



2020 State Roundtable Report

Trauma

6 Key Court Principles

New: Video

Patterns of Trauma in Court



Workgroup Co-Chairpersons

Honorable Linda Cordaro
Court of Common Pleas of Fayette County

William Cisek, Esq., Solicitor
Venango County Children & Youth Services

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Creating Trauma Informed and Responsive Dependency Courtrooms

“If we can arrange our courtrooms in such a way that people feel comfortable responding to us, the result will be a qualitatively better result at the end of a hearing.”

~~Supreme Court Justice Max Baer

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the State Roundtable (SRT) created the Trauma Workgroup (TWG) with the charge of addressing trauma within the dependency court system. Under this broad charge and initial leadership of the Honorable Kathryn Hens-Greco, Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, and Mr. David Schwille, Administrator of Luzerne County Department of Human Services (retired), the TWG began its first year examining environmental issues within the court system that may cause stressful reactions to traumatized people. The TWG also collected and analyzed information related to people’s experiences with Dependency Court.

In late 2015, there was a TWG leadership change and the Honorable Robert Mellon, Court of Common Pleas of Bucks County, became the new TWG Co-chairperson, alongside Mr. David Schwille and then Attorney Bill Cisek, Venango County Children and Youth Solicitor, upon Mr. Schwille’s retirement. Judge Mellon and Attorney Cisek expanded the TWG to include several new members including a local Pennsylvania expert on trauma, two parent attorneys, two social workers working in a *Guardian ad Litem* office, and a child welfare caseworker. These new members revitalized the group and led to a growth in knowledge, education, and resources.

PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED SYSTEMS

A review of the literature suggests the idea of “trauma responsiveness.” Trauma responsiveness requires all those working within a system to possess the knowledge of both trauma and people’s reactions to trauma. Trauma responsiveness requires everyone within the system to be educated, from judges to maintenance staff, on how to interact effectively with traumatized individuals. Simple changes to the way one approaches people and how one speaks to them can make a huge difference in people's responses.

A commitment to become trauma-responsive begins with an understanding of trauma. In its simplest form, the definition of trauma is an “event that threatens someone’s life, their safety or their wellbeing.” (NCJFCJ, 2010) Gordon Hodas, M.D., Child Psychiatrist and Consultant for Pennsylvania’s Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and expert on trauma, identifies maltreatment and witnessing domestic violence as having “the most severe consequences on children and adolescents.” (A Primer on Childhood Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as:

An event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing. SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, 2014

This series of three “E’s,” **EVENT**, **EXPERIENCE**, and **EFFECT**, make up the key elements determining if something rises to the level of trauma. Any event, in and of itself, cannot be defined as a trauma. Instead, how the individual experiences that event becomes crucial.

The key principles of a trauma-informed system underscore Pennsylvania’s strengths-based and family engaged approach to the Child Dependency System. It is important to remember that collaboration around trauma responsiveness is not just with those being served but also with each system.

PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE APPROVED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following chart provides a review of previously approved recommendations made by the TWG to the State Roundtable (SRT) from 2015 - 2019:

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2015 SRT | 1. Develop an electronic resource to highlight innovative and best practices from counties who are becoming trauma- |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

| | |
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| | <p>informed/responsive so that counties can network and provide peer support for implementation;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Work jointly with volunteer counties to obtain parent and child/youth opinions of their court experiences via a survey; and 3. Explore the feasibility of the Alternate Dispute Resolution model, Facilitation, in dependency cases by asking volunteer counties to try the method on a small number of cases and report back on criteria such as implementation, cost, and impact on length of hearings. |
| 2016 SRT | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of a training video on creating a trauma-informed dependency court; 2. Create a “What’s a Court to Do?” document with steps for creating a trauma-informed dependency court as a companion to the training video; 3. Create a bench card on trauma for judges and attorneys; and 4. Explore the feasibility of the Alternate Dispute Resolution model, Facilitation, in dependency cases by asking volunteer counties to try the method on a small number of cases and report back on criteria such as implementation, cost, and impact on length of hearings. |
| 2017 SRT | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a training on the trauma-informed court utilizing the training video, resource guide, and bench card; 2. Send the bench card to the Bench Book Committee for possible inclusion in the next edition to the bench book; 3. Work jointly with the Drug and Alcohol Workgroup to explore the intersection of substance abuse and trauma; and 4. Discontinue the search for counties to implement the Alternate Dispute Resolution model, Facilitation, in dependency cases. Instead, summarize the model in the trauma resource guide as an option and provide contact information for Venango County so that interested counties could directly reach out for information. |
| 2018 SRT | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To begin working on a resource to support solicitors, parent attorneys and GAL’s in preparing their clients for court in a way that reduces their client’s stress and anxiety; and 2. To focus on the interaction between the Judge and children/youth and create a trauma-informed courtroom environment for children/youth. |
| 2019 SRT | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve distribution of “Reducing Stress and Anxiety in the Courtroom: Resources for Solicitors, Guardians ad Litem, Parent |

| | |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>Attorneys and other Legal Professionals when preparing clients for Dependency Court;”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Complete a second test training on “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court;” 3. Implement a statewide training roll-out on “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court;” and 4. Revise and complete the Trauma-Informed educational video. |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

PROGRESS AND UPDATES TO PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past few years, the TWG has helped elevate the importance of a trauma-informed and responsive Dependency Court. The TWG highlighted the usefulness of therapy/facility dogs to ease the courtroom experience and proceedings for all participants. While not a direct charge of this Workgroup, it is exciting to know that 23 counties are using dogs to help children and families in Pennsylvania dependency proceedings. More Judges and Juvenile Court Hearing Officers are also using language that embodies a trauma-informed court, including tools and techniques learned from Motivational Interviewing.

Following the 2018 SRT, the TWG shifted its focus to trauma education, with a priority on creating an in-person training, along with an educational video entitled “The Trauma-Informed Courtroom” for Judges and Legal Professionals. The decision was made to “test” the proposed in-person training with two audiences, before a statewide rollout. The first “test” occurred on December 4, 2018, with Phase I Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) Counties in Harrisburg. A second “test” was then scheduled for June 2019 with Phase 2 FEI Counties in Cranberry Township.

Also in 2018, the TWG was charged to “create resources to support solicitors, parent attorneys, and GALs in preparing their clients for court in a way that reduces their client’s stress and anxiety.” The TWG reviewed this charge and determined that rather than creating a new resource, there were several guides previously developed by other SRT Workgroups that fit this charge. A list of these

was presented and accepted by the 2019 SRT. These resources can be found in the TWG's 2019 report to the State Roundtable at the following link <http://ocfcpacourts.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-Trauma-Workgroup-Report-002394.pdf>

Finally, the TWG was charged to revise the "*The Trauma-Informed Courtroom*" educational video, originally presented at the 2018 SRT meeting. The revisions were to include the following:

- Provide a more precise message about what is meant by and expected from a "Trauma-Informed Court;"
- Provide more clarity, flow, and specific illustrations of the Foundations of Trauma-Informed Systems; and
- Provide additional information on creating a trauma-informed environment for children and older youth.

Through collaboration with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Communications Department, the TWG spent 2019 and 2020 revising and rerecording the educational video.

2019 State Roundtable Progress

Since the 2019 SRT, the TWG has diligently worked to complete the remaining charges, which focus primarily on Court Professionals' education. On June 4, 2019, following curriculum revisions from the December 2018 "test" with FEI Phase I counties in Harrisburg, the second "test" was conducted with FEI Phase 2 Counties in Cranberry Township (western region). This education session aimed to gain feedback on the newly revised curriculum and finalize content for the statewide roll-out. There were over fifty-five attendees, including Dependency Judges, Juvenile Court Hearing Officers, Guardians ad Litem, Parent Attorneys, Solicitors, Court Administrators, Sheriff Deputies, and other court professionals representing the following eight FEI Counties:

- Adams
- Beaver

- Butler
- Fayette
- Lackawanna
- Snyder
- Tioga
- Venango

The informative and engaging professional faculty provided well-received content on “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court.” Those experienced faculty included:

Honorable Kim Berkeley Clark, President Judge

Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County

William J. Cisek, Esquire, Solicitor, and TWG Co-Chairperson

Venango County

Caren Rosser-Morris, Ph.D., Consulting Child Psychologist

Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, DHS

Cynthia K. Stoltz, Esquire, Children’s Court Administrator

Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County

Catherine Volponi, Esquire, Parent Attorney

Director ACBF Juvenile Court Project

The content agenda for the education session included (*see ATTACHMENT A*):

- ❖ The Purpose of Trauma-Informed Courts
- ❖ 6 Key Principles and Skills of Trauma-Informed Courts (*see ATTACHMENT B*)
- ❖ Implicit Bias and Its Impact on Trauma Responsiveness

The participant evaluations reflected a positive response, particularly complimenting due to the diverse professional roles in attendance. The evaluation results are on a 5.0 scale rating:

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| What is your overall evaluation of the training? | 4.4 |
| How relevant was the information presented? | 4.5 |
| How satisfied were you with the following sessions: | |
| Purpose of Trauma-Informed Systems | 4.2 |
| 6 Key Principles | 4.1 |
| Implicit Bias | 4.9 |

What two things will you do differently in your dependency proceedings?

“Try to make proceedings more conversational.”

“Ensure that interactions take into consideration possible past trauma.”

What questions do you still have about the material presented?

“How do trauma and mental health intersect and can you use the same strategies for both?”

“How does vicarious trauma impact these strategies?”

What could have made this session better?

“If we, as an agency, had brought all involved in the court process to this session.”

“A parent or child talking about their court experience through the lens of trauma.”

Additional Comments?

“Very thankful for this training. I will be sure to utilize what I have learned in all my court interactions.”

“I really liked the double presenters for each topic.”

Following the success of the second “test” site, the TWG began preparing for the statewide roll-out, which was originally scheduled as follows:

- May 5, 2020 (Western Region)
- May 13, 2020 (Eastern Region)
- May 14, 2020 (Central Region)

All faculty from the second “test” site confirmed their participation in the statewide roll-out, and registration was beginning to fill up in each region. However, due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing restrictions, it was necessary to reschedule the statewide roll-out for 2021, as follows:

- August 24, 2021 (Eastern Region)
- August 25, 2021 (Central Region)
- August 31, 2021 (Western Region)

Because this topic is so essential to our work with children and families, and our concern for how long social distancing restrictions may be in place, the TWG decided to push the rescheduled dates out far into 2021. The Workgroup hopes to provide this education session in person. We are grateful that all previous faculty have once again committed the rescheduled dates in 2021. The rescheduled session Save the Date is attached (*see ATTACHMENT C*).

The TWG also significantly revised and rerecorded the educational video entitled “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court.” While this video has the same title as the in-person education session and mirrors the overall message, the video is intended to be utilized as a tool for counties to further assess their practices around the 6 Key Principles for Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court. The video also illustrates how the 6 Key Principles can be utilized in a courtroom through real-life mock scenarios familiar with most court professionals. The video can be found at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBZeujcTFzQ&feature=youtu.be>

A copy of this link will be provided to all Leadership Roundtable Judges and Administrators and posted on the Office of Children and Families in the Courts' website, following the State Roundtable's approval.

Filming of the video occurred in two sites: The Hotel Hershey, Hershey, PA (July 24, 2019), and Adams County Courthouse, Gettysburg, PA (August 19, 2019). Participant "actors" in the video included the following:

Honorable Max Baer, Justice
Pennsylvania Supreme Court

Honorable Kim Berkeley Clark, President Judge
Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County

Honorable Michael George, President Judge
Court of Common Pleas of Adams County

Honorable Linda Cordaro
Court of Common Pleas of Fayette County

William J. Cisek, Esquire, Solicitor, and TWG Co-Chairperson
Venango County

Caren Rosser-Morris, Ph.D., Consulting Child Psychologist
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, DHS

The TWG created a guide to accompany the video to engage local children's roundtables in further examining their courtroom and courthouse practices. This guide can be found in this report (*see ATTACHMENT D*).

Finally, the TWG would like to acknowledge the collaboration and hard work of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Communications Office, in filming and editing this video. Specifically, we would like to thank the following:

- Kimberly Bathgate, Assistant Director of Communications

- Justin Scott, Multimedia Specialist

In preparation for the 2020 SRT, the AOPC’s Communications Office has prepared a trailer video, capturing 3-4 minutes of highlights from the main video, which will be shown during the 2020 SRT TWG report out.

On behalf of this year’s Trauma Workgroup, we believe our work has concluded. We want to thank the State Roundtable and all past members of the Workgroup for their efforts over the past six years. There have been significant improvements in the awareness of trauma issues impacting families in Pennsylvania’s Dependency Court System.

We look forward to seeing continued growth in knowledge, understanding, and skill as counties utilize the remaining resources presented at this year’s SRT. Finally, we congratulate all counties who have made efforts to create a more Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court.

2020 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Trauma Workgroup respectfully submits to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable the following recommendations:

1. Approve the distribution of the educational video “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court,” along with an accompanying Video Discussion Guide;
2. Approve the proposed 2021 in-person statewide training roll-out entitled “Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court;” and
3. Approve that the Trauma Workgroup be permitted to sunset, as all charges, except the scheduled 2021 state roll-out, have been accomplished.

ATTACHMENT A

Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court June 4, 2019

9:30 – 10:00 Registration/Breakfast/Welcome

10:00 – 10:30 Purpose of Trauma-Informed Court

*William J. Cisek, Esquire, Solicitor
Venango County*

10:30 – 12:00 Key Principles and Skills of Trauma-Informed Courts

*Catherine Volponi, Esquire, Parent Attorney
Director ACBF Juvenile Court Project*

*Caren Rosser-Morris, PhD, Consulting Child Psychologist
DHS Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services*

12:00 – 12:45 LUNCH

12:45 – 2:45 Implicit Bias and its Impact on Trauma Responsiveness

*Honorable Kim Berkeley Clark, President Judge
Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County*

*Cynthia K. Stoltz, Esquire, Children's Court Administrator
Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County*

2:45 – 3:00 Questions/Evaluation

Attachment B

The six key principles fundamental to a trauma-informed approach include:^{24,36}

- 1. Safety:** Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve, whether children or adults, feel physically and psychologically safe; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.
- 2. Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency with the goal of building and maintaining trust with clients and family members, among staff, and others involved in the organization.
- 3. Peer Support:** Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing their stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing. The term “Peers” refers to individuals with lived experiences of trauma, or in the case of children this may be family members of children who have experienced traumatic events and are key caregivers in their recovery. Peers have also been referred to as “trauma survivors.”
- 4. Collaboration and Mutuality:** Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences between staff and clients and among organizational staff from clerical and housekeeping personnel, to professional staff to administrators, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. As one expert stated: “one does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.”¹²
- 5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice:** Throughout the organization and among the clients served, individuals’ strengths and experiences are recognized and built upon. The organization fosters a belief in the primacy of the people served, in resilience, and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma. The organization understands that the experience of trauma may be a unifying aspect in the lives of those who run the organization, who provide the services, and/or who come to the organization for assistance and support. As such, operations, workforce development and services are organized to foster empowerment for staff and clients alike. Organizations understand the importance of power differentials and ways in which clients, historically, have been diminished in voice and choice and are often recipients of coercive treatment. Clients are supported in shared decision-making, choice, and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward. They are supported in cultivating self-advocacy skills. Staff are facilitators of recovery rather than controllers of recovery.³⁴ Staff are empowered to do their work as well as possible by adequate organizational support. This is a parallel process as staff need to feel safe, as much as people receiving services.
- 6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g. based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender-identity, geography, etc.); offers access to gender responsive services; leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections; incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served; and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

(U.S Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA, 2014)

SAVE THE DATE

Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court



Tuesday August 24, 2021 (East PA)

10AM-3PM

TBD

Wednesday August 25, 2021 (Central PA)

10AM-3PM

TBD

Tuesday August 31, 2021 (West PA)

10AM-3PM

TBD

Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court

Video Discussion Guide

Six Key Principles

Stress Reactions

Trauma Responsive



Pennsylvania State Roundtable

Trauma Workgroup

In 2020, The State Roundtable’s Trauma Workgroup completed an educational video to assist counties in creating a trauma-informed and responsive court. The intended use of this discussion guide is to assist counties in further examining their courtroom and courthouse practices. Recognizing that a trauma-informed court system begins the moment a family enters the courthouse and is impacted by all professionals in the courtroom, it is recommended that counties explore this as a topic in their Local Children’s Roundtable.

“If we can arrange our courtrooms in such a way that people feel comfortable responding to us, the result will be a qualitatively better result at the end of a hearing”

~~Supreme Court Justice Max Baer



Creating a Trauma-Informed and Responsive Court

Video Discussion Guide

Being trauma-informed and responsive at its core means changing the way we understand, serve and interact with people who have been traumatized

- ◆ Has Trauma been a topic on your local Children’s Roundtable agenda?
- ◆ How are families greeted when they enter your courthouse and courtroom?
- ◆ To what extent have your county Judges, Juvenile Court Hearing Officers, Dependency Attorneys, Sheriff Deputies, Court Administrators, and Court Professionals been educated on Trauma and its impact on children and families in the Dependency System?
- ◆ What does your current waiting area look like?
 - ⇒ Does it offer safe space for participants of abuse or domestic violence?
 - ⇒ Do you have a professional monitoring the waiting area?
 - ⇒ Is it child friendly?
- ◆ Which of the “6 Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach” are occurring in your Court and which Principles could you enhance? (reference the principle descriptions on page 4):
 - ⇒ Safety (both emotional and physical safety)
 - ⇒ Trustworthiness and Transparency
 - ⇒ Peer Support
 - ⇒ Collaboration and Mutuality
 - ⇒ Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
 - ⇒ Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues
- ◆ How are issues surrounding implicit bias being discussed and measured in your county?
- ◆ What behavioral indications have you seen in your courtroom that a child or parent is moving from a mental state of “calm” to “terror” as they feel stress during a proceeding?
- ◆ How can professionals in your courtroom help children and families move closer to a calm mental state when they begin to show signs of increasing stress?
- ◆ What resources are available in your county to address trauma?

The six key principles fundamental to a trauma-informed approach

- 1. SAFETY:** Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve, whether children or adults, feel physically and psychologically safe; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.
- 2. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSPARENCY:** Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency with the goal of building and maintaining trust with clients and family members, among staff, and others involved in the organization.
- 3. PEER SUPPORT:** Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing **their** stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing. The term “Peers” refers to individuals with lived experiences of trauma, or in the case of children this may be family members of children who have experienced traumatic events and are key caregivers in their recovery. Peers have also been referred to as “trauma survivors.”
- 4. COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY:** Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences between staff and clients and among organizational staff from clerical and housekeeping personnel, to professional staff to administrators demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. As an expert stated: “one does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.”
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- 6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND GENDER ISSUES:** The organization actively moved past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g. based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age religion, gender-identity, geography, etc.); offers access to gender responsive services; leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections; incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served; and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA, 2014)



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The information contained in this discussion guide is intended to provide useful information regarding the subject covered but may not contain all relevant information. The information contained herein is not intended to be construed as legal advice or considered a substitute for statutory, procedural or other legal authority.