

Module 6:

Providing Developmentally Appropriate Services: Neuroscience and Trauma-Informed Care

Objectives

1. To gain understanding of brain development and functioning during emerging adulthood.
2. To gain knowledge of the neurobiology of traumatic stress.
3. To gain skills for basing services on individual needs and trauma informed care.
4. To engage young people in leadership and system change who have had experiences of trauma.

Scenario for Team Discussion



Support Following Traumatic Experiences ~ Michele

Several weeks ago Michele (aged 18) was referred to the mental health agency where you work by her primary care provider because of severe anxiety and depression. Michele was assigned to you but despite two scheduled meetings, she has not shown up and you are preparing to call her to tell her that she will be dropped because of the no-shows. Today, Michele walks into your office tearful and upset and with visible bruises on her face. Michele reports that last night she left her live-in boyfriend after he pulled a gun and threatened to kill her during an argument. Michele ran away late at night after managing to calm him following the argument, and stayed overnight with a friend. Michele says her friend does not have room for her to stay more than a night or two. Michele tells you that she and her boyfriend have been drinking more lately and using marijuana on a daily basis. The boyfriend is unemployed and has been getting angrier recently and he has punched or kicked Michele and threatened to kill her several times over the last several months. She is scared of him and following the gun incident she is determined not to return.

Questions for Team Discussion

After reading and thinking about the scenario above, engage in a staff discussion of the following questions:

1. What would you do first to make a safety plan with Michele?
 2. Who else would you contact?
 3. What steps would you take to assist Michele to recover from these traumatic events?
 4. What else would you do to support Michele?
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Debriefing

After discussing the scenario, it may be useful to reflect on what staff members learned from each other, using the following questions to guide the conversation:

1. What ideas about assisting Michele seem to be most useful?
2. What assumptions emerged in the discussion and how do team members communicate about them?
3. How did Michele's level of brain development get considered in your discussion?
4. If any team members are survivors of interpersonal violence, how do their experiences affect their responses?
5. Where are the areas of agreement and disagreement?
6. In what ways do team members' responses help you to think differently about how to proceed with Michele?

Role Play for Practice and Discussion



Bullying, Trauma, and Mental Health ~ Keon

Keon is a 17-year-old Pacific Islander male. He is the only Pacific Islander student in his high school that has over 1,000 students. Keon lives with his mother, father, and three older brothers. He plays on the varsity football team. Keon has never spoken to a mental health counselor. You were introduced to Keon by the school counselor after she asked him if he would be willing to talk to you about the anxiety and panic attacks that have recently been getting in the way of his academic performance. Keon's school performance has been declining over the past 10 months. He is close to losing his spot on the varsity team because of his academic performance. Keon will not allow the school counselor to tell his mother about her concerns for his mental health. Keon has told you he expects to get a college football scholarship. He just disclosed he has a history of being bullied and beaten up by his older brothers and by peers at school. He discloses that he has also bullied other kids. He feels remorseful and wants to help other kids being bullied. This is your second meeting with Keon and the school counselor.

Training Role Play Instructions

Volunteers will be needed to play the roles of Keon and the school counselor and will need to read the description of the situation and relevant perspective carefully and take a few minutes to get "into" the role. Other team members will observe the role play and be prepared to discuss.

Service provider engages Keon in conversation and guides discussion in directions Keon thinks would be helpful in understanding his situation more fully and beginning to think about possible solutions. Pause at a natural break after 10-12 minutes.

Keon

Put yourself in Keon's shoes as the only Pacific Islander in his school, having been scared when you were beaten up and bullied and ashamed of engaging in bullying behavior yourself. Imagine your fears of being bullied by the other kids in high school if news got out about your mental health symptoms. Imagine your panic about possibly losing your opportunity for your dream, to get a football scholarship. How are you going to feel about talking to the school counselor who is suggesting talking to your mother about your mental health?

Service Provider

As a counselor in the high school, you're a member of a different ethnic group from Keon. You've met Keon once when he told you about his history related to violence and bullying and his terror of losing his lifelong dream of a football scholarship. Think about how you would engage Keon in talking about his mental health, his dreams, and the potential for help and support. How would you address cultural, family, and peer issues? How will you create a sense of safety for Keon? How might you talk with Keon about involving his family? What might you try to achieve in this session?

Observers

Note where the service provider engages in any or all of the following activities:

- *demonstrates an appreciation of Keon's strengths,*
- *invites Keon's definition of the concerns and ideas about what would be helpful,*
- *creates a sense of safety for Keon,*
- *demonstrates increasing understanding and empathy with Keon's situation,*
- *identifies supports in Keon's life,*
- *motivates Keon toward taking steps toward beginning change,*
- *identifies first achievable steps in change process.*

Notice where/when Keon seems more engaged, more positive about the possibility that his situation could improve.

Discussion of Role Play

First, the person playing the role of Keon shares their perspective about what was most and least helpful in the interaction and where they felt most supported. Next the person playing the school counselor describes their choices about how to engage with Keon, where they felt the session went well and what they might have done differently. The school counselor invites observers to share their questions and ideas in response to the school counselor's specific areas of concern. Observers may also ask Keon questions about their perceptions of the interaction. When did they connect? Where was there a "disconnect"? How could the relationship be fostered?

Module 6 Discussion Questions

Here we offer questions to guide discussion of how module 6 content could be applied in your team's work in the local area and with the young people you serve:

1. What have you found to be effective ways to create a safe environment for youth and/or families who have experienced complex trauma? Describe an example of what you did and how the youth and/or families responded.
2. Telling their story in to others can be traumatizing for many youth. How have you supported a young person when telling their story as part of a self-advocacy effort or in advocacy on behalf of other youth? What were the challenges in doing this? What was most helpful to the youth?
3. How do you incorporate brain development in your work with young people? Think of a situation where a young person was making a poor decision. What did you do help the young person consider the likely consequences and think it through in a different way?