

What is Trauma Informed Care?

Over the last 10 years, there has been a new level of recognition of the complexities of the challenges faced by children who experience a history of repeated personal trauma including sexual or physical abuse, violence, traumatic losses, or other disruptions or betrayals, often by their primary caregivers. This type of trauma is what is experienced by the majority of youth entering the child welfare system and often was experienced during the childhoods of the adults caring for them. The current treatment approaches are not designed to address this type of trauma and new research is identifying what does work and experts have developed best practice guidelines for trauma informed care and treatment for children with complex traumatic stress disorders.

While the term “trauma informed care” or “TIC” has become very popular, it is important to clarify what trauma informed care actually includes according to these guidelines and what trauma informed care is within the Child Welfare System itself. The following definitions may be helpful in clarifying TIC and a trauma informed child welfare system (TICW).

Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

“Trauma-Informed Care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.” (Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet 2009, p. 133)

Trauma Informed Child Welfare System (TICW)

“A trauma informed child welfare system is one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the varying impact of traumatic stress on children, caregivers, and those who have contact with the system. Programs and organizations within the system infuse this knowledge awareness and skills into their organizational cultures, policies and practices. They act in collaboration, using the best available science to facilitate and support resiliency and recovery.” (Hendricks, Conradi, & Wilson, 2011, p.189)

A major component of trauma informed care is systematically assessing and addressing the impact of trauma in key areas. Just like in business models, where strategic planning methods for assessment and implementation are used in determining the best way to achieve the agreed upon goals, a phase oriented TIC model organizes the steps to be taken in treatment so that children and families can understand and engage in a plan that is best for their healing process while at the same time taking into account key areas of focus that are known to be important when working with children and families who have experienced complex forms of trauma. A TICW supports TIC practices within the child welfare system and promotes access to TIC services for the families they serve.