

Trauma-Informed Approach in Adolescent Health



Responding to Disclosures Job Aid

Program staff can follow four steps when responding to signs and disclosures of trauma.

1. Acknowledge feelings and help-seeking
2. Identify internal strengths of the person disclosing and external resources
3. Commit to next steps
4. Consider referral

You may take some of these steps in the moment, while others you may take in the hours, days, or weeks after signs or disclosures of trauma occur. When you take these steps may depend on the nature and severity of the signs or disclosures of trauma, how much time you have to respond, and the extent to which you need additional information and support to respond.

1. Acknowledge feelings and help-seeking.

Responding to disruptive or unexpected behaviors may sound like:

- I hear you keep speaking up when someone else is talking. At the beginning of the session we all agreed to give everyone space to talk and not to talk over each other. It looks like you're having a tough time. What can I do to help you right now?
- I see you keep putting your head down on the table. We have a room next door available if you need to step out and take a break from the program.
- You had a big response to what another participant shared, do you want to step into the hall and talk with me for a few minutes?

Responding to a disclosure about a past trauma or adverse childhood event (ACE) may sound like:

- I really appreciate that you decided to talk with me today. Thank you.
- How is this making it challenging for you to participate in our program right now?
- How would you like me to help?
- Despite what's happening, you have shown incredible determination and sought help. That's a really big deal.

In my program/role, this may sound like:

2. Identify internal strengths of the person disclosing and external resources.

This may sound like:

- You know, coming to our program today shows how strong and resilient you are. What are some of your other strengths that you have used to get through this?
- How have you coped with these sorts of feelings before? How were those strategies helpful or unhelpful for you?
- How would you prefer to handle these feelings right now?
- Have you ever told anyone else about this or asked for help? What was that experience like for you? Did it help you or the situation?

In my program/role, this may sound like:

3. Commit to next steps.

This may sound like:

- I really appreciate that you decided to talk with me today—thank you. That shows incredible courage and strength. I want to honor the trust you placed in me and for you to continue to feel safe and supported when seeking help from our program. So, I need you to know what choices we do and don't have about what you shared with me. I'm going to take a minute to explain our reporting process and we can decide together how to move forward.
- If we need to share this information with someone else, what would you want to say/be said to them? How would you feel about having that conversation? Would it be helpful for us to discuss what that conversation might be like?
- Together, let's decide what to do next. Please tell me how you would like this next step to go and we can make a plan together.
- Thank you for putting your trust in me. I really appreciate and will honor that. I want you to know that I am confident we can work this out together. Let's check in again tomorrow. Is that ok with you?

In my program/role, this may sound like:

4. Consider a referral.

Youth may require different services at different times or not at all. Referrals should be individualized to the youth being referred for a service by assessing their personal needs and making an effort to understand what kinds of services or help the person feels are most important to them.

This may sound like:

- We work with a number of organizations in the area that specialize in supporting young people who have experienced these types of things. I can connect you with them by giving you their contact information or we could call them together.
- The psychologist here at your school is a great resource and knows a lot about supporting young people who've experienced difficult things. Would you like to walk to their office together and I can introduce you?

In my program/role, this may sound like: