

# USING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

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## ADD TO THIS SECTION:

- Any approved adaptations you are making to your EBPs  
in order to make them more sensitive to trauma



# TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO PROGRAMMING

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## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Childhood experiences can have an impact on health and well-being into adulthood. The more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) a person has, the greater the possibility of negative health outcomes. For more information about the impact of ACEs visit these resources:

CDC: About Adverse Childhood Experiences

[https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about\\_ace.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html)

Nadine Burke Harris: How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)

Reminders of these experiences can have a re-traumatizing effect on people who have experienced trauma. That's why more and more people are calling for a "trauma-informed approach" to programs that involve sensitive topics – including sexual health education programs.

## WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH?

For Health Educators, a trauma-informed approach to programming means understanding, recognizing, preparing for, and responding to the effects trauma may have on program participants.

There are six guiding principles to consider when looking through a trauma-informed lens. They are: Safety; Trustworthiness; Choice; Collaboration; Empowerment; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Considerations [1, 2].

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety, including where and when services are delivered and an awareness of an individual's discomfort or unease.
- **Trustworthiness:** Ensuring trustworthiness through clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries.
- **Choice:** Allowing individuals to take part in decision-making regarding their level of participation, and building small but important choices into programming.
- **Collaboration:** Communicating respect for participants' life experience and history; communicating respect for the fact that individuals are the experts on their own lives; identifying tasks that can be worked on together.
- **Empowerment:** Ensuring that individuals have a voice during programming.
- **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Considerations:** Acknowledging the role culture, history, and gender can play in trauma; actively moving past cultural stereotypes and biases; understanding the healing value of traditional cultural connections; recognizing and addressing historical trauma.

# PREPARING, RECOGNIZING, AND RESPONDING

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## PREPARING

What can I do to prepare myself, my program, and my space? Get to know your participants as much as you can before you meet them. Find out:

- What on-site and community-based resources are available to participants?
- Were you asked to come in for a specific reason?
- Have there been any sexually based incidents that participants have encountered or heard a lot about recently?

Be comfortable with any adaptations that may have been made to your curriculum in order to enhance its sensitivity to trauma. (Reminder: all such adaptations must be pre-approved by ACT for Youth.)

## RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING

Recognizing and responding doesn't mean being constantly on the lookout for a young person who may be "triggered" by something you say. It also doesn't mean you have to (or even should) do the work of a therapist or social worker while implementing activities.

What it does mean is that you recognize that some of the behaviors that students exhibit aren't necessarily because they are being purposely disruptive. It means your response comes from a place of making sure every student feels safe and included. It means not asking yourself "what's wrong with this kid?" but instead "what may have happened to this kid?"

Finally, remember that secondary or vicarious trauma can have a very real impact on educators. Make sure you are consistently practicing self-care.

Self-care tips and resources:

[http://www.actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/professionals/self-care.cfm](http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/self-care.cfm)

# A Trauma Informed Approach to Evidence-Based Programs

*Tip Sheet for CAPP and PREP Programs in New York State*

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## **Introduction**

As an educator, you cannot be prepared for everything, but by adopting a trauma-informed approach you may be able to avoid a few potential facilitation pitfalls. As we know now, many young people have experienced or live with trauma. In particular, LGBTQ youth, youth in the foster care or juvenile justice system, young people of color and young people living in poverty are more likely to experience trauma. Discussing sensitive topics as they do in comprehensive sexuality education programs may put them at risk for re-traumatization. A trauma-informed approach can help create a greater sense of safety and empowerment among participants, allowing them to be more open to learning the information you are there to share, and avoid possible re-traumatization. This document will help you better integrate a trauma-informed approach into your program and activities.

## **Principles of a Trauma Informed Approach**

There are six guiding principles to consider when looking through a trauma-informed lens. They are: **Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration, Empowerment, and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Considerations.**

## **General Guidelines**

**Preparation and Set-up:** How are you preparing before you start? Always assume there will be at least one participant who will greatly benefit from this trauma-informed approach.

- Try to get to know the composition of the group before you arrive.
- Make sure you discuss with the teacher or site coordinator what the process is for students who need to excuse themselves.
- Prior to starting the program, know what support services are available to students. If going into a school, let the guidance/counseling office know you're starting programming soon, in case they see an increase in visits to their offices.

**Setting:** Where you do programming can impact how safe participants feels as well.

- Is the space itself welcoming? What is the "emotional temperature" in the room? Does it feel open or confined?
- Do the images in the room reflect the group you are working with and express inclusivity? (e.g. a rainbow flag, positive images of youth of diverse backgrounds)

**Language:** Does the language being used feel **safe** for *all* participants? Is it inclusive?

- For example, using binary and heteronormative terms can make a young person feel as though this is yet *another* place they are not welcome or seen. Consider changing "boy/girlfriend" to "partner" and "male/female" to "person with a penis or person with a vagina." (**Cultural & Gender**)
- Is the language being used **empowering**? When talking about the "responsibilities of choosing to have sex," are you also affirming that we know many young people have sexual experiences that are *not* a choice?
- Be explicit and clear about program structure and topics that will be addressed in different modules. This will help young people prepare themselves to use coping strategies if necessary. (**Transparency**)

**Examples of Activities:** *Not all activities listed are in all EBPs. These are just examples. If you would like to use any of these or infuse a trauma-informed approach into an EPB in another way, it is considered an adaptation and should be put on a master list for approval.*

### **Group Agreements: (collaboration, safety, empowerment, and choice)**

- Mention at the start of the program that this can be sensitive information, or even stressful for some people.
- If school policy allows, explain that if someone gets uncomfortable, they can leave the room to take care of their needs.
- Be sure to truly brainstorm the group agreements *with* participants. Explain that a “brave” or “safe” space is a **trusting space where everyone is always emotionally and physically safe but may be challenged at times** – even creating a space like this requires bravery for some, especially if they carry trauma related to these topics. Explain that it’s everyone’s responsibility to create this space in the room. Some peers may already have experienced abuse or negative consequences related to sex, sexual health, or a relationship.

### **Transmission Game**

- Educators can prep the group for this activity. Explain that you make no assumption about anyone’s HIV or STD status. Let participants know that this activity is not about singling out the source of an infection or making fun of people who get infections – it’s about how easy it is for STDs to spread in a community, and it is only an exercise. However, individuals who don’t want to receive a letter and walk through the transmission game should be given the **choice** of making their own group and participating in the discussion questions together. After the game, reinforce the concept that all forms of sex always require consent.
- Discuss activity with teacher in advance for insight on which students should or shouldn’t get certain cards.

### **Condom Use Skills Demonstration**

- Remind them they have a **choice** in participating in the practice.
- Emphasize consent as an absolutely essential step in condom use.

### **Negotiation Skills**

- Offer participants a choice as to whether they would like to use Option 1 (randomly chosen pairs of volunteers), Option 2 (randomly chosen pairs practice assigned roleplays and then volunteers demonstrate their scenario), or Option 3 (two teams, and volunteers from each team are coached by other team members while acting out the roleplays). Also notify participants when a scene can’t be made gender-neutral (such as when it involves birth control).

### **Agree/Disagree**

- Remind youth **prior** to the activity that these statements are based on opinions. There aren’t right or wrong answers, just different views based on experiences and understanding, and they might end up on different sides of the room. Facilitators should avoid stating that an answer is correct.
- Some educators have done this activity anonymously, using a worksheet with a discussion afterwards.

## RESOURCES

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SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach

<https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>

SAMHSA: The purpose of this paper is to develop a working concept of trauma and a trauma-informed approach, and to develop a shared understanding of these concepts that would be appropriate across an array of service systems and stakeholder groups.

Guide to Trauma-Informed Sex Education

<http://www.cardeaservices.org/resourcecenter/guide-to-trauma-informed-sex-education>

CARDEA: This guide provides facilitators, educators, and youth-serving professionals with concrete strategies for integrating a trauma-informed approach into sex education and pregnancy prevention programming.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org/>

This comprehensive website offers information and resources for educators, mental health professionals, parents and caregivers, and more.

The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

<https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care.html>

University at Buffalo: The Institute offers online courses and resources for those wanting to better understand trauma.

Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach for Youth across Service Sectors

[https://youth.gov/docs/Trauma\\_Informed\\_Approach\\_508.pdf](https://youth.gov/docs/Trauma_Informed_Approach_508.pdf)

youth.gov: This brief provides an overview of trauma, ways that youth cope with trauma, trauma at the systems level, and core principles of a trauma-informed approach. The brief is based on a 2013 webinar that features youth presenters as well as content experts.

A Practical Guide for Creating Safe and Supportive Environments in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

[https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/ta\\_9\\_safe\\_and\\_supportive\\_environments.pdf](https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/ta_9_safe_and_supportive_environments.pdf)

Office of Adolescent Health: This guide provides research-based tips to help teen pregnancy prevention programs create safe and supportive environments for the youth they serve.

