



# Trauma-Informed Resources for Medical Students

## **Definition - What Does it Mean to be a Trauma-Informed Healthcare Professional?**

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Trauma encompasses any extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening experience impacting individuals emotionally or physically.[1] It is crucial to distinguish between physical trauma resulting from injury and the broader concept of trauma. While addressing physical symptoms, healthcare providers must be mindful to avoid re-traumatizing their patients. Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from asking "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" This holistic approach enhances patient engagement, improves treatment adherence, and achieves better health outcomes.[2]

Healthcare professionals experience trauma both personally and professionally, facing significant stressors such as witnessing death, managing severe illnesses, and making critical life-and-death decisions under pressure. This often leads to burnout.[3] To support them effectively, it is essential to create a healthy working environment and provide robust resources that help healthcare workers manage their own trauma. Ultimately, this will help sustain a resilient and capable workforce that can deliver the best patient care. People that have experienced trauma are incredibly resilient, meaning they have developed skills to cope with life's challenges.

## **Why It Matters - Becoming Trauma-Informed**

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Patients may have past negative experiences in clinical settings, making trauma-informed care vital to avoid re-traumatization.[4] Responding with empathy and understanding can significantly improve patient health outcomes by fostering an environment where patients feel safe and open to treatment.

It is essential for providers to explain the rationale behind certain procedures and sensitive questions. Organizations should proactively offer patients the presence of an advocate or family member during treatment, recognizing that this measure is intended to increase the patient's comfort and is not a reflection on the provider's competence.

By embracing trauma-informed care, healthcare professionals can create a supportive and empathetic environment that acknowledges the complex experiences of all individuals, including medical providers, staff, students, and patients in the healthcare profession, leading to more effective and compassionate care.

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## Examples of Trauma-Informed Initiatives in Healthcare & Higher Education

The [Children's Hospital of Georgia](#) now includes [Positive](#) and [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(PACES\)](#) training in the orientation week for all 62 pediatric residents and primary care pediatricians. PACES, which emphasize the importance of supportive relationships, feeling safe, and engaging in positive social and recreational activities, have become a key component of their well check procedures. Since implementing this training and adopting these practices in December 2023, patient experience scores in the general pediatrics division have improved significantly, rising from an average of 3.9 out of 5 to 4.6 out of 5 stars, based on feedback from 4,235 patients between December 2023 and March 31st, 2024.

[Kennesaw State University's \(KSU\) Children and Family Programs \(CFP\)](#) along with faculty members and content experts develops and implements a micro-credentialing program creating a trauma-informed emerging professional pipeline addressing the need to increase trauma-informed training in Georgia. By shifting the culture of education, social work, medicine, public health, and human services via embedding curriculum into their units, the project equips emerging professionals with basic skills and knowledge to work with people who have experienced trauma. Over three-years, the four-tier program aims to: 1) Develop evidence-based and informed modules aligned with existing course work, 2) Implement the program by embedding the trauma-informed micro-credentials within required pre-requirements, 3) Evaluate the program outcomes and impact, and 4) Provide a sustainable pilot model program for other institutions.

[Primary Pediatrics](#) has worked to become the first trauma-aware pediatric provider in middle Georgia. Working in partnership with [Resilient Middle Georgia](#), they began with providing trauma-aware training for all staff and providers at their Macon office. The training focused on introducing the impact of [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) on health and the importance of trauma-informed care. After completing this awareness training, the Macon office implemented a new nurse call line to address mental health concerns for children and families and hired a social worker to further support the practice. In addition to the awareness training and new positions, Primary Pediatrics has been selected to participate in the [KINSHIFT](#) program, which further promoted the adoption of trauma-informed practices. Primary Pediatrics and Resilient Middle Georgia continue to work towards the next steps in building a fully trauma-informed practice.

[Resilient Communities of Southwest Georgia](#) leveraged their partnership with [Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine \(PCOM\) South Georgia](#) and Colquitt Regional Medical Center's (CRMC) [Georgia South](#) residency program to train over 50 family physician residents, psychiatry residents, pediatric unit nurses, and administrative staff in the Connections Matter curriculum. The training focuses on introducing the impact of [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) on healthy brain development, overall health, and the importance of implementing trauma-informed care into their practice as a preventative intervention.

[Resilient Teens](#) is an interactive after-school virtual learning experience facilitated by medical students for teens between the ages of 13 and 19. After the pandemic hit, medical students in the Augusta region were suddenly unable to get their rotation and mentorship hours. Teens in the area were also under huge amounts of stress and parents and caretakers were at a loss. The local teen suicide rate and emergency room visits due to teen suicide attempts at the Augusta University Medical Center had already spiked over a three-year span. Resilient Georgia's Augusta region coalition, [Resilient Communities of East Georgia](#), worked quickly and trained 72 medical students in the Resilient Teens curriculum. This equipped them with tools to work with teens and discuss and teach about teen mental health. This solution provided learning opportunities for the medical students and mentors for teens.



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## Training Resources

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### Trauma-Aware

[Connections Matter Georgia](#) provides training focused on community resilience, building social support systems, and interacting with traumatized populations. Connections Matter Georgia can help medical professionals develop preventative practices in their work that consider behavioral responses to stress and trauma.

[CHRIS 180's Trauma STARS](#) program delivers comprehensive training for healthcare providers, allowing them to earn credits towards their current licensure. This program equips participants with essential knowledge and strategies for assessing, diagnosing, and intervening in trauma cases, enhancing their professional competence and effectiveness.

### Trauma-Sensitive

[The Community Resiliency Model \(CRM\)](#) provides healthcare providers with practical skills to enhance well-being and mitigate the effects of secondary trauma for both themselves and others. CRM fosters emotional intelligence, which is crucial for improving job performance and personal well-being among healthcare professionals. Healthcare providers and frontline workers have found CRM helpful in preventing burnout.

[The Center for Patient Safety's Second Victim Program \(for MDs and RNs\)](#) supports healthcare providers (MDs and RNs) traumatized by clinical events. Despite unique experiences, all providers go through six recovery stages. Understanding these stages helps peer supporters offer effective assistance. Recognizing high-risk events and common stress indicators, like isolation and anxiety, enables timely intervention by trained peers.

**Resilient Georgia** is dedicated to healing adversity and promoting resiliency in children and families. We do this through the prevention and early intervention of ACEs and sharing best practices. We all have a role to play in providing better futures for children.

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## Trauma-Responsive

### [The Tend Academy's Resilience in Trauma-Exposed Work Online Course](#)

[The Tend Academy's Resilience in Trauma-Exposed Work Online Course](#), Compassion Fatigue 101, explores the basics of compassion fatigue in healthcare. It highlights how even balanced providers can experience fluctuating fatigue levels, especially under heavy workloads or trauma exposure. The course inspires participants to make significant changes in their personal, professional, and organizational lives, providing practical strategies to recognize and manage the challenges of healthcare work.

[Dr. Kristen Neff's Mindful Self-Compassion Training](#) teaches participants to treat themselves with the same kindness they would offer a close friend. The course includes lectures, discussions, and exercises to help participants support themselves during difficult times, manage distressing emotions, and use kindness for motivation. Suitable for both the general public and healthcare providers, this training provides practical self-compassion skills for everyday life.

[Resilient Teens](#) offers an interactive, after-school virtual learning experience for teens, ages 13-19. Teens are placed into small groups that are facilitated by Augusta University medical students, and the med school mentors lead fun activities to help the teens learn about mental health and develop skills to cope during stressful events, bounce back and move forward.

## Trauma-Informed

[Dr. Sandra Bloom's Sanctuary Model](#) has transformed healthcare by fostering a collaborative treatment environment, improving outcomes for traumatized clients. This approach reduces reliance on restraints, builds high-functioning multidisciplinary teams, and boosts staff morale. Agencies using the model see increased employee retention and renewed dedication to organizational principles.

[ARC's Attachment Self-Regulation & Competency Training](#) offers global training and consultation services. ARC trainers integrate the framework into diverse settings, especially for healthcare providers. Services include conference workshops, clinical training for mental health professionals, and systemic integration of trauma-informed practices. Agencies are encouraged to commit to at least one year of ongoing training and collaboration for effective implementation.

To learn more, access our references [here](#).