



Trauma-Informed Approaches: Connecting Research, Policy, and Practice to Build Resilience in Children and Families

Childhood trauma can have long-term negative impacts on health and wellbeing across the lifespan. In response, communities, programs, and organizations are increasingly turning toward trauma-informed approaches as a framework for mitigating and preventing the effects of trauma. Government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are integrating trauma-informed approaches into federal initiatives and programs. In collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), James Bell Associates and Education Development Center prepared two resources that highlight and describe trauma-informed initiatives. The first is a review of systems-level trauma-informed approaches that summarizes program activities, targeted outcomes, and evidence of progress towards those systems-level outcomes. The second resource highlights and profiles a range of trauma-informed programs from diverse sectors, geographic locations, and funding sources. Together these materials provide a greater understanding of the current state of trauma-informed community initiatives and give insight into the challenges and opportunities of implementing trauma-informed approaches. Below are some of the key observations that emerged from these projects:

Review of Trauma-Informed Initiatives at the Systems Level:

- In the studies reviewed, trauma-informed program activities generally fell into three categories: training, trauma screening, and service improvements.
- Evaluation of systems-level outcomes typically focused on staff knowledge and behavior, as well as implementation outcomes (e.g., rates of screening and assessment, increased availability of evidence-based treatments).
- While trauma-informed trainings generally improved staff knowledge and attitudes, there were still reports of staff discomfort with discussing sensitive topics like trauma. Training coupled with ongoing support and supervision may help mitigate this discomfort and facilitate lasting practice change.

Profiles of Select Trauma-Informed Programs:

- Many of the highlighted programs draw from multiple definitions of what it means to be trauma-informed; however, the framework developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration was most commonly referenced.
- The profiled programs often work across sectors and engage in innovative partnerships that allow them to better serve children and families.
- While the programs demonstrated notable systems-level outcomes and improvements in child and family outcomes, there are still discrepancies in the outcomes intended by the program and what is actually measured.

