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FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE



Trauma-Informed Leadership: A New Model for Addressing Burnout

November 18, 2026
Schwartz Compassion in Action Webinar

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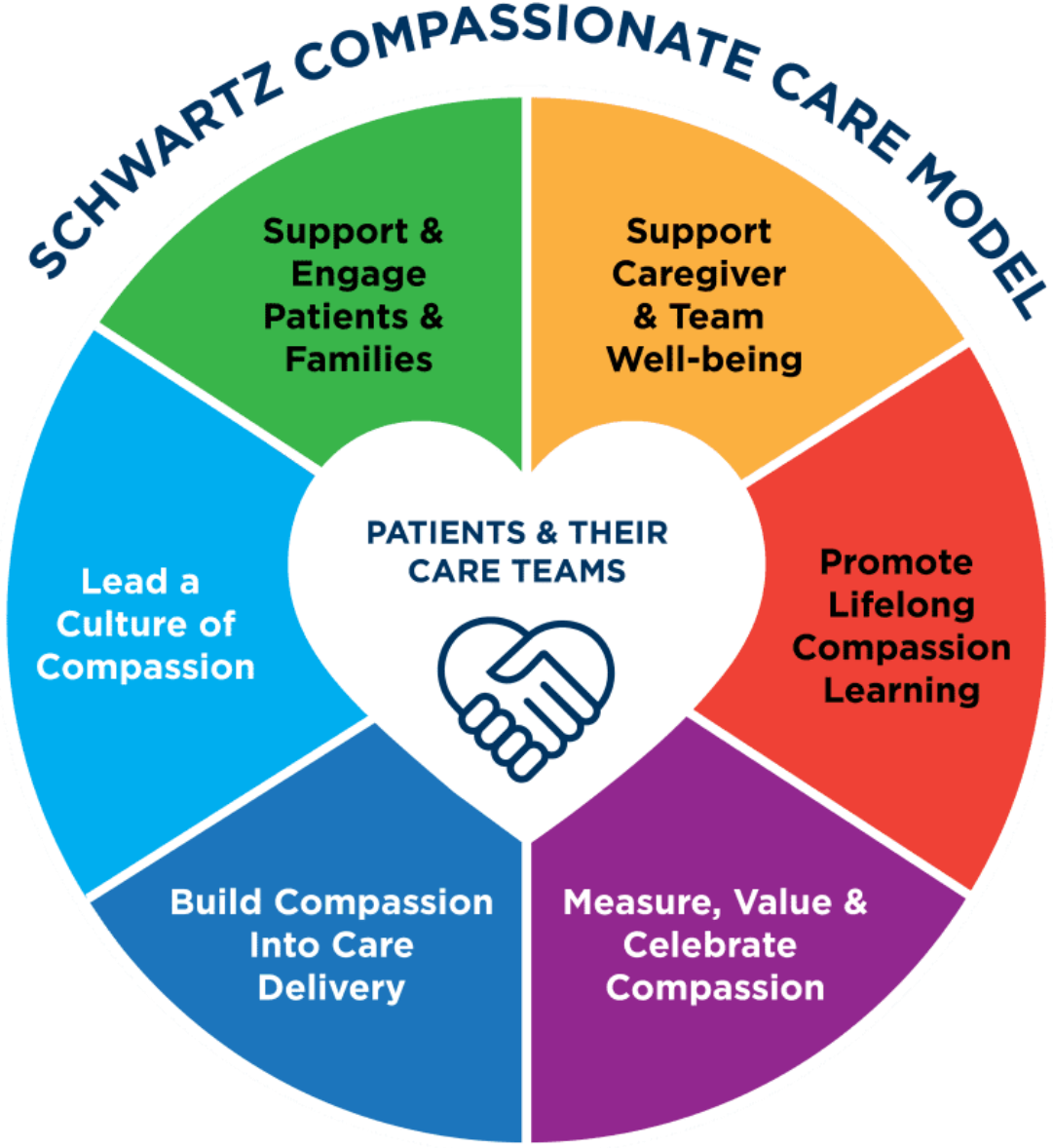




Ellen Feldberg Gordon and Michael Gordon,
in memory of Julian and Eunice Cohen

A Roadmap for Advancing Organization-wide Compassion

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Trauma-Informed Leadership:
A New Model for Addressing Burnout

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Disclosures

None.

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Advisory

If any portion of our discussion makes you uncomfortable, please feel free to take care of yourself in the way that best suits you.

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How familiar are you with “trauma-informed care”?

Realize	Recognize	Respond	Resist

4 Rs of TIC

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Objectives

1. Distinguish between stress, burnout, moral injury, and trauma in our current healthcare environment
2. Identify specific strategies for trauma-informed leadership that promote health professional well-being, foster psychological safety, and nurture organizational resilience
3. Discuss pathways for transforming our workplaces into trauma-informed, resilience-oriented systems of healthcare

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Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

A framework for supporting people who have experienced trauma that can be applied universally as a means of building resilience.

Fosters healing through safe and collaborative relationships.

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PERSPECTIVES

Trauma-Informed Care: A Missing Link in Addressing Burnout

Sadie Elisseou [1,2]

special section

COMMENTARY

Leading Organizations From Burnout to Trauma-Informed Resilience: A Vital Paradigm Shift

Sadie Elisseou, MD[1]; Andrea Shamaskin-Garroway, PhD[2]; Avi Joshua Kopstick, MD[3]; Jennifer Potter, MD[4]; Amy Weil, MD, FACP[5]; Constance Gundacker, MD, MPH[6]; Alisha Moreland-Capuia, MD[7]

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Trauma in Healthcare



What is Stress?



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What is Trauma?

An event or circumstance that is experienced as harmful or life threatening and has lasting adverse effects on function and well-being.

-SAMHSA

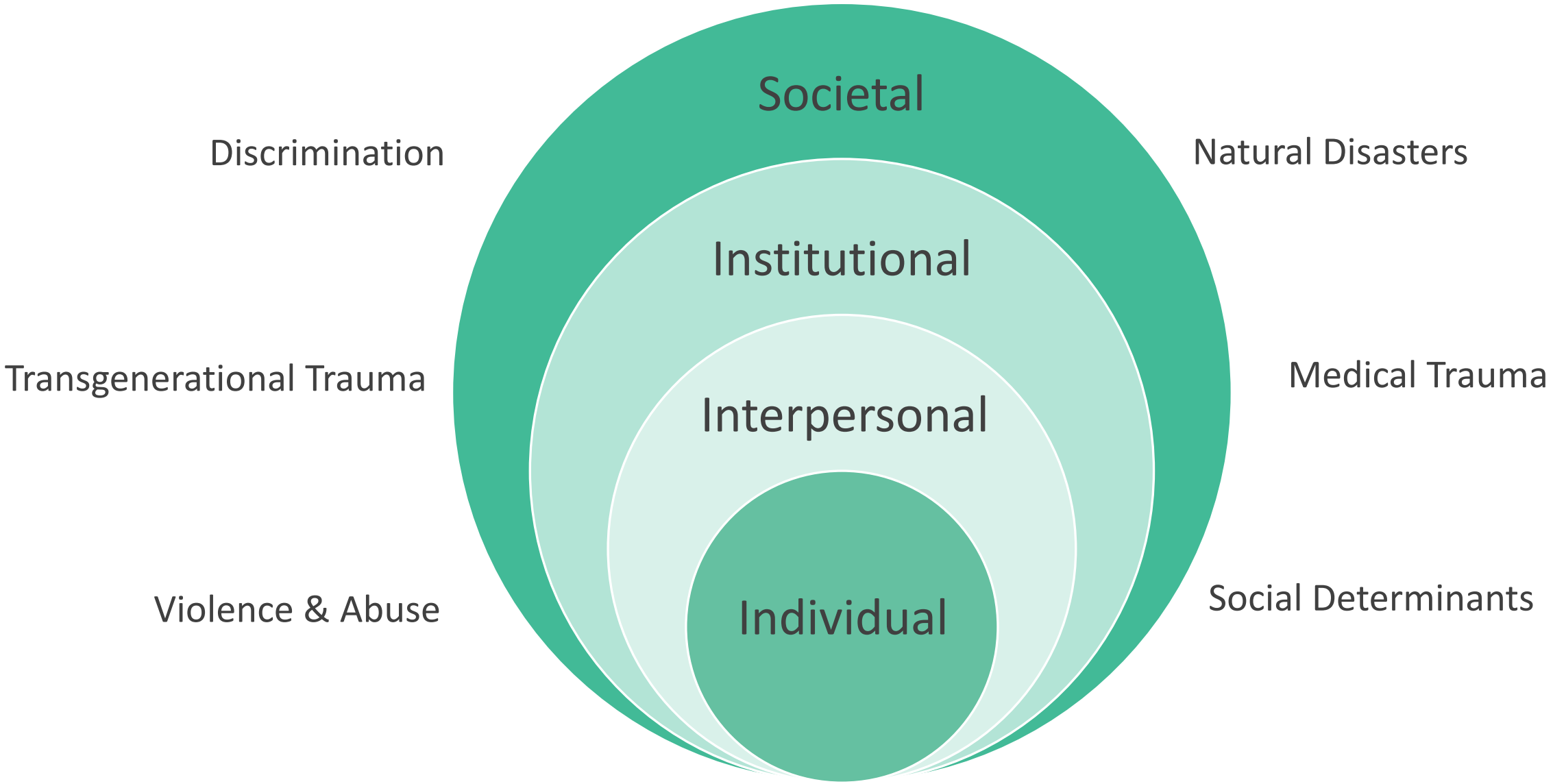
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What Does Trauma Do?





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Lewis O-Connor et al, 2021.

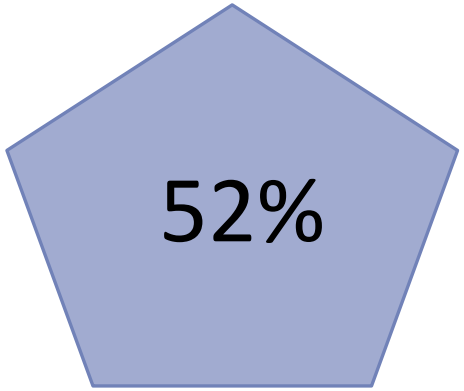
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What are ACEs?

Neglect

Abuse

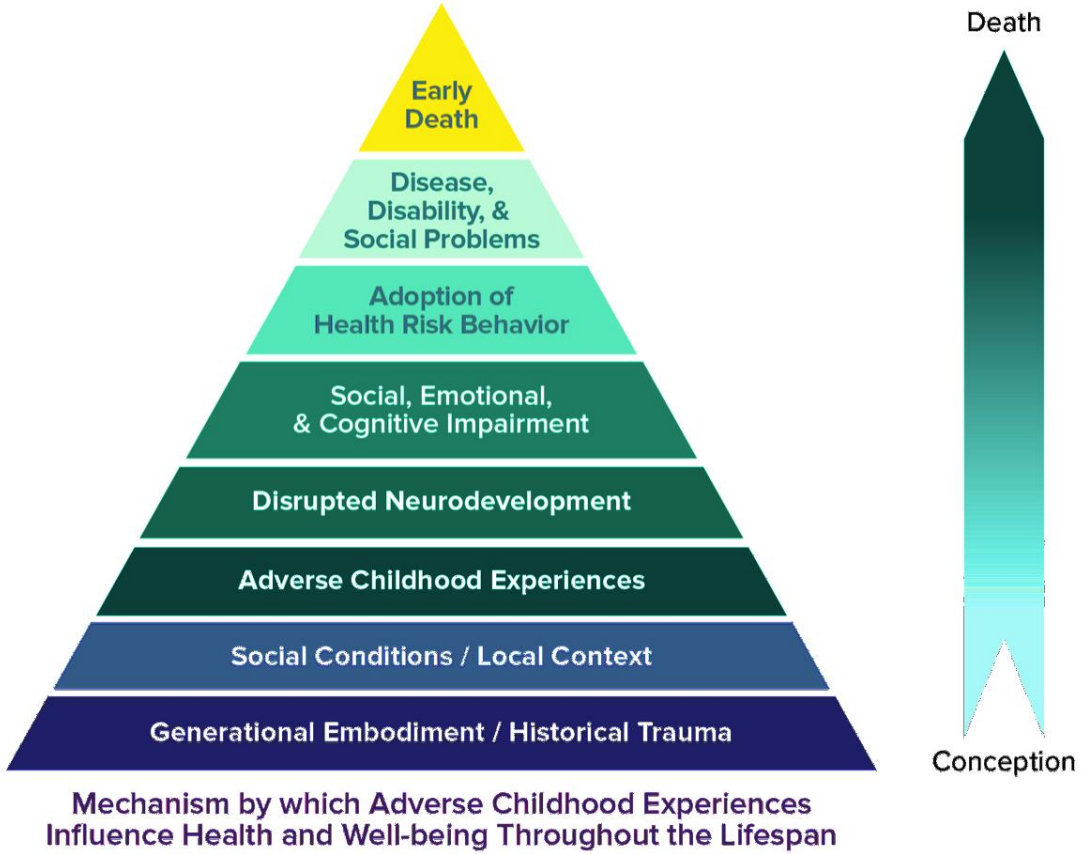
Household Dysfunction



Felitti VJ et al 1998.

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ACEs and Illness



Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Image by CDC, retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html on 2/28/22. Image is in the public domain.

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ACEs Dramatically Increase Risk for at least 9 of the 10 Leading Causes of Death in the U.S.

	Leading Causes of Death in the U.S., 2017	Odds Ratios for ≥ 4 ACEs (relative to no ACEs)
1	**Heart disease**	2.1
2	**Cancer**	2.3
3	**Accidents** (unintentional injuries)	2.6
4	**Chronic lower respiratory disease**	3.1
5	**Stroke**	2.0
6	**Alzheimer's disease** or dementia	11.2
7	**Diabetes**	1.4
8	Influenza and pneumonia	Unknown
9	**Kidney disease**	1.7
10	**Suicide** (attempts)	37.5

Source of causes of death: CDC, 2017; Sources of odds ratios: Hughes et al., 2017 for 1, 2, 4, 7, 10; Petrucelli et al., 2019 for 3 (injuries with fracture), 5; Center for Youth Wellness, 2014 for 6 (Alzheimer's or dementia); Center for Youth Wellness, 2014 and Merrick et al., 2019 for 9.



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Healthcare → Trauma







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TIC for Patients



Review > Fam Med. 2021 Nov;53(10):843-856. doi: 10.22454/FamMed.2021.500263.

A Scoping Review of Trauma-Informed Curricula for Primary Care Providers

Constance Gundacker [1], Courtney Barry [2], Emily Laurent [3], Rita Sieracki [4]

Roadmap for Trauma-Informed Medical Education: Introducing an Essential Competency Set

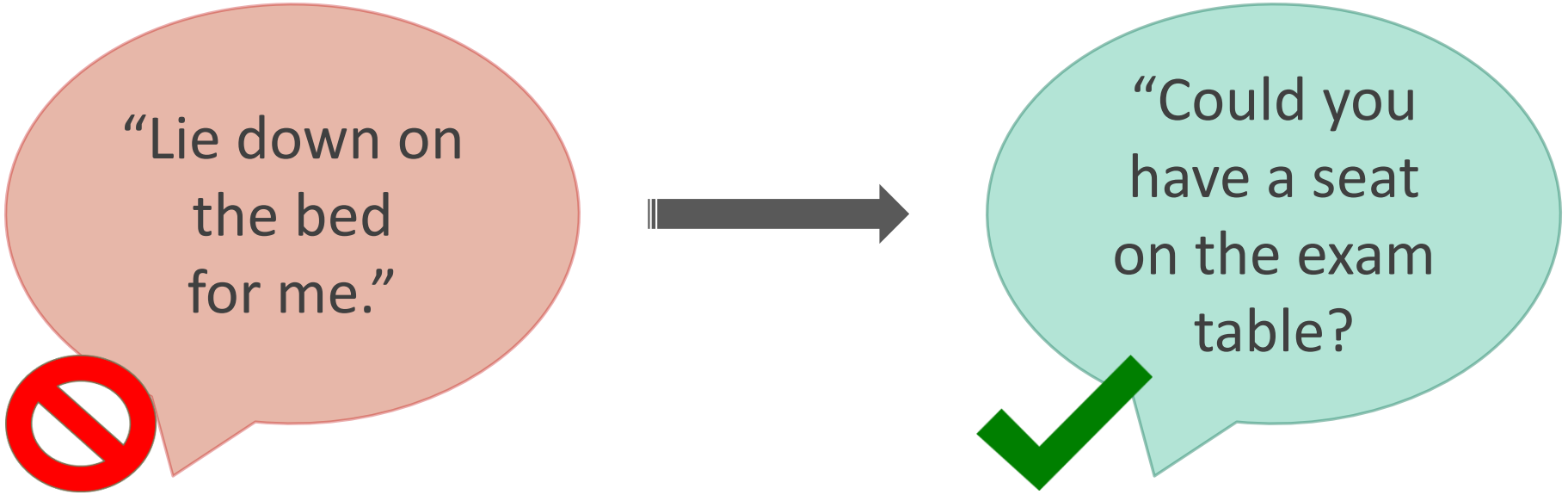
Berman, Sarah MD[1]; Brown, Taylor MD[2]; Mizelle, Cecelia[3]; Diep, Thang[4]; Gerber, Megan R. MD[5]; Jelley, Martina MD[6]; Potter, Laura A.[7]; Rush, Patricia MD, MBA[8]; Sciolla, Andres MD[9]; Stillerman, Audrey MD[10]; Trennepohl, Christopher MD, MPH[11]; Weil, Amy MD[12]; Potter, Jennifer MD[13]

Author Information

Academic Medicine 98(8):p 882-888, August 2023. | *DOI:* 10.1097/ACM.0000000000005196

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Ex. Trauma-Informed Communication



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Ex. Trauma-Informed Physical Exams





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TIC for Professionals



“When the world unravels in the wake of a pandemic, systemic oppression, geopolitical turmoil, gun violence, and natural disasters, society expects us on the front lines. We are asked to be impervious to the strain, face the harsh realities of societal failures (e.g., poverty, housing insecurity, severe unmet basic needs), and serve as containers for the pain. But we are humans first. We bring our beating hearts and tired souls to the job. We carry our own traumas, in addition to the secondary traumas and moral distress inherent to our professions.”

special section
COMMENTARY

Leading Organizations From Burnout to Trauma-Informed Resilience: A Vital Paradigm Shift

Sadie Elisseou, MD[1]; Andrea Shamaskin-Garroway, PhD[2]; Avi Joshua Kopstick, MD[3]; Jennifer Potter, MD[4]; Amy Weil, MD, FACP[5]; Constance Gundacker, MD, MPH[6]; Alisha Moreland-Capuia, MD[7]

Perm J 2024;00:23.110 • https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/23.110

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ACEs in Health Professionals

> Int J Nurs Educ Scholarsh. 2021 Dec 28;18(1). doi: 10.1515/ijnes-2021-0013.

Nursing students' adverse childhood experience scores: a national survey

Carey S Clark [1], Abou El-Makarim Aboueissa [2]

> 40% surveyed had 4+ ACEs

> Acad Psychiatry. 2019 Aug;43(4):369-374. doi: 10.1007/s40596-019-01047-5. Epub 2019 Mar 8.

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Medical Students: Implications for Wellness

12% surveyed had 4+ ACEs

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Vicarious trauma

Burnout

Moral injury

Secondary trauma

Doctors' disease

Compassion Fatigue

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Views of Burnout Over Time

	Old Workplace	Current Workplace	Trauma-Informed Workplace
Burnout	Burnout stems from a deficiency in the health worker's ability to cope with standard demands of the job.	Clinicians are resilient; burnout is a systems problem.	All health workers are at risk for traumatic exposure and its lasting effects, compounding the impact of systemic influencers of burnout.

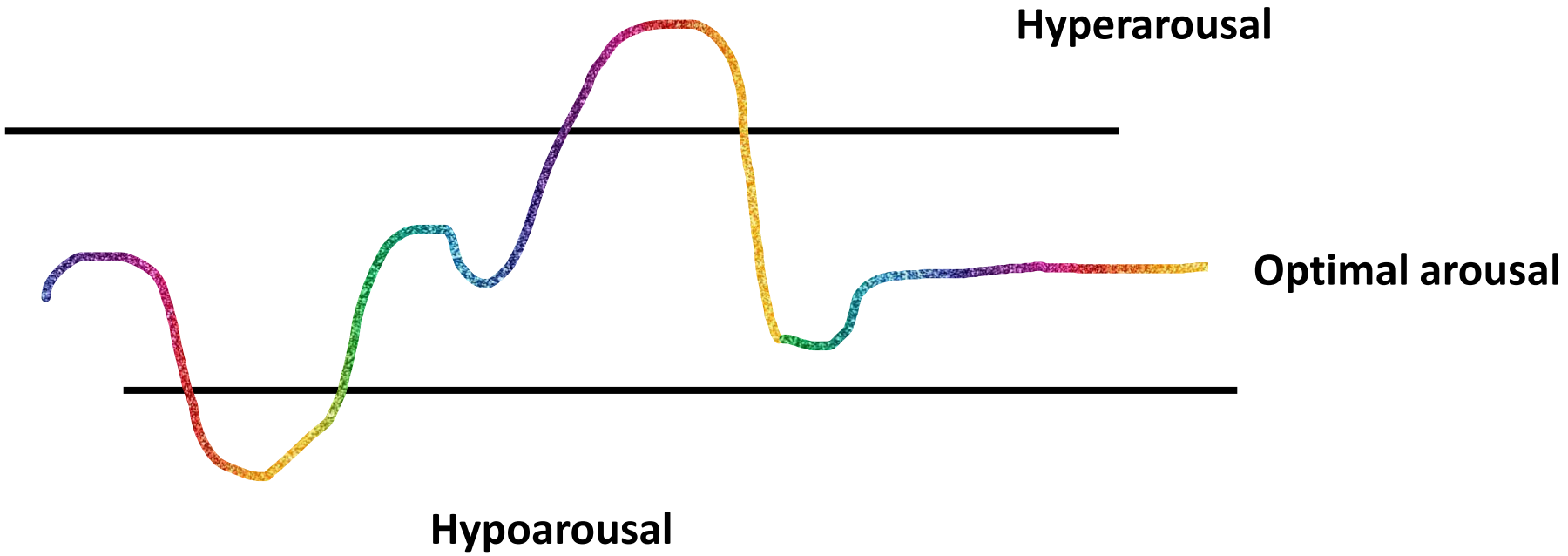
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Terminology Overlap

- Stress, trauma, and burnout are all highly prevalent, can coexist, and can mimic one another
- Unmanaged stress / burnout at work can worsen the signs and symptoms of unmanaged trauma, and vice versa
- Stress occurs along a spectrum--the brain changes we see in burnout align with the changes seen in PTSD
- Studies of health workers show a statistically significant relationship between ACEs and burnout
- Reducing health worker suffering to burnout alone misses an opportunity to explore the role of traumatic stress

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Ex. Emotion Regulation

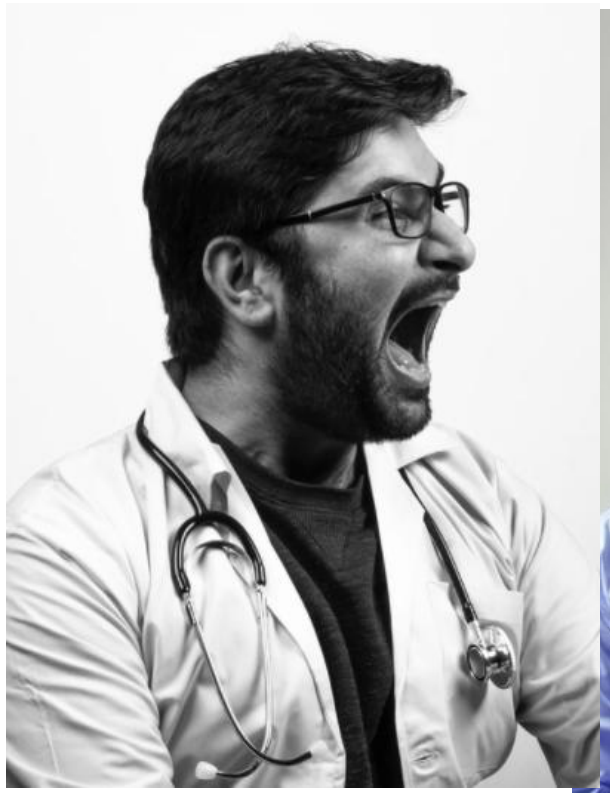


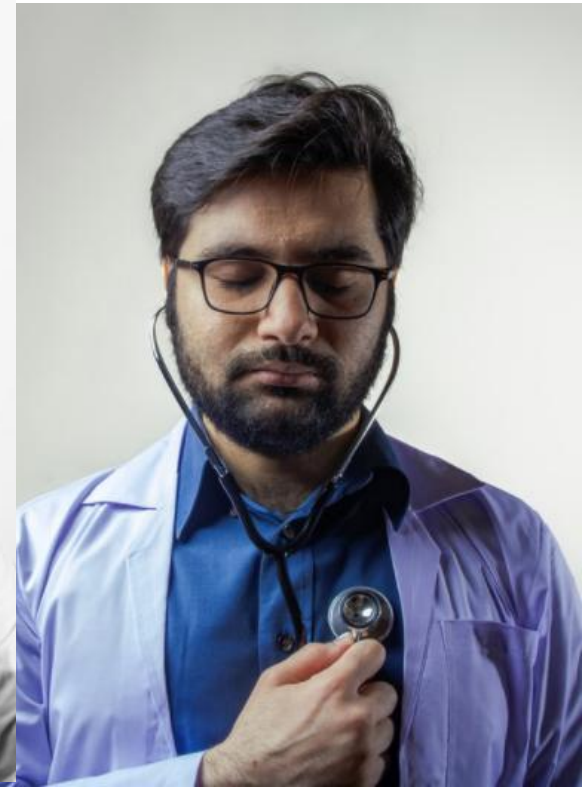
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Ex. Emotion Regulation









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TIC for Organizations





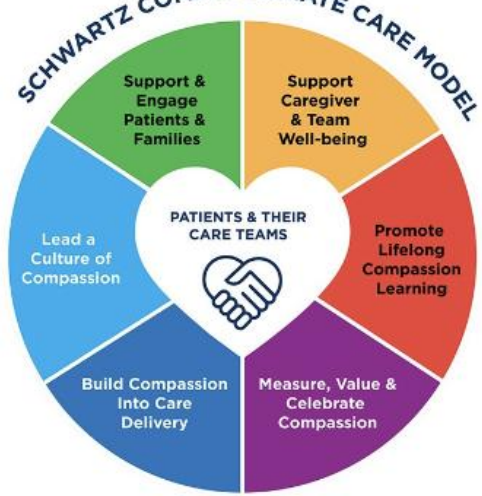
- Workload
- Power dynamics
- Stigma
- Violence
- Disease

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Opportunity

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Compassion makes healthcare better - one connection at a time.





Consider opportunities in your workplace: what interventions could support healing and connection?

Ex. Trauma-Informed Leadership



https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm

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1. Safety

Everyone in the organization should feel physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe.

Ex. Create conditions for employees to feel safe, respected, and able to do their best work—including access to quiet spaces in otherwise stimulating environments.



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2. Trust & Transparency

Systems operations should be conducted transparently with the goal of building and maintaining trust.

Ex. Communicate organizational changes clearly and early on, explain the rationale behind decisions, and create meaningful opportunities for employee input and dialogue.



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3. Peer Support

Invest in peer support and mutual self-help among clients and staff.

Ex. Create opportunities for employees to connect, support one another, and build community. Consider peer networks, affinity groups, mentoring, support groups, and other forms of connection.



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4. Collaboration

Recognize that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.

Ex. Examine and address any unhealthy power dynamics, building practices that promote shared problem-solving, mutual respect, and collaboration across all roles and levels.



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5. Empowerment, Voice & Choice

Build on employees' strengths, support their autonomy, and cultivate their resilience.

Ex. Create meaningful channels for employees to share their experiences and ideas, demonstrate how their input informs decisions, and follow through with positive action.



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6. Cultural & Historical Issues

Recognize that trauma has been passed down in certain populations through history. Move past biases and address historical trauma.

Ex. Build teams that allow people of diverse identities, backgrounds, histories, and lived experiences to belong, participate, and thrive.



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Emotional Intelligence

Facilitative Leadership



Employee Engagement

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Be supportive.

“Leaders who used styles that positively affected the climate had decidedly better financial results than those who did not.” (Goleman, 2000)

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Case Study

- 2024-2025 collaboration to train >1000 healthcare leaders in TIC through train-the-trainer model

- **80%** increase in understanding trauma-informed leadership
- **50%** increase in confidence to create trauma-informed environments
- **90%** reported improvement in leadership skills

Summary

1. Burnout is real, but not the whole story—trauma is prevalent in society at large and within healthcare systems
2. TIC is an evidence-based framework with practical applications to improve patient care, support health professional wellbeing, and strengthen organizational leadership
3. A universal, trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach can foster therapeutic relationships, compliment anti-burnout strategies, improve the patient and employee experience, and connect us to our core mission

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Access Resources

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