

Chapter 14:
Does Trauma Matter?
Starting Conversations at a
Consumer Operated Service
Program (COSP), or Other Group

Does Trauma Matter?

Starting a Conversation at Your Consumer-Run Organization (CRO)?

The following is a scripted dialogue developed by the Trauma informed Care Team at Wichita State University's Center for Community Support and Research to help CROs (COSPs in Kansas) begin a conversation about Trauma. This material was prepared in 2009 and distributed to participants at a CRO Outreach meeting. We have adapted it a little since then. If you and your local CRO would like to learn more about trauma informed care, the CAC would be happy to assist you. Give us a call at 316-978-5842 and leave a message for Gary Parker.

In order to get started, you will need a magic marker and flip chart or a large piece of paper taped to the wall to record people's suggestions. You may also want to make handouts of the definition of trauma used in this conversation which you will find below. You can also write it up on a flipchart in the front of the room. Practice this conversation first. You will want to make sure you can answer any of the questions you will be asking the group - just in case people are not sure what you mean. Don't be afraid to change, revise or add anything to make this conversation your own.

You could say:

Thanks for coming to this talk about trauma. We're here to answer an important question, does trauma matter? Before you answer this, I want to give you some information. It has been said that most of us who use the public mental health system, or have used it in the past - have been exposed to some form of trauma at some time in our lives. Many of us have experienced trauma more than once. A CRO member in Kansas City, KS asks this question, "If so many of us have been impacted by trauma, why aren't we talking more openly about it?" She went on to say, "We talk about mental illness and recovery at our CRO, but we don't talk about trauma."

How many of you would agree with this statement?

I'm going to read the definition of trauma that was developed by a group of consumers in Massachusetts at a consumer run learning community called the Transformation Center. I also have their web address if anyone wants to check them out online: www.transformation-center.org

Read out loud:

"Trauma what is it?"

Trauma shapes and informs our interactions with ourselves and others. It has a profound impact on our body, mind and spirit, often resulting in isolation, disconnection, learned helplessness, shame, rage, self loathing and adverse physical conditions (poor health), including addiction. Traumatic events can be shocking and terrifying. These events can include violence between people, abuse of any kind, neglect, institutionalization, disasters of war. Trauma often involves betrayal by a trusted person or institution. Healing from trauma is possible for all. The experience is transformative."

What stands out for you in this definition?

Anything you weren't sure you understood?

Is there anything about this definition that surprises you? If so, what?

Is there something you think we should add to this definition?

It is important to make sure we know that not everybody has experienced a traumatic event. But understanding how trauma affects people who may come to our CRO is important.

Why do think that is?

In one definition it states that people who have experienced trauma often feel shame, and rage, and helplessness. Often people don't talk about it because they feel like they are not supposed to.

What are some other reasons why people might not want to talk about what's happened to them?

One definition of trauma also talks us that trauma survivors often feel alone or like they can't connect to other people. They often feel shock or terror or just helpless, like they can't do anything for themselves.

What are some of the things we could start doing here that would help people heal from trauma?

What would we keep doing at our CRO?

What would we stop doing at our CRO?

Thinking over everything we've just discussed, as a community, does trauma matter?

What are some things about trauma you would like to know more about?

What kind of expertise do we have among us?

Who do we want to work with on this?

How do we want to gain more information and knowledge?