

Concurrent Permanency Planning: Using a Trauma Lens to Engage Families and Improve Child Wellbeing Right from the Beginning

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Why are we here today?



Every Child is born with the beautiful potential to become wonderful human beings who experience love, joy, growth and make positive contributions to themselves, the people they love, and to all members of society...



Sometimes things occur in children's lives that can interfere with children's abilities to reach their beautiful potential... such as child abuse, neglect, violence, loss, wars, oppression, racism, sexism, poverty, and other adversities...



There are things we can do to help...



The Goal of this Presentation is to Support Integrating an Honoring and Trauma Informed Practice of Concurrent Permanency Planning...

- I. Start with a foundation of understanding trauma and potential impacts on children and families
- II. Explore perspectives and practices that could help concurrent permanency planning principles work to reduce child trauma and promote resiliency
- III. What judges need to know and do in the courtroom to address the child's trauma

- I. Start with a foundation of understanding trauma and potential impacts on children and families



Why Address Trauma ?



Higher Utilizers of Mental Health Study (Oregon Dept. of Mental Health, 1999)

During a 3 year time period in the mid 1990's a group of 69 adults used 3.1 million dollars in mental health services; Over 90% of these adults had experienced childhood sexual and/or physical abuse.





Mental Health and School Failure

“Children with severe emotional disturbances have the highest rates of school failure. 50% of these children drop out of school as compared to a 30% of children with all other kinds of disabilities.”
(President’s New Freedom Commission, 2003)

Risk of Juvenile Delinquency

- “Girls who have been abused or neglected are twice as likely to be arrested as juveniles” (Widom, 2000)
- “60% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system suffer from diagnosable mental disorders” (Wood 2002, National Mental Health Association, 1999)

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (Kaiser Permanente and CDC)

- Adults who experienced at least 4 traumatic events in their childhood have increased risk of morbid obesity, are 2 times more likely to smoke cigarettes, and are over 9 times more likely to have injected street drugs.”
(Felitti and Anda, 2003)



A traumatic experience is an event that threatens someone's life, safety, or well-being. It can overwhelm one emotionally and overwhelm their coping resources.







Examples of Potentially Traumatic Events

- Child maltreatment
- Witnessing violence
- Interpersonal victimization
- Terrorism/War
- Natural disasters
- Loss of loved ones
- Serious accidents
- Medical trauma





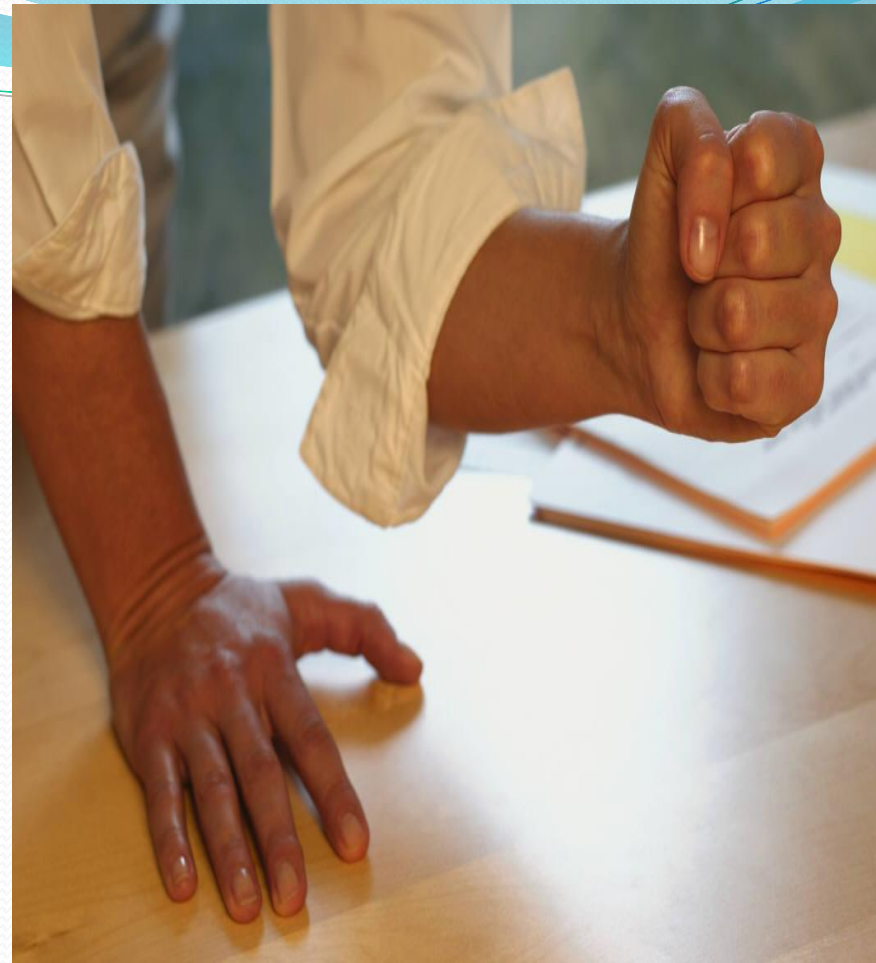
Primary Trauma and Secondary Trauma:

- **Primary Trauma:** The trauma(s) that started the ball rolling...abuse, neglect, illnesses, accidents...
- **Secondary Trauma:** The losses, stress, and other traumas that occur related to the primary trauma such as: intrusive medical treatment, moving to a shelter, changing schools, foster care, moving away from friends, court involvement, etc...



Complex trauma includes youth experiencing interpersonal violation, usually at the hands of an adult who is supposed to be in the role of caring for them and protecting them...

This can be experienced as
a violation of our social
contract with children...

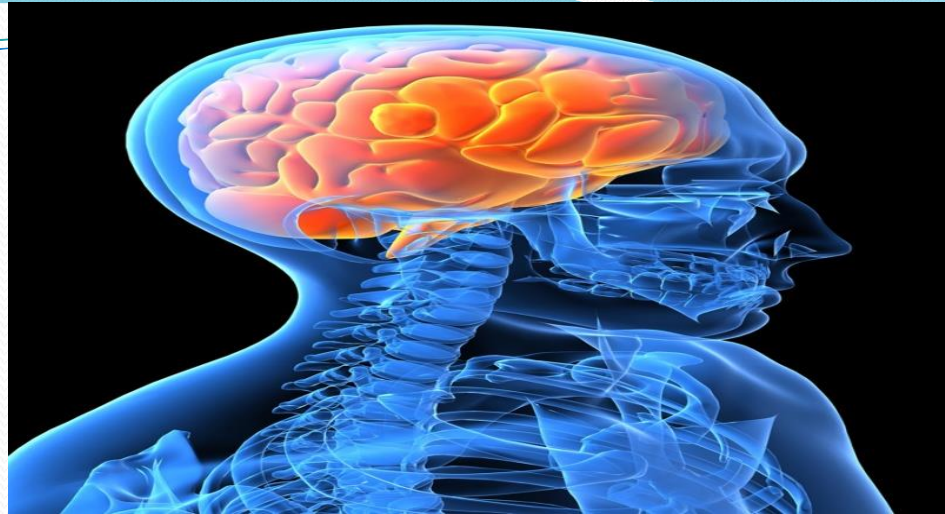


- Substance use/abuse
- Involvement in violent activity
- Relational impairments
- Developmental lags
- Subsequent victimization
- Aggressive behavior
- Poor academic performance
- Numbness; desensitization to threat
- Recklessness and reenacting behavior
- Delinquency and adult offending
- Recidivism



Biopsychosocial Implications for Child Development

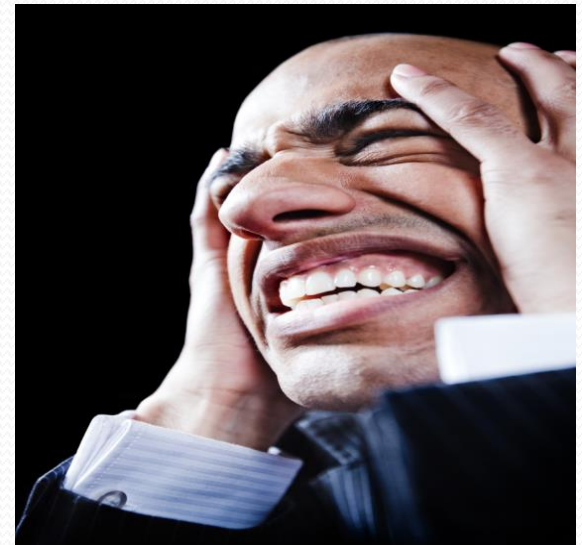
- Altered Biological Stress Systems and Neural Circuitry/Structure
 - Elevated cortisol levels
 - Changes in physiological response to fear/threat
 - Restriction of brain growth
- Disruptions in Attachment Behavior
 - Caregiver-Infant bonding
 - Disorganized behavior, problems in emotion regulation, disrupted relationships, and more
- Changes in Social Development and Understanding of Social Stimuli
 - Encoding and interpreting social stimuli, and accessing more aggressive responses
 - Hostile Attribution Bias
 - Interpreting facial expressions



Trauma changes our biology, including brain development which can result in very well-developed emergency response systems in the brain at a cost to the executive functions of our brain that enhance learning and self-regulation...

Julian Ford, University of Connecticut

“Post Traumatic Stress is responding to normal stressors and life events as if they are threats to your survival...”



Julian Ford, University of Connecticut



Concept of Alarm Mode

After repeated or severe trauma people may:

- Develop very sensitive alarm triggers
- They might not be able to shut off their alarm switch
- Alarm reactions are about automatic reactions, not thought out and using executive functions or reasoning
- Alarm reactions that save our lives in true emergencies can defeat us when we use them in ordinary /non-threatening situations

Alarm Reactions and Veterans

- Veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq are experiencing higher rates of substance abuse, aggression, and arrests
- Survival in these means being in alarm mode 24/7
- The enemy could be anyone
- Often their alarm switch is “stuck on”

Traumatic Reminders

- Any person, place, thing, situation, site, sound, smell, taste, etc... that reminds the person of the traumatic events they have encountered and sets off alarm reaction...





Courtesy of Western Michigan University
Child Assessment Clinic

Our typical response to “Bad” Behavior

- These kids get all kinds of labels
- They usually get labels that tell you that these kids are ***BAD***
- PTSD, ADHD, ODD, Bipolar Disorder, Conduct Disorder diagnoses do ***NOT*** capture the full extent of the developmental impact of what is going on for these kids.

Courtesy of Western Michigan University Child Assessment Clinic



Courtesy of Western Michigan University Child Assessment Clinic

CJI Trauma-Informed Protocol

- Don't ask what is the matter with you?
- Ask, "What happened to you?"
- What do we as a system need to do to help address the trauma?



II. Explore perspectives and practices that could help concurrent permanency planning principles work to reduce child trauma and promote resiliency:

- A. The Nine Essential Elements of Trauma Informed Care (Child Welfare Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, March 2008) and
- B. The Nine Core Principles of Concurrent Permanency Planning (Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, April 2012)

The Nine Core Principles of Concurrent Permanency Planning

(Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, April 2012)



What is Concurrent Permanency Planning?

A practice focusing on children who enter foster care in which caseworkers vigorously pursue family reunification while also developing alternative permanency plans if reunification is not a achievable within legal timelines. This is to:

- Shorten temporary foster placements
- Help children to thrive in safe, stable, permanent families...

Concurrent Permanency Planning Goal are Best Achieved When..

Early, respectful, honoring collaboration between the child welfare agency, community resources, and the court system work together with the child's birth parents, extended families and foster parents, natural support systems who work together toward reunification, but are willing to make a permanent commitment to the children through adoption or transfer of custody if reunification is not possible.

Through a Collaborative And Honoring Approach, Everyone Works Toward:

- Achieving safety, timely permanency, and well-being for children
- Reducing the number of moves for children while in foster care
- Minimizing the negative emotional impact of separation and loss on the children (and families)
- Supporting continuity in children's family and community relationships

The Nine Core Principles of Concurrent Permanency Planning

1. Differential assessment and prognostic case review: Family partnership, strengths and challenges, solution-focused.
2. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process. A respectful, candid discussion that begins when the child enters foster care and continues throughout the life of the case.
3. Family search and engagement, from the beginning, in all capacities.
4. Family group conferencing/teaming.
5. Parent-child visiting during out-of-home care



The Nine Core Principles of Concurrent Permanency Planning

6. Setting clear time limits for permanency decisions
7. Transparent written agreements and documentation give all parties a clear understanding of what both the agency and the family must do to achieve reunification
8. Committed collaboration between the family, child welfare, the courts, and service providers is necessary to ensure that timely casework is paired with smooth progress of cases through the court.
9. Specific recruitment, training, and retention of dual licensed resource families

Child Welfare Trauma Training

Toolkit:

(Version 1: 2008)



Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice

1. Maximize the child's sense of safety.
2. Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion.
3. Help children make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences.
4. Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's behavior, development, and relationships.
5. Coordinate services with other agencies.

Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice

6. Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's trauma experiences and their impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services.
7. Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.
8. Provide support and guidance to child's family and caregivers.
9. Manage professional and personal stress.

TIC Essential Element #1.

Maximize the child's (and family's) sense of safety.

- Traumatic stress overwhelms a child's sense of safety and can lead to a variety of survival strategies for coping.
- Safety implies both *physical* safety and *psychological* safety.
- While inquiring about emotionally painful and difficult experiences and symptoms, workers must ensure that children are provided a psychologically safe setting.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element #1: Establishing a Sense of Safety

- Engaging families fully in the front end and throughout the case helps to achieve this goal...
- Ensuring the differential assessment makes full use of the family's strengths, family input, and the full context of the family's culture and context
- Full disclosure provided in honest and honoring ways, accessing family input as to who, when, how to discuss the concurrent planning process to children
- Diligent efforts in keeping frequent, safe parent/family/child connections, and safe outings/connections with friends, same school if that is positive asset for the child...
- Education and supports to kinship and foster/adoptive caregivers about traumatic reminders, triggers, and other trauma issues...

TIC Essential Element #2. Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion.

- Trauma can elicit such intense fear, anger, shame, and helplessness that the child feels overwhelmed.
- Overwhelming emotion may delay the development of age-appropriate self-regulation.
- Emotions experienced prior to language development maybe be very real for the child but difficult to express or communicate verbally.
- Trauma may be “stored” in the body in the form of physical tension or health complaints.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element #2 Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion

- Developing a strong network of support for the child including natural family, and if needed foster/adoptive caregivers who recognize how primary and secondary trauma impacts a child's emotionally and behaviorally...
- Therapy with a therapist who provides evidence-based trauma-focused therapy and who understands secondary trauma...a therapist who is honoring and engages key adults into the child's healing process
- Caregivers who work to understand the child's emotional language, or can help a child find their language

TIC Essential Element #3: Help children make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences.

- Trauma can lead to serious disruptions in a child's sense of safety, personal responsibility, and identity.
- Distorted connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can disrupt encoding and processing of memory.
- Difficulties in communicating about the event may undermine a child's confidence and social support.
- Child welfare workers must help the child feel safe, so he or she can develop a coherent understanding of traumatic experiences.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element # 3: Help children make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences

- Developmentally sensitive ways to communicate to a child about his and his family's current circumstances, with as much help from family members as possible...
- Speak of the child's family in honoring and respectful ways while allowing the child to be able to honestly express themselves
- Enhanced support system, including caregivers who understand
- Kindly inquire as to the child's understanding of what is happening in his/her life and to his/her family (Don't operate on a don't ask/don't tell policy...)
- Use of Life Book, Trauma-Focused CBT provides opportunity for healing and a therapeutic trauma narrative

TIC Essential Element # 4: Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's behavior, development, and relationships.

- Traumatic events affect many aspects of the child's life and can lead to secondary problems (e.g., difficulties in school and relationships, or health-related problems).
- These “secondary adversities” may mask symptoms of the underlying traumatic stress and interfere with a child's recovery from the initial trauma.
- Secondary adversities can also lead to changes in the family system and must be addressed prior to or along with trauma-focused interventions.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element # 4: Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's behavior, development, and relationships

- When collaborating with family, caregivers, and other community stakeholders ensure they are educated about the impact of trauma on the child and strategies that promote healing, resiliency, and reduce risk of secondary trauma...
- Educational system is really key, saving a child and his/her education is about saving their lives...
- Understand the vulnerability of youth who are transitioning to adulthood.
- Debunk the “willful misbehavior” and snap out of it myths...
- Do not accept mental health diagnosis and treatments that don't address the trauma both diagnostically and treatment wise.

TIC Essential Element #5: Coordinate services with other agencies.

- Traumatized children and their families are often involved with multiple service systems. Child welfare workers are uniquely able to promote cross-system collaboration.
- Service providers should try to develop common protocols and frameworks for documenting trauma history, exchanging information, coordinating assessments, and planning and delivering care.
- Collaboration enables all helping professionals to view the child (and family) as a whole person, thus preventing potentially competing priorities.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC

Essential Element #5: Coordinate services with other agencies

- Principles of Concurrent Planning goes further by not just saying coordinate, but saying “collaborate” and it not only addresses professionals but the need for an honoring partnership with the child and family
- Family Group decision-making is a beautiful way of being trauma-informed, treating the families as experts in their child’s and their own lives, and as resources...
- Listen to the children too...If they are running away, ask why? Who are they missing? Are their activities that help them feel joy or mastery?

TIC Essential Element #6: Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's trauma experiences and its impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services.

- Thorough assessment can identify a child's reactions and how his or her behaviors are connected to the traumatic experience.
- Thorough assessment can also predict potential risk behaviors and identify interventions that will ultimately reduce risk.
- Child welfare workers can use assessment results to determine the need for referral to appropriate trauma-specific mental health care or further comprehensive trauma assessment.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element #6: Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's trauma experiences and its impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services

- A strength-based differential assessment along with identifying challenges for the child and family can help the child and family get what they need...
- Use trauma-history information not solely as a risk factor, but as an opportunity for healing and resilience...
- When services are identified to address issues from assessments, listen to the children and parents or ask: do you have a ride, gas money, what is going to happen with your apartment and furnishings when you are in the shelter, or while your children are away, how about the way the services affect a parent's employment, visitation, etc...

TIC Essential Element #7: Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.

- Separation from an attachment figure, particularly under traumatic and uncertain circumstances, is highly stressful for children.
- Familiar and positive figures—teachers, neighbors, siblings, relatives—play an important role in supporting children who have been exposed to trauma.
- Minimizing disruptions in relationships and placements and establishing permanency are critical for helping children form and maintain positive attachments.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element #7: Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child

- Cultivating kinship, foster parents, and adoptive parents who understand the needs of youth who are exposed to trauma and are willing to provide care that responds to the child's needs in an empowering and trauma-informed way.
- Kinship caregivers, foster parents, adoptive parents, case workers, and other support persons who see the strengths of the child's family and work diligently with the caseworker and the family to keep regular visits, participate in the child's activities, phone calls and help with transportation.
- Unless serious danger is an issue, keeping siblings together is vital...

TIC Essential Element #8. Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers.

- Resource families have some of the most challenging roles in the child welfare system.
- Resource families must be nurtured and supported so they, in turn, can foster safety and well-being.
- Relatives serving as resource families may themselves be dealing with trauma related to the crisis that precipitated child welfare involvement and placement.
- Natural parents can experience significant trauma when separated from their children, this may also trigger re-experiencing past trauma.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC Essential Element # 8: Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers

- Engaging the natural family's natural supports in the entire process...
- Help all the caregivers obtain the resources they need, so that they are taken care of too...
- Caregivers need a lot of support in addressing the aftermath of trauma with the children they are caring for, especially natural parents who are reunifying with their children...
- Help make domestic violence batterers more accountable, remember sometimes the victimized parent lives in fear of retribution, and leaving is the most risky time for victims of domestic violence

TIC # 9. Manage professional and personal stress.

- Child welfare is a high-risk profession, and workers may be confronted with danger, threats, or violence.
- Child welfare workers may empathize with victims; feelings of helplessness, anger, and fear are common.
- Child welfare workers who are parents, or who have histories of childhood trauma, might be at particular risk for experiencing such reactions.

Concurrent Permanency Planning Strategies to Help with TIC # 9: Manage professional and personal stress

- Training, support, reasonable caseloads are essential. We must take care of the caseworkers and other child welfare/court/judicial/law enforcement professionals, all team members.
- Vicarious trauma can put people at risk of similar same difficulties and suffering as some of the people they serve. Concurrent Planning can be traumatic or stressful for families and professionals, especially if true honor, sensitivity, and collaboration are not practiced fully.
- It is solely a matter of individual self care efforts and routines, our agencies and communities must structure cultures and support.

What can a Trauma-informed Judge Do?

(NCTSN Bench Card for the Trauma-Informed Judge, 2012)

Asking trauma-informed questions to identify:

- a. If a child has been exposed to trauma and the level of exposure (single, chronic, complex)?
- b. Is the child receiving effective trauma-focused mental health services if needed?
- c. Do diagnostic assessments and psychological tests address trauma history and connect it when appropriate to the child's diagnosis and behavioral health issues?
- d. Do assessments and interventions identify and promote strengths and resiliency?
- e. Are there secondary trauma issues related to court or other agency interventions?

What can a Trauma-informed Judge Do?

(NCTSN Bench Card for the Trauma-Informed Judge, 2012)

- f. If the child is involved in delinquency court are the interventions and sanctions working?
- g. Are current caregivers helping the child to feel safe? Welcomed, honored, care-for?
- h. Are there safety issues?
- i. Are there trauma triggers in the child placement or environment?

What can we all do?

- The judge's list actually is all of our responsibilities and opportunities to help this child.
- Put a child's education first!!! Saving a child's education is about saving their life...
 - Get records to where they need to go ASAP
 - Don't accept evaluations of a child that say, "He needs to try harder, get his act together, pay attention..."
 - Maintain or find a school placement that welcomes the child and demonstrates that the child is important
 - If a child has talents, interests, activities, advocate to engage the child in these resiliency-building opportunities...

Remember: We are all a team that is working together to save the lives of someone who is precious...





Thank you...