



Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

ADVANCING RECOVERY AND WELLNESS IN TEXAS

**Senate Committee on Criminal Justice/Senate Education Committee Hearing
Interim Charge #7
October 30th, 2012**

Many children involved in school disciplinary programs and the juvenile justice system have been exposed to episodic or acute trauma. This type of early environment and life stress can lead to numerous differences in the structure and physiology of brain development, with resulting long-term effects on multiple human functions and behaviors. Neurobiological research indicates that changes are structural as well as functional. Research continues to shed light on the long-term development of emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social difficulties observed in traumatized children.

Among children in CPS custody who were sexually abused, 60% were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, as were 42% of children who had been physically abused. But trauma and abuse are not limited to children in the CPS system. According to the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, a traumatic experience can often cause mental health, substance use, and physical health conditions. Many symptoms, behaviors and responses expressed by survivors of trauma are directly related to their traumatic experience. Additionally, people who experience significant childhood trauma and family discord as children have a higher incidence of physical and behavioral health problems as adults.

Existing systems of care, including many school disciplinary practices, exacerbate traumatic experiences by relying on invasive, coercive or forced treatment methods that cause or increase a person's feelings of being threatened, unsafe, violated, shamed and powerless. The growing movement toward trauma-informed care recognizes that, for some individuals, current treatment theories and practices can do more harm than good. The use of trauma-informed skills, instead of well-intended but misinformed treatments, can avoid re-traumatizing people and increase their healing and recovery.

Training in trauma-informed care is essential for AEP faculty and staff. Trauma-informed care is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives. Treatment based on trauma-informed care changes the thinking from "what is wrong with you," to "what has happened to you?" Trauma-informed care is a partnership between the survivor and the service provider that is based on trust that can lead to healing and true behavior change. Trauma-informed care uses recommended evidence-based practices such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to treat trauma-related mental and behavioral health conditions. A trauma-informed system is one in which all components of a service system are evaluated and reframed with an understanding of the role that trauma and violence play in the lives of individuals.

Texas has recognized the significance of trauma and its relevance to behavior for children in the child protective services system. CPS staff, child placement agency staff and foster families are required by statute to participate in trauma-informed care training. **Unfortunately, this same level of awareness has not yet been carried over to our educational system.** Consequently, existing systems of care in schools and alternative education programs are often not effective in changing behaviors.

For additional information, please contact Meagan Longley at meagan.longley@austin.utexas.edu.