

Trauma Informed Care Series Parenting Past Trauma

For adults who are living with the painful effects of their own childhood experience or environment, becoming a parent or caregiver may introduce a variety of emotional and functional challenges. It may cause an individual to challenge or question their sense of self and may cause them to re-examine traumatic childhood experiences that they may have thought were laid to rest. We know that childhood trauma can have long-term impacts. It rearranges the brain, lowers self-esteem, complicates relationships, and resides in the body, sometimes prompting medical and physical concerns. Despite efforts to heal from trauma’s imprints, the intense nature of parenting or caregiving may highlight remaining scars.

Effects of trauma on parents or caregivers

A history of traumatic experiences can result in the following:¹

Parents/caregivers may have difficulty keeping themselves and their children safe and healthy. Some are overprotective, while others may not recognize real dangers that can threaten their children.
Parents/caregivers may resort to coping in unhealthy ways, such as using drugs or alcohol.
Parents/caregivers may be more susceptible to further trauma, such as domestic or intimate partner violence.
Parents/caregivers may find it difficult to trust others, especially people in positions of power – caseworkers, judges, and even resource parents.
Parents may be more vulnerable to trauma reminders or triggers when sound, smell, or feeling brings back the experience of the trauma all over again. Reminders may cause parents/caregivers to overreact to situations that others would not find difficult.
Parents may become numb or shutdown – even when interacting with the child – or misread QRTP staff or resource parents’ words or intentions.
Parents/caregivers may have an invading sense of loss of control, particularly during and/or directly following their child’s removal from home. Often parents/caregivers will re-experience this during case planning, team meetings, employment/on-the-job, visitation, court hearings, etc.
Parents/caregivers may react more strongly and/or negatively to things – or have a harder time understanding and/or controlling their emotions, boundaries, behaviors and/or words.
Parents/caregivers may feel uncomfortable caring for the child’s physical needs such as bathing or changing diapers, particularly if there are past experiences of sexual abuse. Tending to the normative care of child may lead to discomfort and fear of unintentionally harming the child.

¹ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *Birth Parents with Trauma Histories and the Child Welfare System, A Guide for Resource Parents*, funded by SAMHSA, US Department of Health, and Huma Services (HHS)

Parents and caregivers who identify as black, biracial, indigenous, or as person of color carry the weight of navigating ongoing systemic racism, often including health disparities and social marginalization, while bearing the cumulative grief and loss of past generations. This is called historical trauma which includes the oppressive, violent, or discriminatory experiences inflicted on individuals, families, and communities of specific cultural, racial, or ethnic groups. Raising and protecting children under the legacy of historical trauma creates a disproportionate level of chronic stress for many families of color.

It takes healthy parents to raise healthy kids

Although every parenting experience is unique, there are many ways parents who are survivors of past trauma can enhance their own coping capacities and learn to support themselves and their children. Family units can be strengthened through a combination of education, coping strategies and family rituals that help create safe and nurturing environments.

To support parents who have experienced their own trauma as children or even later in life, start a conversation. The following are samples of conversation starters. They focus on identifying strengths in the parent/caregiver and the child(ren).

In our agency we recognize that parents may have trauma in the past and that there are strengths that everyone can use and build on. Would you be open to discussing the strengths you rely on to be an effective parent?

Many parents find it challenging to make it to every appointment, get every medication, meet every need of their child(ren). What are some things that make this challenging for you?

It's so hard for kids and parents to be cooped up in small rooms or in the house. Are there ways you and your child(ren) can get out and burn up energy?

Being a parent can be hard and can feel exhausting. Our own experiences as children might make parenting harder. How do you think your experiences while you were growing up might impact how you parent?

I notice you are checking the time, checking your phone. I know the rest of your life doesn't slow down because you are here for your appointment. Tell me about your priorities for today and how we can best accommodate your needs.

What can we do to help you comfort your child? What is your child's biggest strength? What are your child's five best qualities? What is the proudest moment(s) you or your child have had?

In addition to starting a conversation, consider reaching out to the following community organizations.

- **Contact the local Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Boards.** Ohio's ADAMH Boards are statutorily empowered to plan, develop, fund, manage, and evaluate community-based mental health and addiction services. Many Boards have information about getting help on their websites including parent support groups.
- **Contact local Churches, Synagogues, and places of Worship.** Many local faith-based organizations host a variety of support groups.
- **Contact the local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Affiliates.** Local Affiliates (or chapters) offer a variety of programs for parents who struggle with mental illness and trauma.
- **Contact local schools.** Many schools/school districts offer parent support groups.

RESOURCES

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Ohioans who are experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis and their family members can call, chat or text 988 to reach a trained counselor who can offer help and support.

Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Crisis Text Line – Text 4Hope to 741 741 for free, confidential conversation
[Crisis Text Line | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)
- Ohio Careline (1-800-720-9616) for free, confidential connection to licensed provider
[Ohio CareLine | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#)
- OhioMHAS Get Help for a variety of resources on control connection, and meaning
[Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | Ohio.gov](#)
- It is important to instill resiliency in Ohio's children. We can do that by giving them a strong start to their education and addressing childhood trauma
[Early Childhood, Children, and Youth | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)
- Resources
[Resources | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)

Ohio Children's Trust Fund

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund offers classes, articles, and events for parents to help reduce stress and strengthen family bonds. Through its Regional Prevention Council collaboratives, families can access vital community resources. [Regional Prevention Councils](#), provide supportive programs and services to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and child neglect. The

Regional Prevention Council Coordinator administers and monitors the services for the region and connect families to appropriate community-based providers.

Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA)

OACBHA is the statewide organization that represents the interests of Ohio's county Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Boards. Ohio's ADAMH Boards are statutorily empowered to plan, develop, fund, manage, and evaluate community-based mental health and addiction services. [A County Board Directory](#) provides contact information for local Boards.

OhioKAN

[Our OhioKAN Navigators](#) are available to talk 1:1 about any questions Ohio's kinship and adoptive families may have. Call 1-844-OHIOKAN (1-844-644-6526) Mon - Fri 8:30am - 6:30pm. OhioKAN can help navigate basic needs, benefits, caregiver health, caregiver training and education, child health, child social support, child development, childcare, education and schools, family functioning, financial services, and legal aid & services.

Ohio Family Care Association

[The Ohio Family Care Association \(OFCA\)](#) serves as the statewide voice for the thousands of Adoptive, Foster, Kinship, and Primary Families caring for children impacted by Ohio's child protection system. OFCA connects families, support groups, agencies, and advocacy groups throughout Ohio and nationwide to learn from and support each other. They work to support all family groups through a warm line and in their ability to advocate for themselves.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Ohio)

NAMI Ohio is a grassroots organization advocating for mental health issues. NAMI Ohio provides education classes, support programs, family and youth programs, and crisis intervention teams. NAMI Ohio's network of 39 local affiliates, serving most of Ohio's counties, plays an active role providing support, education, and advocacy on a local level. [For more information about support programs for parents and parenting contact your local affiliate.](#)

The Wellness Project

[The Wellness Project](#) is a multimedia, multi-experiential collection of resources and practices to support and enhance your individual and organizational wellness and resilience. The purpose of this website is to discover a variety of ways for supporting helping professionals, so they can show up as the "best version of themselves." It includes a holistic system of wellness activities such as reading, listening, watching, cooking, connecting, moving, breathing, and resting.