

# FAITH AND HEALTH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

## TRAUMA INFORMED CONGREGATIONS

Thursday, April 27, 2017  
9 am to 12 pm

Eden United Church of Christ  
5051 W. Gunnison  
Chicago, IL

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

A group of about 25 people met to share wisdom and resources for building trauma-informed faith communities and growing the Trauma Informed Congregations Network in the metropolitan Chicago area. We had a wide-ranging discussion about the many levels of trauma and resilience and also about things we need to consider as we talk about what it means to be Trauma Informed (TI).

### Uncomfortable Truth

One of the uncomfortable but true issues that we need to recognize and talk about honestly is that faith communities can be sources of hurt, wounding and damage. This is especially true for LGBTQI individuals, but for many other people who have experienced abuse, shaming, exclusion and judgement at the hands of their faith leader or congregation members. Faith communities also perpetuate structural abuse across who traditions and judicatory bodies.

### Expectancy vs Expectation

We talked about how we manage our own need to control when we engage with people who have experienced trauma. One participant said, "The more I try to control, the less helpful I am." We have to learn to just be with people, to hold them accountable by seeing and inviting their own giftedness. There is a difference between expectancy and expectation. When we have specific expectations about what people should be doing, we often don't see the person who is there.

### Root Principles

- Being welcoming of the "other";
- Being intentional about not having the outcome already in mind;
- Being present;
- Ensuring that any resources that we offer people meet a standard of criteria for being trauma informed.



### Guideposts

What are some guideposts from our faith traditions that we can use to help shape how we are approaching the work around trauma and resilience?



#### Use Stories

Stories provide a great way to pullout the guide posts that speak to resilience. In stories we can find what is helpful and what can be dangerous (e.g. what stories have been used to traumatize)



#### Rigor

We have to take care not to be so eager to move the work that we lose the base principles and philosophy that grounds it. We want this to be a rigorous endeavor where being "trauma-informed really means something and implies a certain skill set and standard of practice. What will the criteria be?



#### Be Practical

Start with pragmatic "handles" or practices that we already use in our religious or spiritual life.



#### Principles over Theology

Theologies can divide, but principles can work across all perspectives.



# LEXICONS

## FAITH

DIFFERENT VIEWS

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"Faith community" may not work for everyone. For example, in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, there may be members who are humanists who don't have a deistic view.

## EMPATHY

DO OUR OWN WORK

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Empathy can be confused with pity. The difference between empathy and pity may lie in whether or not we see the "other" as different from ourselves. If the I feel that you are different than me, it's east to move to pity vs empathy —we share the human experience and I can imagine myself in your shoes. This is why it's important for us to do our own work first. If we don't have that self-awareness, we are more likely to move to pity and to trying to "fix" the other.

## TRAUMA

EXPERIENCED PAIN

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Trauma means someone has experienced pain. That may look different for different people. What one person experiences as a trauma may not be painful for others. We need to build our own sensitivity about how to engage with people around their own vulnerability and suffering that has yet to be touched.

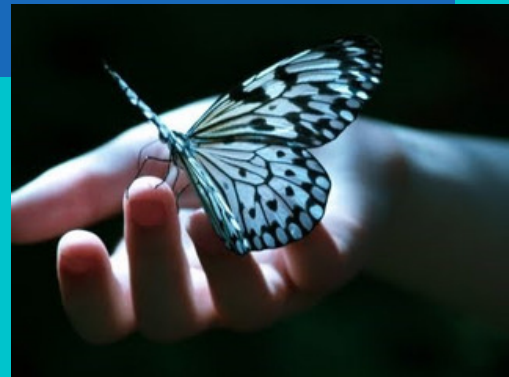
## RESILIENCE

RESILIENCE IS REAL

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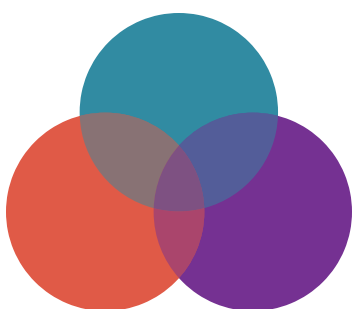
Resilience is a real phenomenon that changes outcomes for people. The communities in which we live have a big impact in supporting resilience. Some people may come from backgrounds that better prepare them to be resilient. Eg. Loving adults who see potential and giftedness that tells a child a different story about themselves that what the rest of the world may tell them. How do we foster resilience in both individuals and communities?

# TRANSFORMATION VS. TRANSACTION



For real change, we have to work to engage people and their stories versus trying to “fix” people with specific steps or formulas. One participant said, "It's not how I fix you, it's how I am with you." We have listed below some of the approaches participants identified as helpful tools for fostering resilience.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE



Restorative Justice (RJ) practice is a way of practicing presence and non-violence in all that we do. It is a great resource for approaching trauma and fostering resilience. RJ includes certain skills and approaches for creating opportunities for people to tell stories in a safe way, especially related to centeredness and being present. This is critical for good TI work. Restorative Justice involves skills and but it really is a way of life.

[www.nehemiahtrinityrising.org](http://www.nehemiahtrinityrising.org)

## INTERACTIVE COMFORT BUILDING



One participant shared about a program for children that provided an opportunity for kids to share at a very basic level as a way of building trust, and then moving into more vulnerable areas. Starting with “interactive comfort building” was a good way to get the children to build trust and then the issues that were most important to them and that needed to be addressed began to emerge.

## NON VIOLENT COMMUNICATION



Non Violent Communication (NVC) is built around the practices of Love, Courage and Truth and helps us practice these three things together.

[www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)

[www.doctorsbeyondstress.org](http://www.doctorsbeyondstress.org)

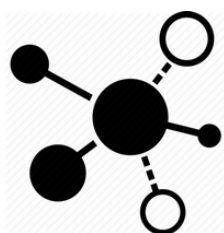
## FINAL THOUGHTS



Ultimately, we need to follow what flows from where people are. We may know that circle practice or Non Violent Communication are wonderful practices and we may be excited about bringing it, but people may have other, more practical or immediate concerns. If Restorative Justice or Non Violent Communication is a way to help people achieve what they want, ok....but it may not be the right approach for the situation.

Our approaches can't be “cookie cutter.” We need to contextualize what we are doing.

## WAYS TO CONNECT



Join the Trauma Informed Congregations Network at [www.faithhealthtransformation.org/forum](http://www.faithhealthtransformation.org/forum) and enroll in NEXUS. You will be added to a group where you can connect with others, find articles and resources and post questions or learnings.

If you'd like to be part of the group that plans faith or spiritually-rooted events and initiatives related to trauma and resilience, contact Kirsten Peachey at 630-920-6107 or [kirsten.peachey@advocatehealth.com](mailto:kirsten.peachey@advocatehealth.com)