



The Resilient Leader: Fostering Strength, Trust, and Psychological Safety

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ASCP Amazing Lab Race – Champion’s Vault

This resource was co-authored by Stephanie Whitehead and endorsed by Brittany Teeter, champions of the Amazing Lab Race: San Antonio, held on April 30, 2024.

This resource is made freely available through the [ASCP Negotiation and Advocacy Toolbox](#) within the Amazing Lab Race Champion’s Vault.



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Disclaimer

We are not licensed mental health professionals, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, or counselors. The content provided in this session is strictly for **educational and informational** purposes only.



Trigger Warning

This course mentions concepts such as trauma, triggers, distress, safety and more.

If you need to talk to someone immediately, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources and best practices for professionals. **Call 988.**

Objectives

- Foster a trauma-sensitive work culture
- Manage stressors, triggers, and trauma within the healthcare workforce
- Incorporate Trauma-Informed Care and Leadership
- Empower a resilient healthcare workforce



Prevalence of Trauma

- **70.4%** have experienced trauma
- Average of **3.2 traumatic events** over the course of a lifetime
- The reported risk for post-traumatic stress **increased by 83%** compared to pre-pandemic levels
- Globally, **1 in 5 people** experienced anxiety, depression or PTS during the pandemic



Trauma

Trauma describes the **challenging emotional consequences** that often results from living through a distressing event.

Trauma is not what happens to you;
it is what happens **inside of you** as a result
of what happens to you.





Trauma in the Workplace

**Trauma is pervasive,
affecting people from all
walks of life**

**The memories are stored
in our body and can
manifest in various
forms**

**Trauma can impact
performance and
engagement**



Impact at Work

Trauma can harm someone's:

- Sense of self
- Sense of safety
- Ability to concentrate
- Ability to enjoy activities
- Ability to regulate emotions
- Ability to navigate relationships
- Ability to reach their potential

Trauma increases:

- Absenteeism
- Task avoidance
- Conflicts
- Accidents
- Loss of motivation
- Fear
- Anger
- Forgetfulness
- Uncooperativeness

Some Types of Trauma

- Severe illness or injury
- Traumatic loss
- Witnessing a terrorist attack
- Witnessing a natural disaster
- Job loss
- Devastating financial loss
- Road accident
- Military combat incident
- Large-scale cyber attack
- Hospitalization
- Medical trauma
- Post-suicide attempt
- Life-threatening illness/
diagnosis
- Emotional abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Domestic physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Sibling abuse
- Physical neglect
- Incarcerated family member
- Divorce
- Overly strict rules
- Coercion
- Bullying
- Abandonment
- Extreme punishment
- Long-term misdiagnosis
- Racism
- Discrimination
- Slavery
- Genocide/Holocaust
- War
- Forcible removal from family
- Forcible removal from
community
- Substandard schooling
- Poor housing quality/availability
- Lack of jobs/substandard wages
- Food scarcity
- Poor water/air quality
- Lack of social capital/mobility
- Exposure to survivors of or
details about traumatic incidents,
torture, or other trauma
- COVID-19 pandemic

Common Behaviors of Trauma at Work

- Harsh language
- **Excessive criticism**
- Competition
- **Micromanaging**
- Lack of planning
- Lack of support
- Public criticism
- “Joking”
- **Avoidance**
- Cliques
- Insensitivity
- Exclusion
- Projecting own needs
- Irritability or angry outbursts
- Appearing detached or disconnected
- **Appearing unengaged**
- Appearing emotionally numb
- Rejecting help from others
- Self-blame when issues arise
- Difficulty trusting others
- **Strong desire to be in control**
- Anxiety of panic attacks
- Acting overwhelmed or easily triggered
- **Social isolation or withdrawal**
- Dissociation
- Memory problems or forgetfulness
- Seeming jumpy or easily startled
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- **Acting in a constant state of crisis**
- Seeming always on guard
- **Difficulty setting/achieving goals**
- Poor self-esteem or feelings of worthlessness
- Impulsivity or reckless behavior
- **Emotional dysregulation**
- Concentration issues
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Abusive leadership styles
- Absenteeism
- Cynicism
- Decreased productivity
- **Accidents/injuries at work**

Self Reflection

**What would you change
about how you reacted to
these behaviors?**

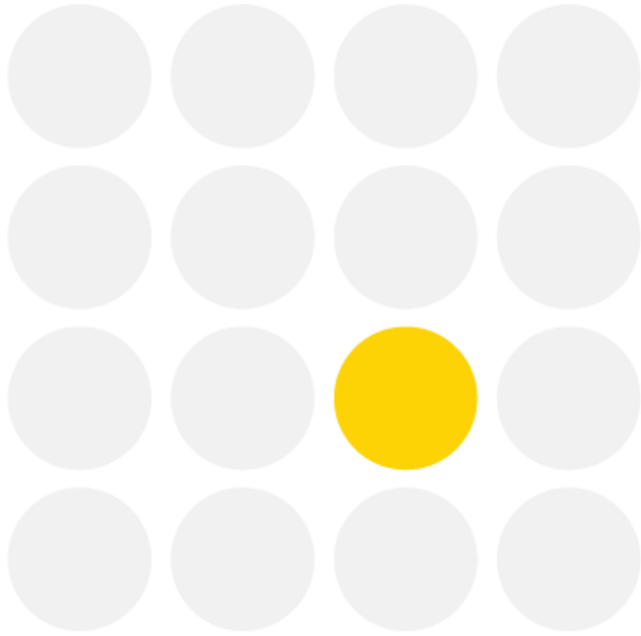
Understanding Trauma Informed Care

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about”

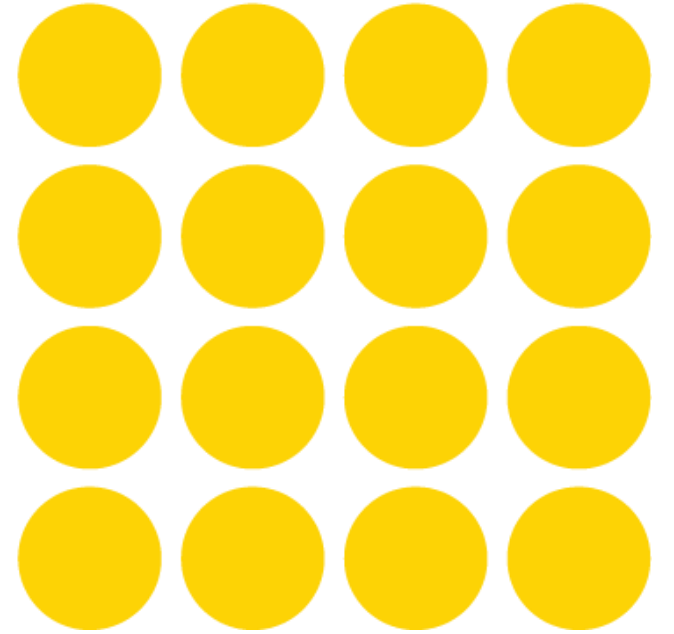
- Wendy Mass, NYT Bestselling Author



someone's day



what we see



what we assume

Trauma-Informed Care
an approach that assumes
that an individual is more
likely than not to have a
history of trauma

Re-Traumatization

Definition

The process of re-experiencing traumatic stress due to situations, policies, or interactions that mirror past trauma.

Importance

Organizations/systems can unintentionally re-traumatize individuals

(Jennings, 2009; SAMHSA, 2024).

Prevention Strategies

Trauma-informed approaches, training and support

Psychological safety and open communication.

Avoid triggering language, behaviors, or environments.

Policies that prioritize well-being and resilience.

Understanding Triggers

Triggers are reminders of past trauma that can activate emotional or physical responses.

Common Types of Triggers

- Visual Reminders
- Sounds & Smells
- Physical Feelings
- Situations
- Emotions
- Places
- Time of Year/Certain Dates

Recognizing & Managing Triggers in Leadership

- Think of one recent leadership “trigger” — something that sparked a strong emotional response.
- Reflect on:
 - The trigger situation (e.g., receiving last-minute feedback)
 - Your immediate reaction (e.g., withdrawal, anxiety)
 - How it showed up in your leadership (e.g., avoided follow-up, reactive tone)

Trauma-Informed Leadership

Recognizes that trauma affects individuals and their responses to stress, and that trauma can have lasting impacts on individuals and organizations

Why Does Trauma-Informed Leadership Matter?

- **Safe and supportive work** environment for all individuals
- Reduces the risk of **re-traumatization**
- **Healing** and recovery
- **Collaboration**, teamwork, culture of safety, respect, resilience
- It is beneficial **for all members** of an organization
- Informed and supportive policies and procedures

TIC Environments and workplaces

- Promote safety and collaboration
- Actively avoid triggers or stimulate anxiety
- Do not create a power differential
- Have a system in place for employees to “speak up”
- Opportunity to self-regulate behaviors in productive ways
- Creates a sense of belonging

Intersectionality b/t Trauma Informed Care & Pathology

Secondary Trauma Stress → Compassion Fatigue → Burnout

Secondary Trauma Stress (STS):

Emotional distress experienced from indirect exposure to others' trauma.

Compassion Fatigue

Deep emotional and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to distressing situations.

Burnout

Chronic workplace stress leading to exhaustion, reduced performance, and disengagement. It manifests as:

TIC and Pathology & Laboratory Medicine

Leading Causes of STS in LPs

- Continuous identification of new diagnoses and understanding their impact on patients
- Processing results that trigger personal health concerns
- Limited patient interaction, leading to emotional disconnect
- Rarely receiving follow-up on patient outcomes

Contributors

- Heavy workload and redundant tasks
- Document management demands
- Extended work hours and overtime
- Tight turnaround times and deadlines
- Exposure to hazardous substances
- Lack of social interaction and support



STS Mitigation

Mitigation

- Peer support and debriefing opportunities
- Mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques
- Trauma-informed leadership in the lab

Identifying and Mitigating High-Stress Moments in Pathology

- Take a moment to think about 1–2 high-stress moments you commonly face in your daily work.
- Drop one in the chat box.

Building Resiliency

Resilience

What does resilience mean to you?

Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to change, and keep moving forward despite challenges and stress.

- **Key Aspects of Resilient Leadership**

- Emotional regulation
- Stress management
- Empathy and support for others

Keys to Resilience

- Work hard
- **Stop to recover**
- Resume working hard



Actions to Take as a Leader

- **Realize** how trauma in pathologists impacts patient safety.
- **Reflect** on the emotional toll of handling high-stakes lab results.
- **Recognize** signs of distress in laboratory professionals.
- **Respond** by fostering a more supportive workplace.



Resources - Books

- The Complex PTSD Journal
- The Body Keeps Score
- Dissociation Made Simple
- Lifting Heavy Things
- The Sexual Healing Journey
- My Grandmother's Hands
- Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents
- Drama of the Gifted Child
- What Happened to You

Resources - Articles

- Universal Screening and Trauma Informed Care: Current Concerns and Future Directions
- A structural regression analysis of trauma-informed climate factors, organizational commitment, and burnout among behavioral healthcare providers in a large public hospital
- Trauma-Informed Care in Primary Health Settings—Which Is Even More Needed in Times of COVID-19
- Nationwide efforts for trauma-informed care implementation and workforce development in healthcare and related fields: a systematic review
- Understanding the Effects of Trauma on Health
- Making the Case for Trauma-Informed Care: Tips for Talking with Leadership

“Shouting ‘self-care’ at someone who needs community care is how we fail them.”

-Nakita Valerio



Thank you

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