

# A Checklist for Integrating a Trauma-Informed Approach into Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs



## What is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

Trauma refers to experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. It can refer to “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”<sup>1</sup>

SAMSHA defines “a program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed as one that: 1) *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; 2) *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; 3) *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and 4) *Seeks* to actively resist *re-traumatization*.”<sup>2</sup>

For resources on incorporating Trauma-Informed Approaches into your program, please visit: [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen\\_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html#Trauma-Informed-Care](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html#Trauma-Informed-Care)

References:

1. <http://media.samhsa.gov/traumajustice/traumadefinition/definition.aspx>
2. <http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

## Introduction to a Trauma-Informed Approach

While a teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) program generally focuses on providing sexual health education, ensuring access to youth-friendly health care services, and engaging youth, families, and communities, a trauma-informed approach (TIA) is a way of addressing vital information about sexuality and well-being that takes into consideration adverse life experiences and their potential influence on sexual decision making. A trauma-informed approach to sexual health is critical to promoting lifelong sexual health and well-being for anyone who has had adverse childhood and/or adult experiences. Principles of a trauma-informed approach can be integrated into any TPP program.

Before conducting this checklist, review the two-part series on Trauma-Informed Care: Tips for Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#). Part 1 provides the rationale for TPP programs to build their capacity to address youth's exposure to violence and Part 2 recommends seven strategies to make programs trauma-informed.

This checklist can help you identify where your TPP program is already utilizing a trauma-informed approach as well as determine additional opportunities for integrating a trauma-informed approach into your program.

## How to use this checklist

Use this checklist to find out where your TPP program is already integrating principles of a trauma-informed approach and where you can improve your use of a trauma-informed approach.

For each of the three levels of integration there are several items, each of which can be answered with “Describes us well,” “Almost there,” “We’re just getting started,” or “Does not describe us.”

It is helpful to have several program staff members review the checklist individually, compare and discuss the results, and brainstorm strategies for improvement. If you notice that most of your areas for improvement are centered in one of the three levels, check out the resources we have for those specific areas. If your areas for improvement are spread across the checklist, consider reviewing some of the general materials on trauma-informed approaches to support your plan for making these important changes. If items on the checklist are beyond the scope of your program, consider referring teens to community partners for those services (for example: mental health referrals), as needed.

Please note that some of the checklist items are similar to the key principles of the [Positive Youth Development checklist](#), as integrating a Trauma-Informed Approach requires many of the same underlying components to making all youth feel comfortable and valued.

*This publication was developed by Child Trends in partnership with Healthy Teen Network under contract #GS-10F-0030R/HHSP23320130043G for the Office of Adolescent Health; US Department of Health and Human Services as a technical assistance product for use with OAH grant programs.*

# 1

## Integrating a TIA at the organizational level

These items assess the degree to which your organization provides empirically-based health promoting policies and practices that promote self-regulation and enhance physical and emotional safety for everyone involved in the TPP program.

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
Our organization has a steering committee (or leverages existing advisory groups) with representation from administration, program facilitators, and youth to assess needs and develop an action plan and a timeline for implementing an integrated TIA to TPP.				
Our organization has a process in place for making referrals and maintains a referral directory of trauma-informed agencies, providers, and services and updates them on an annual basis. This includes local, licensed mental health service providers who have documented specialized training in a TIA.				
Our organization has partnerships with community agencies that adhere to SAMHSA’s six key principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach: 1) Safety; 2) Trustworthiness and Transparency; 3) Peer support; 4) Collaboration and mutuality; 5) Empowerment, voice and choice and; 6) Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues. <a href="http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions">http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions</a> . (You may want to use this checklist when thinking about your partners or share it with other agencies.)				
Our organization operates and makes decisions with transparency by documenting the values and rationale behind each decision.				
Our organization sets clear policies and informs adolescents of the program’s legal requirements such as limits of confidentiality.				
Our organization reviews all policies and procedures, such as program emergencies, crisis situations, and reporting child abuse and neglect on an annual basis, and shares policies and procedures with all staff.				

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
Our organization has a plan to best build internal capacity to provide a TIA to TPP which includes training and technical assistance as part of staff professional development.				
Our organization ensures evidence-based and empirically-informed resources regarding the role and impact of trauma, such as developmentally congruent education materials, workbooks, and therapy models, are easily accessible for both staff and program participants.				

Notes:

## 2

### Integrating a TIA at the program level

These items assess the degree to which the TPP program utilizes trauma-informed practices and materials to enhance understanding, learning, memory retention, and well-being throughout all program activities. Such practices promote skill building, competency development, and behavior change.

*Please note that any adaptation to evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) programs should be discussed and reviewed with OAH as it may require OAH approval.*

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
Staff members recognize that adverse childhood experiences influence a youth’s participation in program activities.				
All TPP programs are facilitated in an environment that is comfortable, accommodating, and considerate for everyone involved – youth, families, and staff.				
Staff members continuously attempt to engage and stay in touch with participants and their families.				
Staff members provide warm, non-judgmental, empathic, and genuine interactions at all times with participants and their families. (This component is also a key for staff training.)				
Staff members provide explanations for all rules and requests.				
During the introduction to our program, our TPP facilitators read a short statement that reflects a trauma-sensitive approach. For example: “Sex and sexuality can be very sensitive topics, and can sometimes be tough to talk about. Not everyone has had positive sexual experiences, and some young people have a difficult time, especially when you have experienced bad things in the past. The purpose of this program is to learn how to take good care of yourself sexually. If at any time you are feeling uncomfortable or having trouble participating, please let us know.”				

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
In our TPP program, adolescents help create “group agreements” that provide the foundation of physical and emotional safety for all program activities.				
As part of an introductory packet, all TPP program participants are given information on trauma-informed community resources as well as our organization’s policy on confidentiality and mandatory reporting.				
Staff are trained and able to adapt trauma-informed information into curricula so that fidelity to the model is not compromised. Fidelity is assessed at regular intervals.				
Program implementation is monitored for continuous quality improvement in terms of applying the TIA principles.				

Notes:

# 3

## Integrating a TIA at the staff level

These items assess the staff's capacity to fully engage with program participants who have had adverse childhood experiences.

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
Staff are initially trained on a trauma-informed approach and how to apply trauma-informed principles in every interaction with youth. Additionally, all staff participate in professional development or continuing education specifically related to using a TIA on an annual basis.				
Staff members carry out trauma-sensitive interactions that take trauma-related histories, symptoms, and behavior into consideration.				
Participants report that our TPP staff members are trustworthy and reliable in all interactions with participants.				
Staff model positive, non-shaming communication that supports healing for those in need and promotes health and well-being for everyone.				
Staff support healing for those in need through referrals to designated licensed mental health professionals and verified by our organization to be trauma-informed.				
Staff members continuously model and promote healthy relationships.				
Staff promote assertive communication and negotiation with sexual partners to establish and maintain healthy relationships.				
Staff listen patiently without interruption, provide information and answers in a pleasant manner, and ensure all participants have opportunities to speak and be heard.				

TIA characteristics	Describes us well	Almost there	Just getting started	Does not describe us
Staff provide an introductory statement defining and explaining trauma cues and the potential for curricula topics to bring up adverse childhood experiences.				
Staff are trained and able to provide warm, non-judgmental, empathic, and genuine interactions at all times, including ongoing training on connecting with youth while maintaining healthy professional boundaries.				
Supervision addresses quality and maintenance of trauma-informed practice, respectfully addresses all staff questions and trauma-related concerns, and provides ongoing staff support.				

Notes:

*Disclaimer: This is a list of some, but not all, of the relevant resources available to support organizations in integrating a trauma-informed approach (TIA). OAH does not endorse any of the resources listed other than those developed by OAH.*

## General resources on a trauma-informed approach

- Trauma-informed care section of the OAH TPP Resource Center. *Presentations, tool kits, podcasts, fact sheets, and webinars.* OAH. [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen\\_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html#Trauma-Informed\\_Care](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html#Trauma-Informed_Care)
- Trauma and Violence. *Webpage.* SAMHSA. <http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-violence>
- Website dedicated to raising the standard of care and improving access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States. *Resource center.* National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). <http://nctsn.org/>
  - Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators. *Toolkit.* National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). [http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/Child\\_Trauma\\_Toolkit\\_Final.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/Child_Trauma_Toolkit_Final.pdf)
  - Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit: Supplemental Handouts. Questions for Mental Health Providers. *Toolkit.* National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/trainingevents/juvenile/casa/QuestionstoAskMHProviders.pdf>
  - Training Resources. *Website.* National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). <http://learn.nctsn.org/>
- Trauma-Informed Care. *Website.* National Clearing House on Families and Youth. <http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/topics/trauma-informed-care>
- Trauma-Informed Care Tips for Pregnancy Prevention Programs. *Tip sheet.* The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). [http://ojjdp.gov/programs/safestart/TipSheetFor\\_Pregnancy.pdf](http://ojjdp.gov/programs/safestart/TipSheetFor_Pregnancy.pdf)
- A Trauma-Informed Approach for Adolescent Sexual Health. *Guidebook.* Resources for Resolving Violence. <http://resourcesforresolvingviolence.com/>
- Trauma-informed care practice guide to promote systems that recognizes, understands, and appropriately responds to trauma and its effects on children and their families. *Guide.* State of Connecticut. [http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/trauma-informed\\_care/pdf/trauma-informed\\_care\\_-\\_practice\\_guide\\_september\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/trauma-informed_care/pdf/trauma-informed_care_-_practice_guide_september_2012.pdf)
- Handling Disclosures of Trauma: Guidelines for Evidence-Based Intervention (EBI) Facilitators. *Tip sheet.* John Snow, Inc. <http://rhey.jsi.com/files/2013/11/Trauma-Disclosure-Guide-Sheet.pdf>
- Youth Services Policy Development Tool. *Toolkit.* Break the Cycle. [http://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/files/youth\\_services\\_policy\\_development\\_tool\\_2.pdf](http://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/files/youth_services_policy_development_tool_2.pdf)
- Responding to Community Violence and Trauma. *Toolkit.* County of San Diego. <http://sandiego.camhsa.org/files/Impact-Trauma-Toolkit-4.12.pdf>

## Resources related to working with specific youth populations

- Video to help professionals learn about the impact of trauma on LGBTQ youth. *Video. National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).* <http://www.nctsn.org/products/nctsn-safe-places-video>
- Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit for Homeless Services. *Toolkit. National Center on Family Homelessness.* <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/90.pdf>
- Integrating Trauma Informed Approaches in Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. *Tip sheet and Resources. FYSB.* <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/trauma20120829.pdf>
- Trauma-informed services for pregnant and parenting survivors. *Toolkit. Pregnant Survivors* <http://pregnantsurvivors.org/>

## Resources related to interpersonal/domestic violence and sexual assault

- Three-Part Series on Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services. *Special collections report. FYSB.* <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/news/trauma-informed-dv-services-20140807>
- Guidelines for assessing and responding to domestic violence in child health settings. *Guide. Futures without Violence.* <http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/HealthCare/pediatric.pdf>
- Tipsheet series on creating trauma-informed services at domestic violence programs. *Tip sheets. National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health.* <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/publications-products/creating-trauma-informed-services-tipsheet-series-for-advocates/>
- A Guide for Sexual Assault Programs and Their System Partners. *Guide. Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.* [http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/resources\\_publications/special\\_editions/Trauma-Informed-Advocacy.pdf](http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/resources_publications/special_editions/Trauma-Informed-Advocacy.pdf)

## Adverse childhood experiences

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study.
  - *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.* <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
  - *SAMHSA.* <http://captus.samhsa.gov/prevention-practice/targeted-prevention/adverse-childhood-experiences/1>
- The Truth about ACEs. *Infographic. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.* [http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/infographics/the-truth-about-aces.html?cid=xsh\\_rwjf\\_pt](http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/infographics/the-truth-about-aces.html?cid=xsh_rwjf_pt)