Delivering Trauma-Informed Care: How to Respond to Clients Experiencing Hardship

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What is Trauma?

* Trauma is a state of mind.
* Trauma is not about the severity of the event, it is about the way we process it.
* Trauma is: “The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud.”
  –Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*
Types of Trauma: “T” versus “t”

* “T” trauma: events in our lives that cause significant derailment or interruption.
  
  Examples: loss, abuse, medical trauma, homelessness, severe mental illness

* “t” trauma: omnipresent identities that can be triggering in daily life. Otherwise known as micro-aggressions.
  
  Examples: belonging to a minority group, being female, living with chronic pain or illness, being an immigrant
The presence of “T” and “t” traumas can create risk factors for a client to experience further hardship.

Assessing for these risk factors is a key component to providing trauma-informed care.

It is just as important to highlight protective factors present in each case, because these resiliencies can help clients mitigate the impact of trauma.
Ways to Create Safety:

* Assume that there are always “T” and “t” traumas present for our clients.
* Create a safe, non-judgmental space.
* Make sure clients know your role (i.e. the services you do and don’t provide at your agency).
Creating boundaries is inherently therapeutic for clients who have experienced trauma.

Giving clients a roadmap of a session models self-regulation.

Outline your role as the worker from a strengths-based perspective.

Practice positive redirection if boundaries are tested or crossed.
Ending a session can be difficult for clients who have experienced trauma.

Finding a way to summarize the interaction can build safety for clients.

Sharing something that you found valuable from the session or interaction can help the client feel heard.

Stating next steps helps the client look forward, which is inherently healing.
There is a ‘trauma story’ and a ‘resilience story.’

The trauma story is “these are all the bad things that have happened in my life.”

The resilience story is “these are all the ways that I have survived.”

Tell this story.
“If you feel lost, disappointed, hesitant or weak, return to yourself. Return to who you are here and now, and when you get there, you will discover the truth. Like a lotus flower in full bloom, even in a muddy pond, you are beautiful and strong.”

-Masaru Emoto, *The Secret Life of Water*

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