

CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES: TIPSHEET SERIES

A Trauma-Informed Approach to Employment Support: Tools for Practice

How can your program incorporate information about trauma and mental health into the employment support you provide for survivors?

❖ **Talk with survivors about:**

- ✓ Common emotional and mental health effects of domestic violence and other lifetime trauma (e.g., depression; difficulties with attention, concentration, and engagement; and other responses such as numbing, irritability, intrusive thoughts, dissociation, avoidance, and anxiety).

❖ **Ask survivors about:**

- ✓ Workplace safety, including whether previous or current abusive partners have access to their workplace, know their route to work, or have directly interfered with work. Support survivors in developing a safety plan around the workplace, if they need one.
- ✓ Ways in which the abuse may have affected their sense of themselves, particularly around work or education.
- ✓ Job history, while being attentive to issues of domestic violence and trauma (e.g., What has work been like before? When has it gone well? When has it been difficult? Has domestic violence or trauma affected work before?).
- ✓ Particular concerns or fears about looking for or starting employment (including potential loss of public benefits).
- ✓ Parenting, childcare, and children's mental health needs and how these may affect their ability to look for or maintain employment.

❖ **Offer ongoing support related to:**

- ✓ Issues that may come up around work, knowing that anxiety or other mental health symptoms can increase at different times (maybe at the onset of starting a new job, once they are comfortable, or if conflict arises).
- ✓ Strengthening or developing skills for dealing with painful or disruptive feelings such as relaxation or grounding techniques, affect regulation strategies, or through developing a written plan such as a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP).
- ✓ Identifying and developing workplace supports (e.g., schedule flexibility, supportive co-workers, or a workplace safety plan).

- ✓ Issues related to disclosure of domestic violence and/or psychiatric or other disability, including whether to disclose, and potential workplace accommodations that may be useful.
 - ✓ Accessing and maintaining supports and resources while working (e.g., therapy appointments, involvement in peer support services, exercise, community involvement, spiritual activities, and time with kids, friends, and family).
 - ✓ Possible triggers survivors may face in the workplace (such as controlling and aggressive behavior, arbitrary rules, conflict, and discrimination and oppression such as racism, homophobia, and sexual harassment).
 - ✓ Talking about interruptions in work history (if applicable) when applying for jobs and during interviews.
- ❖ **Get more information about:**
- ✓ Workplace rights of survivors of domestic violence and people with disabilities for your city and state (in addition to federal protections such as those provided by the FMLA and ADA) and work with survivor to figure out what additional protections their workplace may provide such as sick leave or a domestic violence policy. See below for more resources.
 - ✓ Alternative employment models that may be useful (such as co-ops or other entrepreneurial opportunities) if the survivor has barriers to traditional employment (such as not having documents to work or having a criminal record).
 - ✓ Tools such as the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* that help calculate amount of income a person or family needs to meet basic needs. (Visit <http://www.wowonline.org/ourprograms/fess/sss.asp> for more information.)
- ❖ **Reflect on:**
- ✓ The capacity of your program to provide employment supports to survivors experiencing trauma-related mental health needs and possible partnerships that may help expand the network of resources available.
 - ✓ The points where your personal reactions, needs, or experiences may influence your attitude toward supporting survivors who are experiencing trauma responses and/or a mental health condition.
 - ✓ The effect of your work on your own life (i.e., vicarious trauma), either privately or with trusted others (including supervisors, peers, family, friends, etc.).

- ❖ **For more information** on domestic violence workplace policies, employment rights of survivors of domestic violence, and reasonable accommodations for people experiencing psychiatric disabilities, see these resources:
 - ✓ **Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center** at <http://www.workplacesrespond.org/>
 - ✓ **Legal Momentum** (for more information on employment rights of survivors, including accommodations) at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/legal-knowledge/publications/employment-and-housing-rights.html>
 - ✓ **Bazon Center for Mental Health Law** (for information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and employment) at <http://www.bazon.org/Where-We-Stand/Community-Integration/Employment.aspx>
 - ✓ **Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University** (for more information on reasonable accommodations for people experiencing psychiatric disabilities) at <http://www.bu.edu/cpr/reasaccom/>

For more information or for technical assistance, please contact the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health at info@nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org or 312-726-7020(P) or 312-726-4110(TTY).