
Trauma, Systemic Injustice and Healing

A Context for Our Work

**Town of Bennington
Community Policing Advisory Review Board**

May 20, 2023

Brian Corr • Cambridge Consulting Services Group



CONTENT WARNING



This session will include discussion of a range of traumatic incidents and how they affect people, including discussion of violence and death, and some people might find it disturbing.

Please take care of yourself and if you need to step away from or leave the session, there will be no judgment or questions about why.

If you or someone you know is suicidal or in crisis, please, contact your physician, go to your local ER, or call or text 988.

988 is the new three-digit number that sends callers to the **“988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline”** (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline). It has been active across the United States since July 2022.

When people call, text, or chat 988, they will be connected to trained counselors that are part of the existing Lifeline network. These trained counselors will listen, understand how their problems are affecting them, provide support, and connect them to resources if necessary. (Both programs provide free, confidential support 24/7.)

What is Trauma?



- Individual trauma results from an event, or series of events, that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

— *Definition from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*



Universal Types of Trauma



Interpersonal
trauma

Terrorism &
mass-casualty
events

Natural or
human-made
disasters

Vicarious
trauma

Oppression &
marginalization

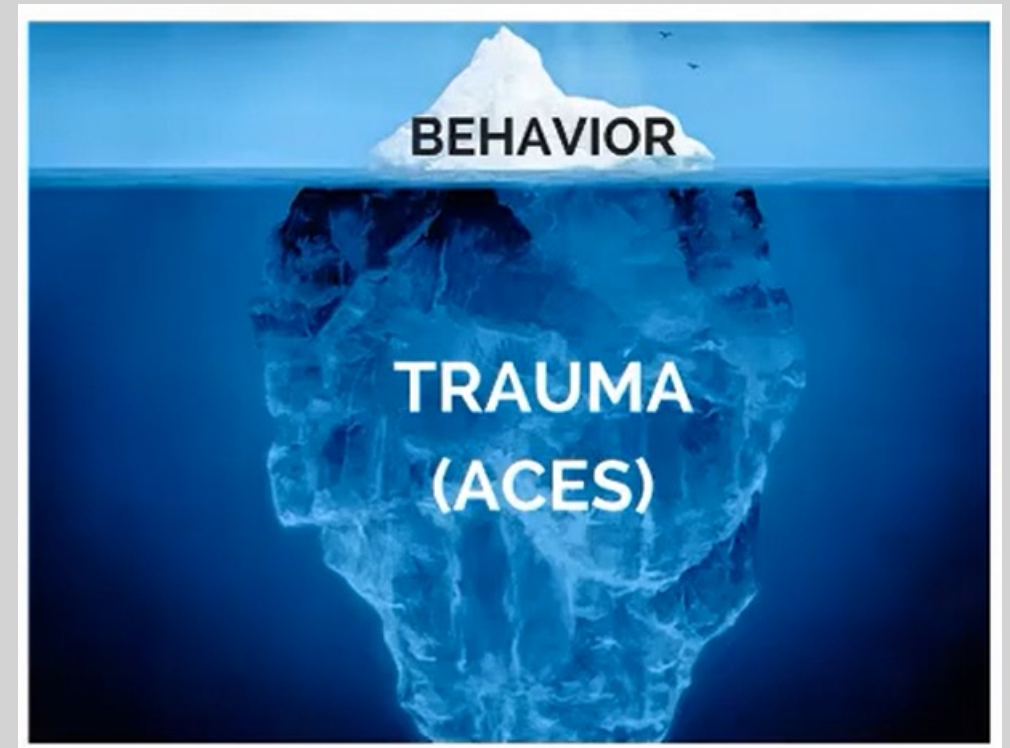
Historical &
community
trauma

Traumatic Response



What is a “traumatic response”?

- Traumatic stress reactions are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances.
- Reactions to trauma can vary greatly and are significantly influenced by the individual’s sociocultural history.



Adverse Childhood Experiences: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk>



Experiences That May Be Traumatic



- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Living with a family member with mental health or substance use disorders
- Sudden, unexplained separation from a loved one
- Poverty
- Racism, discrimination, and oppression
- Violence in the community, war, or terrorism

From: <https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences



67% of all adults report experiencing at least one ACE, and 12.5% of adults report experiencing four or more.

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce

Trauma: What's Beneath The Surface



Risk Factors for Deeper Traumatic Impact

- Age of onset
- Relationship to perpetrator
- Chronicity, severity, frequency, and mode
- Duration of trauma(s)
- History of prior trauma(s)
- Gender

Trauma-Informed

What does “being trauma-informed” actually mean?



- **Realizing** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths to recovery
- **Recognizing** the signs and symptoms of trauma in community members, individuals and their families, officers – and others
- **Responding** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices
- Working to actively **Resist** re-traumatization

ReMoved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOeQUwdAjE0>





Impact of Trauma on Law Enforcement

Higher risk of Sudden Cardiac Death

(Joseph, Violanti, Donahue, Andrews, Trevisan, Burchfiel, & Dorn, 2009; McCraty & Atkinson, 2012)

Higher rates of depression (Wang et al., 2010), **post-traumatic stress disorder** (PTSD; Marmar et al., 2006), and **alcohol use disorders** (Rees & Smith, 2008)

More likely to die from suicide than in the line of duty & LEO; those with 15 to 19 years of experience have the highest rates of completed suicides (Miller, 2006)

Higher risk for developing diabetes, obesity, and metabolic syndrome (O'Hara, Violanti, Levenson, & Clark, 2013; Paton, Johnston, Clarke, Violanti, Burke, & Deenan, 2008)

Police officers forfeit seven to ten years of their life for their vocation (Violanti 1996)

Slide courtesy of Lt. Richard Goerling

Cambridge's Trauma-Informed Law Enforcement Training

- Resiliency/Officer Well-being
- Trauma Basics and Neurobiology
- Trauma Informed Investigations: Systematic Approaches and Interviewing Strategies
- Recognize and Mitigate

LESSONS LEARNED



After hosting many trainings, we discovered the following:

- The leadership team within the department has to be not only supportive of trauma-informed training, but actively involved in communicating their support to the department and present during the actual training.
- The training needs to be dynamic and include a variety of methods: lecture, group work, and alternative forms of engagement.
- It is helpful if law enforcement officials get this training as early in their career as possible.
- Community collaboration with agencies and organizations who are supporting survivors or others in the community is very important both in participant diversity and planning efforts.
- **The big take-away:** This initiative needs to be more than a one-time training. Implementing education and understanding about officer wellness and trauma requires a shift in culture, more opportunities and areas of support, and continued educational policies.



McKinney, Texas Pool Party • June 5, 2015



McKinney, Texas Pool Party • June 5, 2015:

<https://www.wsj.com/video/raw-footage-texas-cop-draws-gun-on-pool-party-teens/3EFEC66F-BA79-429E-BBBA-BE721569756F.html>



McKinney, Texas Pool Party • June 5, 2015



What happened here?

- What did you see?
- Why did it happen?
- What led up to it?
- What might a trauma-informed department have done differently?
- How will this affect the people involved in and affected by this incident?

Being Trauma-Informed: The 4 R's



Realizing the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths to recovery

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in community members, complainants, families, officers, staff and others involved with the system

Responding by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices

Actively seeking to **resist** re-traumatization and support recovery



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“If you have come to help me you are wasting your time.

But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

*Australian Aboriginal activists in Queensland,
1970s*



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