



ICTG RESOURCE GUIDE

Collective Trauma Preparedness and Response



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Youth Ministry Leadership

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Contact:

office@ictg.org

www.ictg.org

Contents

Introduction	1
Becoming Trauma-Informed Youth Ministries	3
Traits of Trauma-Informed Youth Ministries	7
Youth Ministry Assessment Guide for Becoming Trauma-Informed	11
Adverse Childhood Experience Assessment	15
Individual Resiliency Assessment	17
Collective Congregation Trauma Assessment	21
Congregation Resiliency Assessment	23
Trauma Informed Youth Ministry Assessment	27
Youth Ministry Resiliency Assessment	29
Calm	33
Stress Account	39
Self-Care Roster	41
Connect	43
Personal Community	45
Personal Care Network Inventory	47
Professional Community	49
Youth Minister's Professional Care Network Inventory	51

Communicate	53
Positive Internal Body Communication	57
Internal Body Communication- Panic Attacks	58
Communicating with Family & Friends	59
Caring Relationships Characteristic Roster	60
Communicating with Youth Team Leaders	61
Communicating with Youth Members & Families	62
Worship and Ministry Resources	63
Conclusion	65
Notes	67





INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health, *almost half of the children in the United States* today will suffer one, two, or more traumatic experiences before they are 18 years old. That's a lot of youth in and around your congregation who need reliable care. Unfortunately, youth are not a community's only concern today. According to the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Alliance, a multi-disciplinary group of professional and advocacy organizations, an estimated *70 percent of adults in the United States* today have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives. This represents a lot of parents, relatives, and community elders who are impaired in responding adequately to childhood adversity.

Too often, young people endure significant collateral damage from traumatic incidents, and their trust in religious groups' abilities to guide them in faith and meet needs in the community well wanes. When unprepared, just one catastrophic event can obliterate a previously thriving youth ministry program.

In worst cases, when traumatic stressful pressures exceed capacities and become overwhelming, youth group leaders conduct dangerous patterns of behavior, including avoiding conflict, neglecting their own health and their loved ones, experiencing burnout, or, worse, they commit crimes. Too many communities



around our country are familiar with these troubling results.

Facing daunting impacts of trauma, of course, is not new to youth ministry leaders. Even as youth groups provide epicenters for healing by hosting essential locations for belonging and spiritual development, research shows how the effects of trauma still ravage local congregations every day. At any given time, youth groups consist of members, visitors, and leaders who have experienced significant adverse events. Sometimes, these groups also are part of a congregation or a community that experiences a collective trauma. Whether with kids, families, or fellow congregants, youth leaders regularly find themselves at the crossroads of tragedy and healing. Yet too often, youth leaders like you, and ones you know, look back at crises they encountered and recall feeling isolated, unequipped, and their abilities to cope overwhelmed. Shocking events exceeded their capacities and demanded skills rarely, if ever, addressed in traditional youth ministry training programs. It is critical youth team leaders hone their response-abilities and long-term care practices if youth ministry efforts are going to sustain meaningful results amid shocking 21st century demands.

Youth leaders, more often than not, minister on the frontline of these disturbing challenges. You know, all too well, how young people especially are vulnerable to the impacts of broken relationships, abuse of all kinds, and isolation. You also know the ways youth are neglected, abused, or how their developmental and creative needs can go unmet even by the most well-intentioned caregivers distracted by mounting stress at work or in the community. Merely the act of you opening this guide demonstrates you see enough in your setting to know things can't go on like this. As a minister you need information and tools to be within reach to meet the demands you face every day. The impacts of trauma, indeed, are far reaching and impact every community throughout our country and our world today.

Facing harsh statistics and seemingly unending tragic headlines, it can seem like all hope is lost. But there is good news! Incredibly, the single most important factor in fostering resilience among youth is having ***at least one consistently caring adult in their life***. When intentional, congregations, can offer this gift in spades. Throughout this book, we'll show you how to build critical relational capacities and foster resiliency among your next generations.



BECOMING TRAUMA-INFORMED YOUTH MINISTRIES

Our communities need to be able to trust that faith communities, and especially their youth groups, are not only safe organizations but also are reliable catalysts for healing. This trust is only built when both ordained and lay ministers skillfully respond and attend to far-reaching emotional and spiritual wounds caused by trauma. Congregational resiliency, and attending to stark emotional and spiritual wounds remaining after severe loss, requires both aptitude and intentional care – what is commonly being referred to these days as becoming “trauma-informed.” Generally, being “trauma-informed” refers to how a person or a group commonly operates with awareness that:

- Trauma occurs among individuals, families and groups and its effects can become wide spread
- Individual, family and group care practices can counter adverse impacts of trauma and initiate healing

Important to note—Becoming trauma informed is not necessarily learned in the classroom or certified through a degree program. Rather, these skills are forged over time as everyday people dedicate themselves to growing reliably caring relationships in their midst, respecting and listening to survivors’ innate abilities to communicate injuries, and blessing or valuing the symbols of loss and survival they encounter.



In the aftermath of trauma, relational care makes a world of difference and is a hallmark of a trauma-informed congregation.

At ICTG, we understand care to be made up of three core components: calm, connect, and communicate.

These three practices of care determine the pace of healing. They reliably mitigate threat, decrease stress, and increase trust and safety. They are the fertile soil from which new life emerges and restoration flourishes. Within these relationships, even in light of the glaring rates of trouble mentioned above, ***we learn hope is not lost because trauma is never the end of the story.***

When intentional about practicing care, congregations and youth ministries, in particular, have the capacity to multiply care exponentially.

Likely, as a reader, you are a youth team leader who is seeking to prepare well for traumas that may occur, or you experienced a trauma and in the aftermath are now discerning next steps. At ICTG we believe you are one of the greatest assets to your community. We believe in this place and time, here and now, you can be a caring servant leader among your faith community as you walk the “Valley of the Shadow of Death” together. Your willingness to show up and be present along this undefined pathway makes a difference for you and your community of faith. The fact that you’ve already opened this book and read this far shows you already possess instincts for healing and thriving beyond trauma.

To help you expand your personal and professional skills for effectiveness as a youth leader in responding to traumas, we culled current research to provide you with practical guides to use repeatedly and in varying circumstances to discern abilities and maximize creative responsiveness. As you learn more about how stressors impact you, how to build effective care networks for yourself and your congregation, and how to build and rebuild ministry after trauma, you practice greater capacities for resiliency. Stone by stone, these practices form the wells of calming, community, and communication for you and your youth leadership team to draw on in times of crisis. As a youth leader – whether an ordained pastor, a lay director, or a volunteer lay leader – this guide helps to ensure you have what is needed to withstand - or, better put, stand with - the inevitable pressures of trauma.

It’s important to note there is no short cut. There is no magic spell in these pages – or anywhere else, for that matter – to catapult you to feeling better. **There is no way to fully make the loss disappear.** Instead, in the following pages, you will find tools for developing personal and professional practices to increase your capacities for long-term personal, vocational and youth ministry health based on the three core components for healing. By caring for yourself and caring for the people around you, together you form true and reliable resiliency and discover pathways through the fogginess of sorrow. This information and tools come from field experts like yourself who are willing to share what they have learned when they were in your shoes, preparing for or responding to traumas. May they be a source of encouragement and inspiration to you in the days ahead.