

# UCI CARE

## Trauma-Informed Interactions with Students

Developed and adapted by Lissa Lim, Ph.D. from SAMHSA and Community Health Canada's The Trauma Toolkit (2013).

Welcome! This handout is intended to provide you with some basic information about trauma-informed care and suggestions about how to integrate trauma-informed care into your interactions with students.

Due to the prevalence of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and stalking, all people working at a university will come into contact with individuals that have experienced trauma. Having information about how to interact in safe and caring ways with individuals affected by trauma can help you minimize the risk of unintentionally behaving in a way that retriggers or reminds a person about the trauma they have experienced, which can interfere with their healing and growth. We hope this handout helps you to engage with your students in the most compassionate and supportive ways.

### Trauma-Informed Care

The purpose of trauma-informed care is to integrate a holistic understanding of the many ways people are affected by trauma into all aspects of services and interactions with people impacted by trauma.

Trauma-informed care values (*Adapted from SAMHSA*):

- ❖ **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety.
- ❖ **Trust and Clarity:** Building trust by maintaining appropriate boundaries with students, and being open and clear about what students can expect from an interaction.
- ❖ **Choice and Control:** Putting student's personal choice and control first.
- ❖ **Compassion and Support:** Offering compassion and support by using a non-judgmental attitude toward students affected by trauma and their willingness to participate in activities or engage with you.
- ❖ **Collaboration:** Working together with students to identify what feels most healing and supportive for them.
- ❖ **Strength-based:** Emphasizing students' strengths and resilience.
- ❖ **Cultural Sensitivity:** Being sensitive to the diverse identities of the students that are affected by trauma, as well as various ways they cope with their experiences.
- ❖ **Empowerment:** Helping students feel strong, in-control, and free to make their own choices.

### Trauma-Informed Services

Trauma-informed services uphold the values of trauma-informed care by interacting with students in a manner that is welcoming and appropriate to the unique needs of those affected by trauma. Working from a trauma-informed care perspective has a positive impact on healing and the quality of services offered to students. Services that use a trauma-informed approach *know that experiences of trauma affect people in various ways, integrate this knowledge into all services, aim to avoid re-traumatizing students, and acknowledge that there are multiple paths toward healing.*

## Ways of Integrating Trauma-Informed Care into Interactions with Clients

### Attitude and Atmosphere:

- ❖ Create a safe space by attending to students with warmth and empathy.
- ❖ Demonstrate compassion by being aware and supportive of the various emotions that may come up for those impacted by trauma.
- ❖ Allow students to have choice and control by letting them set the pace, slow down, and take breaks as needed.
- ❖ Strive to be culturally appropriate by not assuming a student's gender, sexual, ethnic, or religious identity. Remain open and accepting about the experiences of students who are culturally different than you.

### Physical Contact and Space:

- ❖ Allow students enough personal space so that close physical proximity can be avoided.
- ❖ Avoid physical contact, including handshakes and hugs, because we never know what type of physical contact may remind the student of the trauma they experienced. Ask for permission if physical contact is unavoidable.
- ❖ Only offer a handshake or a hug if a student asks or initiates this kind of contact.
- ❖ Allow students to make choices about where they sit in the room and what they may need to feel comfortable (e.g., water).

### Language and Communication:

- ❖ Use language that emphasizes strength and resilience (e.g., “you can do this,” “you are strong,” “tap into what feels right and good to you.”).
- ❖ Use neutral language when talking about students’ experiences (e.g., people affected by trauma) because people affected by trauma can have various feelings about being labeled “victim,” “survivor,” “thrivor.”
- ❖ Respond to students’ disclosures of their experiences with belief and validation.
- ❖ Frame questions and statements with empathy, being careful not to express judgment, or demand any particular response or participation.

### Services and Participation:

- ❖ Create clarity and build trust by explaining what, why, how things will happen during your meeting with the student.
- ❖ Give students choices about how much and when they would like to participate in your meeting as possible, and avoid asking them to explain why.
- ❖ Focus on student’s strengths and empowerment by letting them know that they have the potential to make choices about their well-being and safety.
- ❖ Affirm positive decisions made by the students regarding their well-being.