



ICTG RESOURCE GUIDE

Collective Trauma Preparedness and Response



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Organizational Health Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

Communities and organizations consist of individuals who have experienced significant adverse events. Sometimes, communities and organizations also encounter collective trauma or a cascade of severe losses as a whole. Becoming a trauma-informed leader can help your organization or community thrive beyond the geography of disaster that may surround you at any given time. Many leaders look back at crises they encountered and recall feeling isolated, unequipped, and overwhelmed. Shocking events exceeded their capacities and demanded skills rarely, if ever, addressed in traditional educations. What scant training and guides did exist was out of reach, hidden away in obscure academic journals or only available through remote and expensive conferences. The impacts of trauma, indeed, are far reaching and affect every community throughout the world today. This guide provides information and tools you'll need as a leader when your community is impacted by trauma.



As a leader, you need information and tools to be within reach to meet the demands you face every day. According to the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health, ***almost half of the children in the United States*** at that time would go on to suffer one, two, or more traumatic experiences before they turned 18 years old. Subsequent studies continue to demonstrate similar rates of adversity. More often than not, when these children express their pain it is frequently misdiagnosed as "acting out" or as symptoms of an illness or disease unrelated to traumatic stress.

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.

Add to these personal experiences collective trauma events which may include mudslide, tornado, fire, act of violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, or a leader's suicide, and it becomes critical that leaders hone their response abilities and long term care practices to meet the demands of their communities.

If that were not enough, many factors further complicate healing processes. Incessant access to harsh headlines through social media and increasing cycles of urgency distract and numb people from being able to sense their pain, respond adequately, or find relief. Rare or no opportunities to practice relational restorative skills, like patience, calming, fair conflict resolution, and constructiveness, inhibit leaders, staff members, and constituents from developing abilities to thrive amid 21st century realities of devastation.

Despite best efforts, sadly when traumatic pressures become overwhelming leaders sometimes practice dangerous patterns of conflict avoidance, their families fall apart, they experience burnout, or, worse, they even commit crimes.

Even as social service agencies, counseling centers, and faith communities can provide epicenters for healing, research shows how the effects of trauma still ravage local organizations and communities everyday. Traumatic losses dismantle previously conceived views of community and tear at core senses of identity and belonging, which are necessary components of healing. Organizations struggle to find their footing and resume momentum long after the uncharted paths of debris and heartache first appear.

BECOMING A TRAUMA INFORMED ORGANIZATION

Organizational resiliency requires *care* – a practice that is commonly being referred to these days as becoming “trauma informed.” If trauma-informed care was not part of your organization’s pre-disaster mission, this need can feel unfamiliar and even beyond the scope of your organization’s activity. However, attending to basic trauma needs can help an organization resume core mission activity more quickly and with more lasting health for leaders, staff, and constituents.

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 affects can become wide spread
- Collective trauma may involve an event, or series of events, that exceeds your organization or your community’s capacity to cope for some time
- Individual, family and group care practices can counter adverse impacts of trauma and initiate healing

It is important to note that becoming a caring person who helps counter the effects of trauma is not a process that necessarily is learned in the classroom or certified through a degree program. Rather, these skills are forged over time as everyday people dedicate themselves to growing reliable, caring relationships in their midst, respecting and listening to survivors’ innate abilities to communicate injuries, connecting



leaders, staff, or constituents with useful resources, and blessing or valuing the symbols of loss and survival they encounter.

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

At ICTG, we understand that trauma-informed care is made up of three core practices: calm, connect, and communicate.

These three critical actions 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 the caring relationships that exercise these core practices after trauma, ***we learn how hope is not lost and trauma is never the end of the story.***

As a reader, likely you are a leader who is seeking to prepare for trauma that may occur, or, you experienced a trauma and, in the aftermath, are 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 leader among your organization as you come alongside fellow survivors and walk the aftermath of trauma together. Your willingness to show up and be present along this undefined pathway makes a difference for you and your community. The fact you have opened this guide and read this far shows you already possess critical instincts for healing and thriving beyond trauma.

To help you expand your personal and professional skills for effectiveness in responding to trauma, we culled current research and scoured best practices to provide you with practical steps and tools you can implement immediately and use in varying circumstances to maximize responsiveness. The following pages include assessment tools for becoming a trauma-informed organization, rosters for discerning personal stress and self-care, and guides for expanding professional and community care practices. As you learn more about how stressors impact you, how to build effective care networks for yourself and your organization, and how to build or rebuild safe and meaningful mission practices after trauma, you develop greater capacities for resiliency. Stone by stone, these practices form the wells of calming, community, and communication for you, your staff, and your constituents to draw on in times of future crisis. These guides help to ensure you have what is needed to withstand - or, better put, stand with - the pressures of trauma.

It is important to note that 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 and organizational 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 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.



TRAITS OF TRAUMA INFORMED ORGANIZATIONS

Trauma informed organizations know trauma disrupts systems. Trauma disrupts internal bodily systems, family systems, and organizational systems. Trauma disrupts our health, making it challenging for our organs and body parts to communicate in healthy ways (we'll address this more in the Communication section). Trauma disrupts our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. It can make us desire isolation and also feel isolated, even when we don't want to be alone. It can cause us to feel shame, vulnerability, and ongoing fear of further threats, which can make it challenging for us to build new relationships or restore broken ones. Trauma can polarize groups of people, blocking the flow of information. If we do not recognize that the effects of trauma are all around us, impacting us in these many ways, we cannot mitigate challenges and bring about healing.

To counter this vast disruption, trauma informed organizations regularly practice the core actions of care: calm, connect, and communicate. They display many signs and expressions of being informed about how trauma impacts people's lives and how care counters adversity.

