**Pre-Service Module: Trauma**

**Section 1: Trauma**

**Section Learning Objectives**

By the end of Section 1: Trauma, child welfare professionals will understand:

* What trauma is
* How childhood trauma impacts children, youth, and adults
* How a trauma-informed approach enhances best practice

**Section Themes and Key Points**

Below is a summary of the themes and key points covered in this section. This summary is intended to remind learners of the key learning points addressed and assist supervisors / coaches in understanding what was covered in order for them to guide and support the application of learning for new child welfare professionals related to this section.

1. This section identifies trauma as the “inability to cope or protect ourselves”. The types of traumas that youth and families in the child welfare system may experience include historical, socio-cultural, chronic and/or acute trauma. Many families in the child welfare system may also have complex trauma, which involves exposure to multiple traumatic events that are severe and invasive.
2. This section identifies the impact of trauma and notes that not everyone exposed to trauma will suffer in the same way. Trauma exposure impacts individuals differently depending on whether the child or youth can process the events with a supportive person. Factors that shape the impact of trauma include age, victim or witness status, perceived danger, relationship to the person and past experiences. The elements critical to build trust and resilience through partnership with youth and families who have experienced trauma include empathy, control, and transparency.
3. This section reviews toxic stress. Stress hormones are designed for our survival but can be toxic when developing brains are constantly being exposed to them, leading to toxic stress. Toxic stress is exacerbated for children in distress who do not have a caring or protective adult to help make them feel secure, soothed and seen.

1. This section introduces a tool for recognizing trauma an individual has experienced, along with predicting its impact. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences prior to the age of 18 and the ACE’s screen and score is a measure of cumulative exposure to certain adverse childhood conditions. Researchers found that the number of categories of adverse childhood experiences, not the duration or severity of any one type of experience, was the stronger predicter of challenging outcomes later in life. ACEs are cumulative - the more categories experienced, the greater the impact of health through the lifespan.

**On-the-Job Application Activities**

Listed in this section are optional transfer of training activities to support the learner in applying the knowledge acquired during the Trauma Pre-Service Module to their CPS roles and responsibilities.

These two activities are optional and are provided only to aid the child welfare professional and supervisor/coach in supporting transfer of learning from pre-service to the agency. The child welfare professional, with input from their supervisor/coach, may choose to complete all, some, or none of these activities or substitute in other activities.

Each of the two activities are described below, and a resource section to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with the child welfare professional follows the description of each activity.

**Option 1: “Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: 2011-2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Findings” Activity**

Wisconsin began collecting information about ACEs in 2010 and published the information, “Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: 2011-2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Findings.”

* Review the Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: 2011-2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Findings” on Wisconsin.Gov/Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board Publications Page: <https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Pages/OurWork/Publications.aspx>. [Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: 2011 – 2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Findings. (2018). Madison, WI: Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board.]
* Study the distribution of ACE scores among Wisconsin Adults (Figure 2 on page 4) and keep in mind, the higher the number of ACEs, the greater the likelihood of an adverse impact on mental, physical, and socioeconomic well-being in adulthood. Consider the following questions:

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| **What implications could this have for your practice with families?** |
| **What strategies could you implement to work effectively with families and their trauma history?** |

* Discuss your thoughts with your supervisor or coach and explore with them what your agency does to promote trauma informed practice.

**Resource for Option 1: “Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: 2011-2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Findings” Activity**

This resource section is provided to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with their child welfare professional after completion of Option 1 related to the Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin Activity.

The cumulative results of the five years of the Wisconsin ACE Study confirm the impact

of ACEs on a wide spectrum of social, mental, and physical health outcomes among

Wisconsin adults across all ages and social strata of the state.

ACEs can be prevented or, if they occur, the effects can be mitigated. Therefore, ACEs need to be addressed across the lifespan so that they do not continue to negatively affect the health and well-being of children into adulthood. Adults who have already been affected by childhood adversity and who have experienced trauma resulting in compromised health and well-being also need to be identified and supported.

On the state and local levels, efforts continue to increase education and outreach, which improve awareness and access to effective services. Institutions, agencies, programs, and communities each have the opportunity to use the findings from the Wisconsin ACE Study to mobilize their unique resources to prevent and mitigate the impact of ACEs.

**Option 2: Video “The Invisible Suitcase” Activity**

* Watch the video, “The Invisible Suitcase” (1:23): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmzy6fRLcCU>. [Film was made by Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>, based on The Invisible Suitcase © Ian Woodroffe. Animation © Child Bereavement UK.]
* Consider: How does this metaphor help you to understand yourself and others?
* Identify the tools or strategies you might use to help the families you work with “unpack” their invisible suitcase and discuss these with your supervisor or coach

**Resource for Option 2: Video “The Invisible Suitcase”**

This resource section is provided to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with their child welfare professional after completion of Option 2 related to “The Invisible Suitcase” Video Activity.

The film uses the metaphor of an invisible suitcase to show how we all carry our experiences and emotions through life. It is intended to help children and adults understand that their feelings are normal. While feelings of grief, sadness, and worry may always be present, by reaching out for support and considering how to respond, they are something that can be managed. This film is a good resource and tool to share with children and families in child welfare.