

# A Trauma-Informed Approach to Girls: What it is and Why it's Needed

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Voice and Visibility for Disconnected Girls: Responding to Trauma

Georgetown University Law Center

November 15, 2013

Washington, DC

## Definition of Trauma

The diagnostic manual used by mental health providers defines trauma as:

“exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation.”

(American Psychiatric Assoc. [APA] DSM-5)

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## Definition of Trauma (cont.)

The exposure must result from one or more of the following scenarios in which the individual:

- directly experiences the traumatic event;
- witnesses the traumatic event in person;

(American Psychiatric Assoc. [APA] DSM-5)

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## Definition of Trauma (cont.)

The exposure must result from one or more of the following scenarios in which the individual:

- learns that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend;
- experiences first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not through media, pictures, television or movies unless work-related).

(American Psychiatric Assoc. [APA] DSM-5)

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## Traumatic Events

Trauma can take many forms:

- Emotional, sexual or physical abuse
- Neglect
- Abandonment (especially for small children)
- Extremely painful and frightening medical procedures

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## Traumatic Events (cont.)

- Catastrophic injuries and illnesses
- Rape or assault
- Muggings
- Domestic violence
- Burglary
- Automobile accidents

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## Traumatic Events (cont.)

- Immigration
- Natural disasters (hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, volcanoes)
- Terrorism such as September 11, 2001
- Witnessing violence such as a parent harming another parent

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## Trauma and Abuse

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Domestic violence
- Witnessing abuse/violence
- Self-inflicted violence
- Military sexual assault (MST)

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## Types of Abuse (cont.)

### Stigmatization

Women and girls in criminal justice system  
Women and girls of color  
Women and girls in poverty  
Lesbian, transgendered, bisexual  
Women and girls with mental illness  
Women and girls with physical challenges

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## Traumatic Events (cont.)

Of all these forms of trauma,  
women/girls are at greater risk of  
interpersonal abuse than men/boys.

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## Definition of Gender-Responsiveness

- Creating an environment through:
  - site selection
  - staff selection
  - program development
  - content and material
- that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls, and
- addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges.

Source: Covington, S.S., & Bloom, B.E. (2006). Gender-responsive treatment and services in correctional settings. In E. Leader (Ed.), *Inside and out: Women, justice, and therapy*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth. © S. Covington, Ph.D., 2013

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## Trauma

- Variation in what trauma is
- Variation in response

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## Trauma

- Acute event: accident, assault
- Chronic: ongoing abuse, poverty, racism

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## Trauma-Informed Services

### Trauma-informed services:

- Take the trauma into account.
- Avoid triggering trauma reactions and/or traumatizing the individual.

(Harris & Fallot)

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## Trauma-Informed Services (cont)

- Adjust the behavior of counselors, other staff and the organization to support the individual's coping capacity.
- Allow survivors to manage their trauma symptoms successfully so that they are able to access, retain and benefit from the services.

(Harris & Fallot)

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## Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

- Safety (physical and emotional)
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

(Fallot & Harris, 2006)

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**ACE Study**  
(Adverse Childhood Experiences)

**Before age 18:**

- Recurrent and severe emotional abuse
- Recurrent and severe physical abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

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**ACE Study**  
(Adverse Childhood Experiences)

**Growing up in a household with:**

- Both biological parents *not* being present
- Your mother being treated violently
- An alcoholic or drug-user
- A mentally ill, chronically depressed, or family member attempting suicide
- A family member being imprisoned

(N = 17,000)

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**ACE Study**  
(Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Results

ACEs still have a profound effect 50 years later, although now transformed from psychosocial experience into organic disease, social malfunction, and mental illness.

- Smoking
- Alcoholism
- Injection of illegal drugs
- Obesity

(Felitti, V.J.: Origins of Addictive Behavior: Evidence from the ACE Study, 2003 Oct;52(8): 547-59. German, PMID: 14619682 (PubMed-indexed for MEDLINE).

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## ACE Study (continued)

Women 50% more likely than men to have a score of 5 or more.

(Felitti & Anda, 2010)

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences Five-State Study 2010

- Collaboration between CDC and state health departments of AR, LA, NM, TN and WA.
- 26,229 adults were surveyed

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## ACE Scores and Impact

- Adverse childhood experiences are underlying factors for:
  - Chronic depression
  - Suicide attempts
  - Serious and persistent mental health challenges
  - Addictions
  - Victimization of rape and domestic violence

Source: Ann Jennings, Ph.D.

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## Crittenton ACE Pilot (October 2012)

Group	Total Score	
	4+	5+
All girls served by Crittenton (n=916)	53%	42%
All young mothers served by Crittenton (n=253)	61%	48%
Young mothers in juvenile justice and served by Crittenton (n=59)	74%	69%
Young mothers in child welfare and referred to Crittenton (n=42)	63%	48%

Source: Summary of Results: Crittenton Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Pilot, October 24, 2012 © S. Covington, Ph.D., 2013

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### Trauma Creates Pathways

- Don't do well in school
- Don't interact with peers
- Don't do well with teachers

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### ACE Study Walla Walla, WA ([www.ACESooHigh.com](http://www.ACESooHigh.com))

- Wow. Are you okay?
- What's going on?
- 1 – 10 with anger

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### A Trauma-informed Environment

- Incorporates an understanding of the impact of violence and abuse on girls into all programs and services
- Establishes both physical and emotional safety in order to prevent re-traumatization, an increase in eating disorders, self-harm, management problems, failure to engage in program services, relapse, recidivism, and poor program outcomes

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### A Trauma-informed Environment

- Creates an atmosphere that is respectful of girls and their need for safety, respect, and acceptance
- Eliminates unnecessary triggers and identifies triggers for each individual

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### A Trauma-informed Environment

- Strives to maximize a girl's ability to make safe choices and exercise control over her life
- Strives to be culturally competent – to understand a girl's culture and how that affects her life experiences, view of the world, and behavior
- Uses "universal precautions" and assumes that every girl may be a trauma survivor

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## Shift Focus

From what goes wrong, to:

- Resilience, support
- Skills, resources
- Hope

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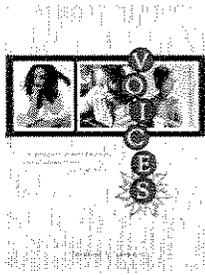
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## Voices: *A Program of Self-Discovery and Empowerment for Girls*



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## Moral Challenges

- 19<sup>th</sup> century – slavery
- 20<sup>th</sup> century – totalitarianism
- 21<sup>st</sup> century – brutality against women and girls

(NY Times 9/23/09)

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