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**CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE:
INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

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**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2013
October, 2013
Atlanta, GA**

Creating Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice: Introduction to the Essential Elements
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Goal of this training:

- Educate child welfare professionals about the impact of trauma on the development and behavior of children.
- Educate child welfare professionals about when and how to intervene directly in a trauma-sensitive manner and through strategic referrals.
- Assure that all children in the child welfare system will have access to timely, quality, and effective trauma-focused interventions and a case planning process that supports resilience in long-term healing and recovery.
- Assist child welfare workers in achieving the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) goals of ensuring that all children involved in the nation's child welfare system achieve a sense of:
 - Safety
 - Permanency
 - Well-being

Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice

A. Maximize the child's sense of safety.

- Traumatic stress overwhelms a child's sense of safety and can lead to a variety of survival strategies for coping.
- Safety implies both *physical* safety and *psychological* safety.
- A sense of safety is critical for functioning as well as physical and emotional growth.
- While inquiring about emotionally painful and difficult experiences and symptoms, workers must ensure that children are provided a psychologically safe setting.

B. Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion.

- Trauma can elicit such intense fear, anger, shame, and helplessness that the child feels overwhelmed.
- Overwhelming emotion may delay the development of age-appropriate self-regulation.

- Emotions experienced prior to language development may be very real for the child but difficult to express or communicate verbally.
- Trauma may be “stored” in the body in the form of physical tension or health complaints.

C. Help children make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences.

- Trauma can lead to serious disruptions in a child’s sense of safety, personal responsibility, and identity.
- Distorted connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can disrupt encoding and processing of memory.
- Difficulties in communicating about the event may undermine a child’s confidence and social support.
- Child welfare workers must help the child feel safe, so he or she can develop a coherent understanding of traumatic experiences.

D. Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child’s behavior, development, and relationships.

- Traumatic events affect many aspects of the child’s life and can lead to secondary problems (e.g., difficulties in school and relationships, or health-related problems).
- These “secondary adversities” may mask symptoms of the underlying traumatic stress and interfere with a child’s recovery from the initial trauma.
- Secondary adversities can also lead to changes in the family system and must be addressed prior to or along with trauma-focused interventions.

E. Coordinate services with other agencies.

- Traumatized children and their families are often involved with multiple service systems. Child welfare workers are uniquely able to promote cross-system collaboration.
- Service providers should try to develop common protocols and frameworks for documenting trauma history, exchanging information, coordinating assessments, and planning and delivering care.
- Collaboration enables all helping professionals to view the child as a whole person, thus preventing potentially competing priorities.

F. Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's trauma experiences and their impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services.

- Thorough assessment can identify a child's reactions and how his or her behaviors are connected to the traumatic experience.
- Thorough assessment can also predict potential risk behaviors and identify interventions that will ultimately reduce risk.
- Child welfare workers can use assessment results to determine the need for referral to appropriate trauma-specific mental health care or further comprehensive trauma assessment.

G. Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.

- Separation from an attachment figure, particularly under traumatic and uncertain circumstances, is highly stressful for children.
- Familiar and positive figures—teachers, neighbors, siblings, relatives—play an important role in supporting children who have been exposed to trauma.
- Minimizing disruptions in relationships and placements and establishing permanency are critical for helping children form and maintain positive attachments.

H. Provide support and guidance to child's family and caregivers.

- Resource families have some of the most challenging roles in the child welfare system.
- Resource families must be nurtured and supported so they, in turn, can foster safety and well-being.
- Relatives serving as resource families may themselves be dealing with trauma related to the crisis that precipitated child welfare involvement and placement.

I. Manage professional and personal stress.

- Child welfare is a high-risk profession, and workers may be confronted with danger, threats, or violence.
- Child welfare workers may empathize with victims; feelings of helplessness, anger, and fear are common.
- Child welfare workers who are parents, or who have histories of childhood trauma, might be at particular risk for experiencing such reactions.