

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE FOR CLERGY AND CHURCHES

Based on principles of trauma-informed care as described by Dr. Andrea Clements, East Tennessee State University

Being trauma-informed does not simply give you a list of things to do to provide therapy, it changes who you are and how you see the world. Recognizing the sort of trauma that can lead to addiction can help us be more empathetic towards those struggling.



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) & TRAUMA

Understanding ACEs is foundational for being trauma-informed. **Any sort of adversity, trauma, or neglect can affect one's brain chemistry.**

A **nurturing environment** can help a child learn to **control their behavior** better whereas **neglect** can produce a **hyperactive stress response**.

The earlier the adversity, the longer and more prominent the effects—this can manifest in impulsivity, anger, fleeing, drug use, etc.

Any kind of **substance misuse** is **much more likely** in people who have had **adversity earlier** on in their life.

Drug use can function as an escape. Users can take substances like opioids to “quiet” their brains or find a feeling of comfort they are lacking.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Build relationships: It is extremely therapeutic when people **feel safe enough to feel open**—even if they don't share! Just knowing they could makes the difference.

Take the perspective of someone else. Congregations can ask themselves whether someone would feel comfortable visiting their space—**ask what barriers could be removed.**

Remember it's fine to ask! **Have a conversation.** Ask others how they feel. Get their feedback.

Strength-focused care: Instead of focusing on someone's deficits, **find the strengths a person has** to “retool” the **essence** of what they're good at while working toward a desired outcome.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE FOR CLERGY AND CHURCHES

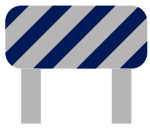


THIS IS THE GOSPEL!

The Church is instructed to love others as God is love, but **the Church is also empowered** by the Holy Spirit to do so.

Following this framework, **Christians should seek to be the ones sitting with people** in their distresses and struggles because **that is what Christians are called to do**.

Christians doing this work need to **ask God for wisdom** (James 1:5-7) and **rely on God's guidance** throughout the process of walking with people.



BARRIERS AND REMINDERS

People—especially those in the church—avoid engaging in this work because **they feel like they have no control to "fix it."**

That's okay! Remember, it's important to realize that **you don't always have to fix it or do something**. Help can look like saying, "I see what you're going through and I don't know how to fix it but **I wish things were different for you.**"

Remember you can't make people change. Have a conversation and **create a safe space** where someone can get better. **Walk alongside them** and slowly they can start to heal.

You may be trying to teach someone how to think differently who **may not be able to think much at all**.

Always remember to seek counsel from people who know more. You must be equipped to do effective work with people who have been traumatized or are in addiction.

Many thanks to Dr. Andrea Clements, Psychology Professor at East Tennessee State University, for her contributions to this action guide.
