

Creating a Trauma-Informed Program or Department: Questions to Facilitate Self-Assessment

Developed by Janice Carello, PhD, LMSW

Principle 1: Physical, Emotional, Social, and Academic Safety

Key Question: To what extent do the department's activities and settings ensure the physical, emotional, social, and academic safety of all department members?

Department Specific Questions:

- Is the physical environment safe (e.g. accessible exits, sufficient space, adequate privacy)?
- Do department members feel emotionally, socially, and academically safe in all individual and group settings?
- Do department members feel safe to make and learn from mistakes?
- Do department members feel comfortable bringing their work-related concerns, vulnerabilities, and emotional responses to department meetings or to a supervisor or mentor?

Principle 2: Trustworthiness and Transparency

Key Question: To what extent do the department's activities and settings maximize trustworthiness by making the tasks involved in service delivery clear, by ensuring consistency in practice, and by maintaining appropriate boundaries?

Department Specific Questions:

- Do department members have a clear understanding of one another's work and role?
- Do department members make their expectations of one another clear? Are these expectations consistent and fair for all department members?
- Can department members count on each other to follow through with responsibilities?
- Do program directors and administrators make rationales for policy and practice changes clear?
- Is there consistent follow through on announced plans? Are changed plans announced and explained?
- Can program directors and administrators be trusted to listen respectfully to supervisees' concerns—even if they don't agree with some of the possible implications?

Principle 3: Support and Connection

Key Question: To what extent are department members linked with appropriate peer and professional resources to help them succeed personally and professionally?

Department Specific Questions:

- Do department members have on hand referral information for campus, community, and professional resources?
- Are peers and program directors available to provide support during office hours or through some other means?
- Is self-care encouraged and supported with policy and practice?
- Is professional development encouraged and supported with policy and practice?

Principle 4: Collaboration and Mutuality

Key Question: To what extent do department members share common goals and share power?

Department Specific Questions:

- Do department members perceive themselves as allies or as adversaries?
- Do department members understand the role that they play, the importance of this role, and the impact they have in this role?
- Is department member accountability or impairment handled in a way that conveys "What's happened to you?" rather than "What's wrong with you?"
- Are department members encouraged to provide suggestions, feedback, and ideas? Is there a formal and structured way that program directors and administrators solicit input?

- Do work experiences cultivate a model of doing “with” rather than “to” or “for” other department members?
- Do program directors and administrators communicate that all department members’ opinions are valued even if they are not always implemented?

Principle 5: Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

Key Question: To what extent do policies and practices emphasize department members’ strengths and resilience over deficiencies and pathology and maximize experiences of choice and control?

Department Specific Questions:

- Is there a balance of autonomy and clear guidelines in performing job duties? Is there attention paid to ways in which department members can make choices in how they meet job requirements?
- When possible, are department members given the opportunity to have meaningful input into factors affecting their work (e.g. office décor, schedule, flex time, pedagogical approaches)?
- Are department members offered development, training, or other support opportunities to assist with work-related challenges and difficulties? To build on instructor’s skills and abilities? To further their career goals?
- Do all department members receive training related to trauma, including the impact of workplace stressors?
- Do department members get a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities?
- Is there appropriate attention to accountability and shared responsibility or is there a “blame the person with the least power” approach?

Principle 6: Social Justice

Key Question: To what extent are policies and practices responsive to issues of privilege and oppression and respectful of diverse individual and collective experiences and identities?

Department Specific Questions:

- In what ways are stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions addressed? Which stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions are addressed?
- In what ways are policies and practices responsive to and respectful department members’ diverse experiences and identities? To which experiences and identities are they responsive?
- Are efforts made to ensure department materials and activities are accessible?

Principle 7: Resilience, Growth, and Change

Key Question: To what extent do policies and practices maximize possibilities for resilience, growth, and change?

Department Specific Questions:

- How are each department members’ strengths and resilience recognized?
- Do department members communicate a sense of realistic optimism about each other’s capacity to reach goals?
- Are supervisory and peer feedback constructive, even when critical?
- How are department members helped to understand and reflect upon their own and others’ growth and change processes?

(Adapted from [Fallot & Harris, 2009](#); [SAMHSA, 2014](#))

Updated 3/2020