



**Pathways
to Resilience**



Building Healing-Centered, Trauma-Responsive Networks of Care

OCTOBER 2023

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Building Healing-Centered, Trauma-Responsive Networks of Care

Introduction

The national Pathways to Resilience initiative is based on the fundamental belief that states and communities have a responsibility to create conditions that enable people to thrive, including in the face of adversity. A trauma-responsive network of care can help accomplish this goal by bringing together partners across sectors to build an environment that promotes resilience and healing for the people they serve.

Pathways to Resilience defines a healing-centered, trauma-responsive network of care as a group of organizations across sectors – including government agencies, health care providers, educators, and community-serving organizations – that collaborate to link people to services and supports that can help them prevent, treat, and heal the impacts of adversity and trauma. Many families that have a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma are served by multiple social service programs, so creating trauma-responsive networks of care can both maximize resources and efficiency and serve families more effectively.

Ideally, organizations in a network of care have formal, established relationships and shared goals of mitigating the negative effects of adversity and trauma, developing and strengthening positive relationships, and helping individuals and families navigate systems of care. By building and sustaining trauma-responsive networks of care, communities can help those receiving services from multiple providers navigate systems of care, effectively facilitate and track referrals and outcomes, and ensure there is no wrong door for those seeking support.

Pathways to Resilience has developed this guide to help communities and organizations build and establish their own trauma-responsive network of care. It explains the effects of trauma and toxic stress and evidence-based strategies for addressing them and outlines milestones for communities and organizations to establish effective networks of care.

Whether you are in the beginning stages of developing a trauma-responsive network of care or looking for opportunities to strengthen an existing network, we hope this guide will enhance your ability to prevent and address the impact of adversity and trauma on individuals and families in your community. Join our [Pathways Learning Network](#) to learn from colleagues in other states and sectors who are part of this important work.

Understanding and Addressing Trauma and Toxic Stress

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a person's response to a to a difficult experience, series of experiences, or set of circumstances that are perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that have lasting adverse effects on their mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual wellbeing and how they function.ⁱ

One method of categorizing different types of trauma comes from a [1998 study](#) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente that coined the term "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)." ACEs refers to the ten categories of adversities in three domains – abuse, neglect, and household challenges – experienced by age 18 years old. [ACEs are very common](#) – nationally, two out of every three adults have experienced at least one ACE and 1 in 6 adults have experienced four or more ACEs. There are additional types of traumatic experiences that many consider an expanded list of ACEs, such as racism and discrimination, community violence, experiencing poverty or homelessness, and natural disasters.ⁱⁱ

While stress is a normal and necessary part of life, ACEs and other traumatic experiences that are strong, frequent, and/or last a long time can affect the brain, hormones, and the immune system and lead to lasting wear and tear. This is known as "toxic stress" and can lead to physical, mental, and behavioral health issues if not addressed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Strategies for Addressing Toxic Stress

There are a series of evidence-based strategies for responding to trauma and treating toxic stress. Awareness of both [risk and protective factors](#) can help organizations understand how an individual's experiences may affect how they will respond to adverse events. Protective factors – which help people draw on individual, family, and community strengths when facing adversity – can help prevent trauma and toxic stress from occurring and lessen the long-term impact. Evidence-based stress mitigation strategies, such as having even one supportive relationship, getting good sleep, and spending time in nature, can help treat toxic stress and improve well-being. Trauma-responsive care is a framework that encompasses these concepts by recognizing and responding to the effects of trauma, establishing physical and emotional safety, and avoiding retraumatization.

Evidence-based strategies include:



Having healthy & supportive relationships



Getting regular physical activity



Getting regular sleep



Engaging in mindfulness practices (deep breathing, meditation, yoga)



Eating a balanced and nutritious diet



Taking care of our mental health, which may include talking to a professional



Spending time in nature



Finding purpose/meaning in life

Evidence-based strategies graphics adapted from: Bhushan D, et al. The Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health. Office of the California Surgeon General, 2020 DOI:10.48019/PEAM8812; Gilgoff et al. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Outcomes, and Interventions. *Pediatric Clinics* 2020; 67(2): 259-73.

Trauma-Responsive Networks of Care: Key Elements

While individual organizations can and should apply trauma-responsive strategies in their day-to-day work, establishing broader networks of care can achieve a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing trauma and toxic stress. The following sections describe the key components of a network of care and outline actionable milestones for communities and organizations seeking to implement this approach.

The core element of an effective and integrated network of care is having a formal, established working relationship between organizations, with the shared goals of mitigating the negative effects of trauma and adversity, developing and strengthening positive relationships, and helping individuals and families navigate systems of care through a “no wrong door” approach.

Networks of care can include a wide range of cross-sector partners, and members of a network may vary across communities. Each organization may interact with individuals and families in different settings or services, but they can take a common, or shared perspective on approaches to interacting with people to prevent and address trauma and toxic stress.

Potential members of a trauma-responsive network of care include:

- Local government
- Health and behavioral health providers
- Schools and educators
- Early childhood programs
- Social service programs (e.g., child welfare, housing, and homelessness agencies, domestic violence services)
- Tribal organizations
- Community based organizations (e.g., food banks, Boys & Girls Clubs, LGBTQ+ advocacy, family resource centers)
- Faith-based organizations
- Justice system

Building the Network

The following steps are intended to guide communities and organizations as they build and strengthen their trauma-responsive network of care to establish strong partnerships and leadership structures, align policies, respond to community need, and ensure sustainability and continuous improvement.

“By providing political will and organizational support, these champions can help increase buy-in and collaboration across participating organizations and can often help secure funding and build momentum in the broader community.”

STEP 1: Identify champions and establish shared accountability. Regardless of the composition of your network of care, it is essential to establish a structure that includes individuals with decision-making power and a shared commitment to building and sustaining the network of care. Leaders should collaborate to develop shared goals and a strategic plan laying out a long-term vision for the network. Identifying champions and leveraging the strengths of participating organizations can also facilitate buy-in and multiply the impact of the network of care.

- ✓ **Find your champion(s).** Knowledgeable and trusted leaders can serve as champions and key messengers about the importance of preventing and addressing trauma and developing a trauma-responsive network of care. By providing political will and organizational support, these champions can help increase buy-in and collaboration across participating organizations and can often help secure funding and build momentum in the broader community.
- ✓ **Establish shared accountability.** A leadership and accountability structure should include representatives from across the network of care and may build upon existing working relationships between entities (e.g., data sharing agreements between agencies). Establishing a governance structure helps define the responsibilities of the entities that make up a network of care and create shared accountability for the long-term vision.

- ✓ *Establish shared goals and a strengths-based approach that emphasizes leading with humility and ensuring inclusivity.* Participating entities should work together to establish goals and increase each other's impact. Leaders should develop an inclusive decision-making process and prioritize collaboration and relationship building over credit taking. It is also critical that the families being served by the network have a role in shaping the community's network of care approach.

STEP 2: Strengthen community partnerships across sectors. Network of care members must intentionally and consistently engage with each other and with the communities they serve to build trust, identify and leverage available resources, and effectively link people to coordinated services. Organizations should build on existing relationships, while also connecting across sectors and with groups that have been left out of the decision-making process in the past. Trust is key to building and sustaining networks of care.

- ✓ *Ensure that the community is engaged early and often in decision-making.* Engaging with community members from the outset is essential for developing a strong network of care that bolsters supportive relationships and is sensitive and responsive to community needs. Participating organizations should develop or expand relationships with the families being served and [people with lived experience](#) to inform the planning, implementation, evaluation, and ongoing improvement of the network of care.
- ✓ *Understand and document all available community resources and identify gaps.* Because networks of care may interact with individuals and families through a variety of settings and services, it is critical to document points of access and available resources within the network of care, along with common barriers or resource gaps. Doing this exercise early in the planning process will help ensure a “no wrong door” approach for those seeking services as well as create opportunities for efficiencies across the network.

“Participating organizations should develop or expand relationships with the families being served and [people with lived experience](#) to inform the planning, implementation, evaluation, and ongoing improvement of the network of care.”

- ✓ ***Make new connections with cross-sector partners.*** Cross-sector partnerships are central to the network of care. Break down siloes and bring in new perspectives by making an intentional effort to develop relationships with organizations and communities that have not historically worked together or have been left out of the decision-making process. Individuals and families do not experience food insecurity, mental health challenges, or housing instability in silos; and neither should their service providers.
- ✓ ***Educate partners about available resources.*** To connect people to available resources in the network of care, participating members must know where and how they are provided. Use multiple communication channels and venues to regularly share updates to educate participating organizations as well as community members about the resources and services that are available.

STEP 3: Align policies and programs to amplify impact. Cross-sector partnerships are a defining feature of trauma-responsive networks of care, but participating organizations need to be deliberate about aligning their language and policy goals. Establishing common language around trauma and adversity, consistently communicating with partners about goals and priorities, and identifying where different organizations are best suited to contribute can help the network coalesce around policy and programmatic goals and amplify impact.

- ✓ ***Establish a common trauma-responsive language via trainings and shared learning opportunities.*** Different sectors and organizations may not use the same language when discussing trauma and approaches to addressing it. To establish common language across the network, provide ongoing opportunities for staff at participating organizations to learn about trauma, the different ways it might manifest in the people they serve, and share evidence-based and actionable strategies for responding to trauma and adversity. Giving staff a shared language can also help them be more aware of their own lived experience and how it may be impacting how they experience their work.
- ✓ ***Establish and leverage consistent and bi-directional communication channels.*** Open lines of communication can facilitate relationship building, improve linkages to services, and ultimately help track outcomes. Whether through in-person or virtual meetings, phone calls or emails, or even across electronic referral platforms, effective communication helps align efforts and expand the reach of the network of care.

- ✓ *Increase collective impact by identifying how different partners can engage and achieve the greatest impact.* As participating organizations get to know each other better, they can identify strengths and determine potential areas of policy alignment and collaboration to increase the network's impact. For example, a trusted community-based organization may be better suited to conduct outreach to certain groups, while a government agency may focus more on helping that organization increase its capacity through grant funding or other means.

STEP 4: Invest in infrastructure and explore diverse funding sources to ensure sustainability.

To effectively connect individuals and families to services and support trauma-responsive work in the long run, a network of care requires both an adequate infrastructure and diverse funding sources. Participating organizations may consider leveraging sources such as Medicaid funding and grant opportunities. Braiding and blending diverse funding streams can help to ensure sustainability. Funding can be used to help build capacity and support practice change through investments in trauma-responsive and resilient workplaces or in technology to help people access services.

- ✓ *Invest in trauma-responsive and resilient workplaces to support staff.* To effectively provide trauma-responsive care, participating organizations must first address the secondary traumatic stress that their frontline staff may be experiencing. Organizations should work to create trust and psychological safety, review policies and procedures to ensure they are trauma-responsive, and have staff complete organizational assessments to inform systems change and foster a more resilient and trauma-responsive culture.
- ✓ *Use technology to facilitate connections.* Depending on the makeup of the network of care, participating organizations may want to invest in technology (e.g., a digital referral platform) to communicate with each other, link individuals and families to services, and ultimately track outcomes.
- ✓ *Leverage cross-sector funding sources and grants to support practice change and capacity building.* Different organizations within the network of care may be able to access different funding streams and grants to support their work and build capacity by hiring staff. It is important that organizations are aware of which services may be reimbursable through Medicaid or other state and federally funded programs and that funding streams are braided and blended to support long-term sustainability.

STEP 5: Track progress and continue to respond to community needs. As participating organizations develop measures to track progress towards their goals, they may identify emerging needs or areas for improvement. Engaging new partners can help to fill service gaps, while community input can inform continuous improvement efforts and ensure that new policies and programs are responsive to community needs.

- ✔ *Develop measures to track progress towards goals.* Members of the network of care should establish measures that allow them to track progress towards the goals outlined in the strategic plan. These measures will allow participating organizations to identify areas for improvement and may be informed by various data sources, including claims or referral data and organizational assessments.
- ✔ *Engage new partners to increase reach and impact of network.* A network of care is not a static entity and should evolve with the community and its changing needs. It may be necessary to bring in new partners who can expand the reach of the network of care to new groups or geographic areas, fill any gaps in services, and increase the overall capacity of the network.
- ✔ *Continuously evaluate and respond to emerging community needs by regularly seeking out community input.* Evaluation and quality improvement are an essential part of any network of care. In addition to developing progress measures, participating organizations should seek out community input to understand emerging or unmet needs and develop strategies to address them. Community members should be involved in the evaluation of existing programs and policies and consulted throughout the development and implementation of new trauma-responsive strategies.

Conclusion

A trauma-responsive network of care is an essential part of a comprehensive approach to preventing trauma and mitigating the effects of adversity, trauma, and toxic stress that leverages cross-sector collaborations to help individuals and families heal. The organizations that comprise a network of care may vary by community, but they all share the goal of creating supportive and nurturing environments and ensuring there is no wrong door for those seeking support. Whether you are in the beginning stages of establishing a trauma-responsive network of care or are looking to sustain and grow an existing one, following these actionable steps can help guide you to create a culture of healing and resilience in your community.

i. Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

ii. Philadelphia ACE Project (2021). What are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)? Philadelphia ACE survey. <https://www.philadelphiaaces.org/philadelphia-ace-survey>

iii. Adapted from The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University – ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions.

About Pathways to Resilience

[Pathways to Resilience](#) is an initiative to raise awareness of the impact of adversity and trauma on individuals, families, and communities and advance cross-sector strategies for promoting equity, lifelong health, and well-being. The initiative convenes state and community leaders and aims to promote trauma-responsive policies and programs in every state. Pathways to Resilience is sponsored by Aurrera Health Group, which previously led the California [ACEs Aware](#) initiative, a first in the nation effort to screen patients for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and respond with evidence-based interventions. Key to the success of ACEs Aware was grant funding to establish networks of care between health care providers and community-based organizations, with implementation guided by a [Network of Care Roadmap](#). This resource is adapted from the ACEs Aware Network of Care Roadmap.

Building upon lessons learned in California, **Pathways to Resilience** is intentionally emphasizing the importance of a cross-sector approach, recognizing that individuals' experiences with trauma and adversity can impact all aspects of their daily lives. The initiative is also working to shift the conversation from "trauma-informed" to "trauma-responsive" to encourage organizations and states to move from having knowledge of trauma to taking active measures to prevent and address it. **Pathways to Resilience** is in the process of becoming an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Visit [Pathways-US.org](#) to learn more about the services **Pathways** is providing to states and communities.