

Reaching Teens: Strength-Based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development:

A Tool Kit to Support an Organization's Effort to be Trauma-Informed

Reaching Teens does not substitute for a fully implemented trauma-informed organizational model, such as The Sanctuary Model. However, it is trauma-informed throughout by adhering to the below principles and focuses on helping organizations or practices APPLY these principles.

- Our youth are not broken, many youth who have “been through it” possess some of the greatest degree of compassion, depth, and sensitivity.
- Displayed Behaviors do not represent who young people really are, rather how they have learned to react to the world. We must shift our lens, therefore from “What’s wrong with you?!?” to understanding that something that happened to the person we are serving explains their behavior.
- We need to approach all youth with radical calmness.
- We approach all youth with unconditional love and high expectations. It is the love that addresses the demoralization that can stifle progress. However, for that love to be safe it must be well-boundaried lest we absorb secondary trauma or add ourselves to the list of people who have engaged youth and then let them down.
- Youths’ “risky behaviors” are often their attempts to manage stress in their lives. We honor their experiences when we go beyond telling them what not to do and show them what to do.
- Trauma takes control away from people. One of the greatest gifts we can give a young person is to restore his or her sense of control.
- We must understand what trauma does to sometimes trigger people’s behavior, so that we will be able to distinguish “what is about us and what is not about us.” This critical understanding builds the appropriate boundaries that allow us to uniformly serve with empathy and calmness.
- We understand that traumatized youth are among our most compassionate, caring youth. However, we also understand that they have earned the right to be “reactive” or to be “triggered.” We can guide them how to control their reactivity, but it is also on us to know how not to trigger their reactivity. Being radically calm, was the critical first step, but there is more to know.
- If we are to serve over a lifetime we must address our secondary trauma and understand our own buttons and triggers.

Although these principles are infused throughout Reaching Teens, the following chapters form the core of the trauma informed track. Note that several chapters are found in two or more units. We suggest you fully teach the content the first time it is introduced and reinforce it in a different context in subsequent units.

Foundational chapters:

Chapter 6: “The Impact of Trauma on Development of well-being” offers the foundational scientific principles behind the trauma-informed movement.

Chapter 22: “Trauma Informed Practice: Working with youth who have suffered adverse childhood (or Adolescent) Experiences” offers the foundational principles behind APPLIED trauma-informed practice.

Chapter 5: “The 7 C’s Model of Resilience” offers a foundational framework on positive youth development and resilience.

Please add the following link to these chapters. It offers a critical script to help people shift a young person away from self-labeling (“I have an anger problem”) or external labeling (Oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, intermittent explosive disorder) towards a strength-based understanding of themselves (“I have a protector’s brain”)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising-resilient-children-and-teens/201609/the-blessings-and-challenges-having-protector-s>

Approaching youth with a strength-based, loving stance:

Chapter 25: “Addressing Demoralization: Eliciting and Reflecting Strengths” is about hearing young people’s stories in a way that reveals who they really *are* rather than how they might behave. This is a critical first step to initiate the behavioral change process.

Chapter 26: “Health Realization-Accessing a Higher State of Mind No matter What” is about bringing us all to awareness that every individual has the capacity within themselves to be emotionally, spiritually and mentally healthy.

Chapter 21: “Examining our Own Unconscious Biases” allows us to look deeply within ourselves and understand how our assumptions can prevent us from optimally serving youth.

Chapter 20: “Boundaries” help us have healthier relationships with youth, avoid secondary trauma, and increase our professional longevity.

Helping young people restore control over their lives:

Chapter 28: “Helping Adolescents own their Solutions” is about facilitating youth to use their internal wisdom to make decisions

Chapter 29: “Gaining a sense of control-one step at a time” is a specific technique that helps youth break large problems into manageable steps.

Chapter 26: “Motivational Interviewing” is a heavily researched strategy that gives youth control over their change process.

Chapter 31: “Stress Management and Coping” offers concrete healthy strategies that can reduce stress. One of the greatest strategies to regain control is to have healthy strategies to manage feelings and circumstances.

It also teaches the strategy that can help a traumatized person collect their thoughts while controlling impulsive actions. It is not presented in precisely this manner in the book, but can be put together in this way.

Step 1: Define the stressor. Asking yourself is this a real tiger or a paper tiger can be a first step. In other words, if this cannot kill you it needn't activate all of your protective mechanisms.

Step 2: Words alone, however may not be able to control your hormonal response to stress, once activated. Therefore, exercise, even running in place for a couple of moments or shadow punching the air, can use up activated hormones.

Step 3: Once the hormones are used up, one can use relaxation techniques, like deep breathing to further calm one's nerves.

Step 4: Return to the question, “Is this a real tiger, or a paper tiger?” One's mind is likely now able to take control and think through the problem.

Chapter 32: “Mindfulness Practice for Resilience and Managing Stress and Pain” offers a proven calming technique that helps people reduce their worries of the past and fear of the future.

Helping you serve youth with radical calmness:

Chapter 20: “Boundaries” help us have healthier relationships with youth, avoid secondary trauma, and increase our professional longevity.

Chapter 22: Trauma Informed Practice: working with youth who have suffered adverse childhood (or Adolescent) Experiences.

Chapter 23: De-escalation and Crisis Management when a Youth is “Acting Out”.

Chapter 24: Delivering Bad News to Adolescents

Chapter 33: Helping Youth Overcome Shame and Stigma Could Do Our Best to Not be a Part of the Problem.

Avoiding Triggering Reactive Behavior:

Chapter 16 Core Principles on Communicating with Adolescents

Chapter 14 Setting the Stage for a Trustworthy Relationship

Chapter 15 Body Language

Chapter 23: De-escalation and Crisis Management when a Youth is “Acting Out”.

Chapter 24: Delivering Bad News to Adolescents

Chapter 33: Helping Youth Overcome Shame and Stigma Could Do Our Best to Not be a Part of the Problem.

Guiding youth towards healing:

Chapter 25: “Addressing Demoralization: Eliciting and Reflecting Strengths” is about hearing young people’s stories in a way that reveals who they really *are* rather than how they might behave. This is a critical first step to initiate the behavioral change process. It is also critical to healing because it enables youth to see themselves through a more reflective positive lens.

Chapter 31: “Stress Management and Coping” offers concrete healthy strategies that can reduce stress.

Chapter 32: Mindfulness Practice for Resilience and Managing Stress and Pain

Chapter 33: Helping Youth Overcome Shame and Stigma Could Do Our Best to Not be a Part of the Problem.

Chapter 42: Depression

Chapter 45: Grief

Helping the caregiver exposed to trauma limit their own secondary trauma. These also remind them of the good they are doing, even if they do not see it at the moment.

Chapter 20: Boundaries

Chapter 67: Healer, Heal Thyself: Self-Care for the Caregiver

Chapter 69: Have I Really made a Difference? Trusting that Our Presence Matters

Resource chapters. These are relevant to the practice of trauma-informed care either because they are about populations likely to experience trauma or because they prepare you to address the emotional or behavioral manifestations that may be related to trauma. We list these as resources because they may be effectively used on an as-needed basis. These include:

Chapter 42: Depression

Chapter 43: Anxiety

Chapter 44: Somatic Symptoms

Chapter 45: Grief

Chapter 46: ADHD in Adolescents

Chapter 49: Eating Disorders

Chapter 50: Talking to Teens who are Using and abusing Substances

Chapter 55: Bullying

Chapter 56: Unhealthy Relationships

Chapter 57: Emotional, Physical and Sexual Abuse

Chapter 58: Youth Violence

Chapter 61: Sexual and Gender Minority Youth

Chapter 63: America's Children: The unique needs and Culture of America's Youth (Note these children may witness their parents recovering from PTSD)

Chapter 64: Foster Care Youth

Chapter 65: HIV Infected Youth

Chapter 66: Serving Homeless and Unstably Housed Youth