Meeting the Needs of Higher Education Through Trauma-Informed Leadership

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CUPA-HR Webinar

Presenter

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As a result of participating in today’s session, you will be able to...

- Define traumatic stress and describe the multiple ways in which trauma may be experienced within higher education.
- Discuss the body’s trauma response system’s impact on human behavior and psychology.
- Integrate elements of trauma-informed care into their leadership practice.
- Reframe problematic employee issues through a trauma-informed lens.
Let’s Ground Ourselves for a Moment

• Close your eyes (if you’re able and comfortable doing so)
• Sit in a comfortable position
• Pay attention to your body and breathing
• Listen
Using the Chat Feature…

• Name, Role, & Institution
• What comes to mind when you think of the word trauma?
Perry’s Pattern of Stress Activation

Stressor

Unpredictable
Extreme
Prolonged
SENSITIZATION Vulnerability

Predictable
Moderate
Controllable
TOLERANCE Resilience

Perry & Winfrey, 2021
Describing Trauma

• **Acute:** Results from a single stressful or dangerous event.

• **Chronic:** Results from repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful or dangerous events.

• **Complex:** Results from exposure to multiple traumatic events.

• **Historical:** Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding from massive group trauma across generations.
The Trauma Response System

Creativity | Thinking | Language | Values | Time | Hope

Reward | Memory | Bonding | Emotions

Arousal | Sleep | Appetite | Movement

Temperature | Respiration | Cardiac

Brainstem

Diencephalon

Limbic System

Traumatic Stress

The Trauma Response System

Creativity | Thinking | Language | Values | Time | Hope

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Traumatic Stress
Trauma Exposure Responses

• Fear, Guilt, Anger, & Hopelessness
• Diminished Creativity
• Dualistic (Black & White) Thinking
• Sleep Disturbance & Chronic Exhaustion
• Hypervigilance
• Inability to Feel Empathy
• Minimizing
• Avoidance
• Withdraw
• Short-temperedness & Irritability

Photo Credit: Margaret, (Lynch, 2017)
Poll Question

Which of these trauma-exposure responses have you noticed in yourself or others since the onset of COVID-19? (Select any that apply)

- Fear, Guilt, Anger, or Hopelessness
- Diminished Creativity
- Dualistic (Black & White) Thinking
- Chronic Exhaustion
- Hypervigilance
- Feeling Less Empathetic
- Minimizing
- Avoidance
- Withdraw
- Short-temperedness & Irritability
The Trauma-Informed Leader

- Engenders Safety
- Culturally Competent, Socially Aware, & Anti-Racist
- Collaborative & Empowering
- Contagiously Empathetic
- Emotionally Mature
- Values Pause

TIL (Trauma-Informed Leadership)
Trauma-Informed Leaders are Introspective

- How is your leadership practice informed or impacted by your own past?
- What are your emotional triggers?
- How and when do you take time to check in with yourself?

“If you don't heal what hurt you you'll bleed on people who didn't cut you.” ~Unknown
Poll Question

To what degree do you feel psychologically or emotionally safe at work?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
Trauma-Informed Leaders engender safety

- When we feel unsafe, our stress activation system is triggered.
- Safety should be defined by those who are being served.
- Active listening, transparency, consistency, accountability, and respecting boundaries are first steps to cultivating safety.
Trauma-Informed leaders are empowering and collaborative

• Empowerment looks like choice and voice.
• They create patterns of stress activation that develop resilience, not sensitization.
• Curiosity and input are highly valued and publicly recognized
Trauma-Informed Leaders are culturally competent, socially aware, & anti-racist

- Trauma (including historical, collective, and generational trauma) disproportionately impact those from historically marginalized backgrounds.
- Merely acknowledging current events and struggles is not enough.
- TIL’s go out of their way to understand the perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds of others. Particularly focusing on understanding where their privileges may blind them to such experiences and perspectives.
Trauma-Informed Leaders are contagiously empathetic

- Social psychologist Elaine Hatfield defined emotional contagion as “…how people who observe the emotions and behaviors of another tend to copy those emotions and behaviors.”
- What Happened to You v. What’s Wrong with You?
- Lead with and reward empathy and others will follow
Trauma-Informed Leaders are emotionally mature

“…thinking objectively and conceptually while sustaining deep emotional connections to others” (Gibson, 2015, p. 27)

- Set realistic expectations
- Consistent in behaviors and responses (not capricious)
- Respect boundaries
- Flexible
- Apologize when mistakes are made
- Reflective
- Truthful
Trauma-Informed Leaders value pause

- Constantly being in stress reduces our ability to think creatively, complexly, and empathetically.
- Stress can be addictive, and folks may begin believing their productivity is tied to their stress levels.
- Priorities matter. We can’t be everything to everyone at all times.
- Leaders must model the way.
Reflect: Think about a time when an employee or co-worker was struggling or behaved in a problematic way. Try to reframe their behavior(s) through a trauma-informed lens and how principles of trauma-informed leader could help to support the individual?

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<th>Common Trauma Exposure Response’s</th>
<th>Trauma-Informed Leadership Principles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fear, Guilt, Anger, &amp; Hopelessness</td>
<td>• Introspective</td>
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Takeaways & Call to Action

✓ Trauma is individualized and has both physiological and psychological implications.
✓ Trauma-Informed Leadership starts from the inside out.
✓ Ask “What happened to you?” not “What’s wrong with you?”
✓ Higher education as a helping profession has an ethical responsibility to promote and incentivize trauma-informed leadership at all levels.
Trauma-Informed Leadership Starter Pack

1. THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma
   - Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

2. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing
   - Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.
   - Oprah Winfrey

3. Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others
   - Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

4. Organizational Trauma and Healing
   - Pat Vivian and Shana Hormann
Submit questions to our presenters using the Chat.
Thank You

*Please complete your event evaluation*

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References


