

Staff Development and Training

Biopsychosocial Approach to Trauma-Informed Schools

Elaine Fletcher-Janzen, Ed.D., NCSP, ABPdN

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

The INSPIRE Neuropsychology Clinic, Community High School District 218, Oak Lawn, Illinois.

General description: Scope and Sequence

Program Introduction

The Biopsychosocial Approach to Trauma-Informed Schools program/certificate offers a multidisciplinary approach to building and maintaining trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed schools. Recent research and guidance from agencies such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA) and the National Child Trauma Network (NCTN) indicates that trauma-informed schools strategically focus on preventing violence and stress and experience positive outcomes such as: less suspensions, less expulsions, less aggressive behavior, and increased learning and academic grades. These agencies also emphasize that trauma-informed schools rely on the whole community of educators, parents and local agencies to band together to change the school climate to one of growth and resilience.

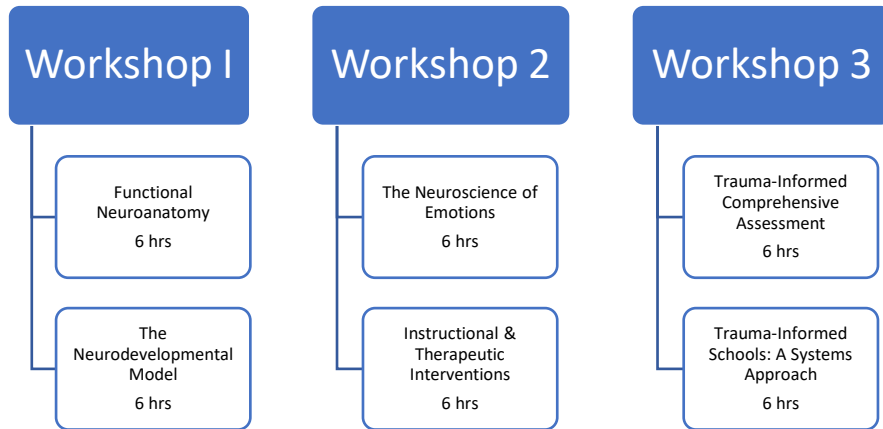
The best interventions for children and youth who have experienced trauma and stress and children in general, are those that reflect how the body and brain work together to survive and even thrive. Mindfulness, emotional intelligence, distress tolerance, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and resilience are common terms used in schools that seek to support students with strong character and success. These interventional terms work well because they have a biological base, and to use them fully, we must understand the underlying body and brain systems that govern human responses to the environment and how we all depend on each other for a safe society.

The Biopsychosocial Approach to Trauma-Informed Schools program is made up of three two-day workshops that build an understanding of the basic biology of the individual all the way up to the structure of the trauma-informed community. In a systematic way, participants will learn about the basic structures of the brain and body that govern how we think, how we feel, and why and how we act. This knowledge will then be applied to how we work with children and youth who have experienced trauma and stress: how we can make them feel safe and supported so that learning can take place. This knowledge will also be applied to psychological assessment and the differential diagnosis of trauma-related conditions so we can detect when they are present and how they affect cognitive and emotional functioning in the classroom. Finally, we will apply this knowledge to a systems approach for designing and developing preventative, secondary and tertiary services so that our school systems can become communities of change and safety.

Details:

- 3—2-day Intensive Workshops
- 6 Days, 6 contact hours per day = 36 contact hours total

- Participants will be furnished with a list of resources for reading and viewing before each workshop.
- Participants will be furnished with handouts and materials for direct use in the schools.



Day 1

Functional Neuroanatomy

Purpose: To provide a basic understanding of brain development and localized areas of functions and patterns of brain growth that translate into guiding principles for assessment and intervention.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will provide an overview, in lay terms, of brain development that will include the definition and structure of brain cells, grey matter, white matter, lobes of the brain, vascular structure, limbic system, attentional networks and other areas that will be referenced in subsequent workshops.

An overview of principles that govern brain development will be reviewed including concepts of neuronal group selection, strengthening of neuronal connects via proximity, periods of synaptic pruning, automaticity, prediction, and embodied cognition.

Day 2

Neurodevelopmental Model of Assessment & Intervention

Purpose: To provide a parsimonious guide to conducting a systematic and neuropsychologically- informed comprehensive assessment that includes all educationally appropriate aspects of cognitive functions and academic skills.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will present the Neurodevelopmental Model of Assessment that systematically guides the clinician to determine levels of function in simple to complex cognitive abilities such as auditory, visual, sensory-motor, language, memory, attention, executive functions and social emotional areas. The model reflects brain maturation and expected levels of ability from one age/stage to another thereby allowing a full picture of how the brain changes from one developmental level to another and how this affects academic and behavioral output.

Day 3

Affective Neuroscience of Emotions

Purpose: To provide a review of current research of affective neuroscience and embodied cognition that introduce the concept of interoception and its essential contribution to educator-student relationships and therapeutic intervention.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will present a review of the history of research on emotions, then an introduction to current theories from affective neuroscience. Participants will learn multiple biopsychosocial lines of research that include polyvagal theory, constructivist theory, and interoception theory, all of which, inform why interventions such as mindfulness, breathing, dialectic behavior therapy and play therapies are successful interventions.

Day 4

Relating Affective Neuroscience to Trauma Informed

Purpose:

To translate affective neuroscience research findings into evidence-based interventions that assist in trauma informed counseling and psychoeducation practices.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will provide a translation of the biological bases of mindfulness, interoception, emotion identification, homeostasis evaluation, and action planning. Evidence-based interventions will be reviewed for each area and experiential activities will be provided to enhance learning.

Day 5

Trauma-Informed Comprehensive Assessment

Purpose: To provide a thorough trauma-informed method of determining if complex or acute trauma has affected cognitive, social, emotional, or academic functioning.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will provide an overview of cognitive and affective processes that are affected by complex and/or acute trauma and may assist clinicians in ruling trauma related cognitive deficits in or out of the clinical picture. The workshop will also provide a summary and review of test instruments, specific to trauma assessment, that can assist in differential diagnosis. These instruments will also be reviewed in the context of the Neurodevelopmental Model of Assessment so that a comprehensive report can be generated.

Day 6

Trauma-Informed Schools: A Systems Approach

Purpose:

To assist school psychologists and school teams in becoming subject experts and agents of change for their school districts.

Workshop Activities:

This workshop will review SAMSA and NCTN models of trauma-informed care in the public schools. Several staff development and community engagement plans associated with successful implementation (in other school districts) will be reviewed along with train-the-trainer guides. Workshop activities will provide opportunities for participants to determine best practices for his/her/their local schools and develop plans for strategic design and implementation.