



Trauma Informed Responsiveness

Life can change forever in just one moment of trauma; life can change even more dramatically with prolonged trauma. Individuals with a trauma history require specialized trauma informed responsiveness in order to avoid re-traumatization and support healing and recovery.

A trauma is an event or experience that the individual perceives as dangerous, threatening, painful, or unsafe and which can interfere with healthy functioning. Soldiers are known to experience trauma when on the battlefield while young children may experience trauma as a result of an accident, natural disaster, trauma, abuse, or neglect.

When an individual continues to react to new environmental stimuli as if the original trauma event(s) was happening, it is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. Individuals may react to sounds, people, smells, places, and even memories with an emotionally charged PTSD episode. PTSD episodes vary greatly from individual to individual and situation to situation, but may involve anxiety or terror, dissociation (the individual may lose track of time, forget where s/he is, or become disoriented about why s/he is there), and physical body changes such as racing heart rate and rapid breathing.

Trauma Informed Responsiveness [TIR] is a logical and humane way of acknowledging the individual's trauma history. TIR informs how to respond to the individual with a trauma history in a way that is calming, reassuring, and avoids triggering a traumatic memory or experience. The most important thing to remember when responding from a TIR perspective is that the individual suffering from the traumatic history is in a state of mental disruption and needs to begin to recover.

Some ways to adjust interactions to accommodate TIR strategies is to maintain a calm, respectful, and person-centered attitude. Avoid pushing an agenda that may be too demanding for the individual who is in recovery from trauma. Above all, notice when situations, demands, interactions, environments, and conversations seem to trigger a traumatic or upsetting response in the individual. Above all, TIR requires us all to recognize that trauma is a real condition that is painful and tragic and takes time to heal.

Visit your local NAMI or community mental health facility if you have questions about whether you or someone you love suffers from PTSD or has a serious trauma history.

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