

Trauma-Informed Person-Centered Planning: A Guide for People with Disabilities and the Professionals and Family Members Who Provide Supports

“When we recognize that nearly everyone we serve has experienced some form of trauma, we know, without a doubt, that we need to provide services in a new way.

That one piece of information changes everything.”

~ Shirley Paceley

Introduction

Many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience trauma in their lifetimes. In addition to big traumas like sexual assault, abuse and neglect, little traumas occur on a regular basis. These traumas include bullying, name-calling, segregation, people trying to ‘fix’ them, etc. Given the prevalence of trauma, it seems critical that disability service providers consider steps to be trauma-informed within the context of person-centered planning.

When trauma occurs in the context of relationships, the individual loses their sense of safety, their connection with others and their sense of personal power. Therefore, the healing process is best supported with a focus on safety, empowerment and connections.

This tool is divided into these three categories to help the person and their support staff think about person-centered planning in the context of healing.



This guide can be used when working through the person-centered-planning process, as a self-reflection tool, and to train staff. We encourage you to add new questions/statements to this guide as you learn from people with disabilities what is most important to them.

Definitions

A **trigger** is a reminder of a previous trauma. The trigger can be external such as a sight, sound or smell which reminds the person of a traumatic event. A trigger can also be internal, such as a feeling of helplessness. A trauma trigger can cause the person to experience overwhelming emotions. A trigger can even cause flashbacks in which a person may reexperience the traumatic event.

Grounding is a technique that helps a person 'stay in the present' when they are experiencing overwhelming feelings or anxiety. There are many techniques that can be helpful when someone experiences a trauma trigger. Different techniques work for different people. The person can choose what works for them. It is helpful to practice these coping strategies, with support, when they are calm.



Safety

Before the Meeting

- What makes the person feel safe in general? During a team meeting? What has helped or hurt during previous meetings? What things can be done that would make the person feel safer?
- Identify any known triggers and what support the person may need/want. Are there any comfort items the person wants at their meeting?
- Plan what to do if the person needs a break during the meeting. (In general, develop a plan to feel safe during the meeting).
- Are there any topics the person does not want discussed during the meeting? How will they let people in attendance know this? What support does the person want?
- Explain the process and allow time for the individual to ask questions, share concerns or state preferences.

During the Meeting

- Observe the person for any signs that they are feeling uncomfortable or upset. Follow the person's 'plan to feel safe' as discussed before the meeting.
- Respectfully use grounding techniques, such as deep breathing, if the individual appears upset.
- Take a break during the meeting or slow down the pace.
- Ask the person if they want to include anything in their plan about keeping safe.



After the Meeting

- Discuss with the person how they felt during the meeting. Did the person feel physically safe? emotionally safe? If the person felt unsafe, discuss what brought up those feelings? What if any grounding strategies were used?
- Acknowledge and praise the person for any actions they took to keep safe during the meeting.

The Plan

- Does the plan address the person's safety issues; both physical and emotional?
- Does the plan identify: (1.) what triggers should be avoided? (2.) What responses allow the person to feel safe? (3.) What family and support staff can do when the person is 'triggered'?

Empowerment

Before the Meeting

- Engage the person in planning for the meeting...where? what time? Who to invite? Who do they want to sit by? What materials do they want to have? Where do they want to sit? What role do they want to have (e.g., sit at head of table? Call meeting to order? Introduce everyone?)
- Summarize their strengths and preferences and needs?
- Are there any topics the person feels are too private to discuss with the whole team? How can we accommodate this?
- What does the person want to happen in the meeting? Goals?



During the Meeting

- Do not rush.
- Listen to the person - reflect what they say - believe what they say.
- Ask what they think about each idea that is presented.
- Ask what is most important to them. What dream(s) they have for their life? Support dreams the person shares.
- Observe whether the individual is looking for others for acceptance or if others influence the outcome of the plan.

After the Meeting

- Talk with the person about what they felt and thought about the meeting.
- Acknowledge and praise the person for steps they took to speak up for themselves.
- Discuss what to do if the plan is not followed.

The Plan

- Does the plan address opportunities for the person to have more power in their lives/to make more choices? Does the plan address the person's dreams for their life? Does the plan include fun things (positive emotion)? Does the person understand what is in their plan? Does the plan include achievement and meaning in the person's life?
- Is the plan written in a way that the person best understands? Are programs done at a time that works best for the person's schedules/preferences/needs?
- Does the plan contain the goals/hope/dreams/awesome things about the person or just what he/she can't do?



Connections

Before the Meeting

- Does the person have any friends or family members they want to invite to the meeting? Does the person have any dreams/desires related to connecting with other people?
- Does the person have transportation to spend time with friends/family and/or to go to preferred places with others? If transportation is a barrier, what are the possible solutions?
- In what ways would the person like to spend time with others?
- Are there classes/groups in the community the person would like to engage with?
- Consider spiritual connections and opportunities for the person to self-reflect. Does the individual have opportunities to get outside and enjoy nature, alone time (without staff interruption) to listen to music, read, etc.? This is especially important for people residing in group settings.

During the Meeting

- Be supportive of those who were invited and able to attend.
- Support the person's dreams/desires as it relates to connecting with others.
- Encourage team members to consider goals that include connection with others.

After the Meeting

- Review the planning process with the person. Acknowledge and praise anything that occurred during the meeting that builds on connection.



The Plan

- Does the plan include positive relationships that the person wants?
- Does the plan provide support for the person to expand their social capital (number and type of relationships)?

Please share your ideas with us by contacting BTS Co-Director Linda Sandman at lsandman.msw@gmail.com or BTS Co-Director Leanne Mull at leanneadvocacy@gmail.com.

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