

Marquette University Law School  
Andrews Center for Restorative Justice

Tips for Integrating Trauma Lens into your legal and/or restorative justice practice.

The prevalence of trauma in the population we serve in the legal system is often very high. Always look for signs and symptoms and keep learning about trauma.

- Accept that it's not about you.
  - a. Hyperarousal and traumatic reminders can greatly influence behavior. Remember that behaviors common in victims of trauma (dissociation, anger, fear, lack of trust) are not about you personally, and don't reflect on you or your abilities as a lawyer or judge.
  - b. Victims of trauma may be in survival mode, dealing with the world around them in a very different way than you may realize. Their priorities are often different than what you expect or judge to be more important.
  - c. A person in authority, such as a judge or lawyer, or a person who is perceived as potentially harmful may be a trauma reminder to a victim and can trigger fight, flight, freeze coping responses.
  - d. Even seemingly harmless items or comments can trigger trauma responses in vulnerable individuals, so be on the alert.
  - e. Be aware that a client may dissociate or be overly compliant rather than agitated or combative.
- Provide comfortable environment that enhances safety and minimizes arousal
  - a. Additional stressors can emotionally and cognitively overwhelm traumatized children and adults.
  - b. Limit, if possible, physiological arousal such as loud voices, bright lighting, crowded spaces

- c. Provide supports.
- d. Give choices.
- Ask concrete questions to engage the prefrontal cortex
  - a. Where did this happen?
  - b. Where were you in the room?
  - c. If they are fuzzy, then they may be acting from their amygdala.
  - d. Ask them to draw a diagram or picture to show what happened.
- Use grounding exercises to reengage prefrontal cortex
  - a. Physical activity, humor, feel feet on floor, name things in room, take break (but don't isolate).
  - b. Ask concrete questions – one question at a time. Rather than ask “why” say, “tell me more.”

- b. Skills that regulate emotions
  - i. Deep breathing (hold inhale to degree of comfort, then exhale slowly).
  - ii. Mindfulness
  - iii. Helping others
  - iv. Pros and cons lists
  - v. Observe & describe
  - vi. Distraction
  - vii. Exercise
  - viii. Call a friend
  - ix. Music
  - x. Positive self-affirmations
  - xi. When someone is very agitated, a strong sensory stimulus can help: e.g. holding an ice cube, eating a sour candy, smelling an essential oil (like lavender).
  - xii Rhythmic or repetitive movement (walking, bouncing a racquetball, etc)
- c. Mastery & efficacy (you're good at something & can be successful)
  - i. Explore strengths as well, go deeper rather than superficial.
- d. Self-