accepting space for the entire community.

CARING THROUGH BIBLIOTHERAPY

- Bibliotherapy is “the use of selecting reading materials as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and psychiatry; also, guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading.”² “Reading has been shown to be able to help people understand the issues they are experiencing, amplifying the effects of other treatment, normalize experiences with mental health concerns and care, and offer hope for positive change.”³ “Most of us can point to books that helped us through hard times, renewed our hope, made us feel understood and less alone, or gave us a valuable new perspective or information on events in our lives.”⁴
- Bibliotherapy is both an ancient practice and a new discipline. “Bibliotherapy...tended to be based in a medical context, with an emphasis on self-help books. But we were dedicated to fiction as the ultimate cure because it gives readers a transformational experience.” – Ella Berthoud, Bibliotherapist⁵
- Many resources exist for choosing materials. Some sources for therapeutic children’s books include www.apa.org and www.childswork.com



² American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/bibliotherapy>

³ www.goodtherapy.org <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/bibliotherapy>

⁴ Dajevskies, E., et al. (2016). Therapy by the book. *School Library Journal*.

http://www.slj.com/2016/10/programs/therapy-by-the-book/#_

⁵ Dovey, C. (2015). Can reading make you happier? *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/can-reading-make-you-happier>

EIGHT TOOLS TO MAKE YOU A BETTER Librarian

(Adapted from Center for Adolescent Studies, 2015)

- **1. MINDFULNESS** Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of your own experience with an attitude of non-reactivity. The more mindful you are, the better you'll be able to connect with, listen, and respond to youth. *(TIP: Practice mindfulness by taking 10 mindful breaths; whenever your mind wanders away from the breath, simply return your awareness to your breathing.)*
- **2. CURIOSITY** Teens often feel like adults aren't interested in their lives; that they just want to tell them what they can and can't do. Practice curiosity to let youth know you're actually interested in them. *(TIP: Ask youth about their hobbies and how they best like to spend their time, the music they like, the movies they're into, etc. Become interested in youth culture.)*
- **3. EMPATHY** Adults often don't do a good job of considering teens' perspectives, especially when it comes to youth issues like drugs, sex, etc. Practicing empathy will help you stand in the shoes of the youth you work with. Teens will more drawn to you if you attempt to understand them, rather than judge them. *(TIP: Especially with youth you may feel tension with, take their perspective and "live it" momentarily – visualize what it's like to be him or her and hold strong to that view point.)*
- **4. COMPASSION** is wanting to help youth by alleviating their suffering, stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, etc. When they know you want to help (from an authentic place and not just to get what you want), they will feel more connected to you, trust you more, and ultimately be more receptive to whatever it is you're offering. *(TIP: Pick a youth you work with who is struggling in some way. Visualize him or her and him or her compassion. Disclose to the you want to help them when appropriate.)*
- **5. ACTIVE LISTENING** Often adults are conditioned to be directive with youth. We tell them what to do, but rarely listen. When we listen, we offer an emotionally corrective experience: one in which they are heard on the rare occasion by an adult and can be fully witnessed, listened to, understood. Practice active listening and youth will trust you more and be receptive to what you're offering. *(TIP: While listening to a youth, use mindfulness to keep your awareness in the present moment, curiosity to keep your intention authentic, and body language (eye contact, body posture) to let the youth know you are listening undividedly.)*
- **6. SELF DISCLOSURE** Skillful self-disclosure is the practice of revealing personal information for the specific sake of relationship building. Youth need to know that we are human, with opinions & experiences in order to connect with us. It's imperative that we don't over disclose or disclose anything inappropriate, but don't be afraid to show up and be yourself. *(TIP: Fold a piece of paper in half. In one half write, "information I'm comfortable disclosing," on the other half write "information I'm not comfortable disclosing." Write down opinions, life experiences, etc. Doing this ahead of time will help you to not be caught off guard when youth ask you about yourself.)*
- **7. TRACKING SKILLS** are the ability to recognize emotional tone, typically via body language, facial expressions, etc. When we practice tracking emotion, we can better attune to youth, which contributes to stronger relationships. *(TIP: Notice the body language -especially facial expressions - of the youth you work with as they talk to you. Try not to assume what they're feeling, but rather become curious about their body language as a window to investigate further: "I notice your brow is scrunched up right now, what are you feeling?")*
- **8. HEALTHY BOUNDARY SETTING** Don't be a pushover with youth, especially if you're trying to build an authentic relationship. I'm not saying you should be punitive and overly aggressive (please don't do that!), I'm saying it's unhealthy to not set boundaries with youth when they're tested. That will ultimately take away from the potential of a youth to view you as a caring, safe, trustworthy adult relationship.