



## Learning Lab Descriptions

### MORNING LEARNING LABS

#### **Relationships Matter: How Connections Promote Resiliency and Healing**

*Dr. Dana Milakovic, Office for Safe Schools, Pennsylvania Department of Education*

Current data indicates that over 40% of youth are reporting high levels of depression, mental health concerns, and sadness. Data from 2021 shows that 17% of students live with a mental health condition, one in six adolescents experienced a major depressive episode, and three million adolescents have had serious thoughts of suicide. With youth needs increasing, and mental health conditions being diagnosed and reported at higher rates, adults often wonder what they can do in a school system to support youth. Research continues to show that positive, supportive relationships reduce suicide ideation and increase mental and relational wellness. This session will review the data around youth mental health in Pennsylvania and provide participants with strategies on how to engage youth. This will include relationship-focused strategies and the development of relationships within a trauma-informed framework.

#### **Working Toward Trauma Proficient Systems for Children with Complex Needs**

*Teri Pentz, MS, LPC, NCC, IMH-E®, UPMC Western Behavioral Health*

This training will use an adaptation of the traditional case study format to explore the evolution of the Trauma Proficient Practice Model, looking at the Theiss Center's journey starting with its work with children with complex trauma. After a brief overview of early child development with an emphasis on early experiences as the basis for a sound mental health foundation, participants will explore the impact of childhood trauma on brain development, attachment relationships and behavior. With this foundation as a baseline, presenters will describe the series of evidence-based treatments adopted through the Center's 12 years of SAMHSA funding; review a timeline and anecdotes illustrating the process of developing the Center's training and consultation work; and explore some examples of barriers in implementation encountered in clinical and non-clinical settings.

#### **Navigating Support: Working with Newcomer Immigrant Children to Access Essential Services**

*Jennifer L. Spata, Esq., Voce, & Kelly Sagastume, Nationalities Service Center*

Immigrant and refugee children often experience dangerous and traumatic events on their journey to and within the United States. Refugees experience a cycle of trauma, violence and distress that begins before migration and continues during and after migration. A better understanding of the trauma refugees continue to face is essential if we are to avoid the unintentional harm and re-traumatization of youth and their families. This workshop will explore ways systems can better support immigrant youth

and families as they navigate and access medical, mental health, and education-related services. A collaborative approach is needed as we help build inclusive communities where all can thrive. Presenters will discuss how child-serving systems can identify and overcome barriers to ensure this population can access culturally competent, trauma-informed services.

### **Family-Centered Trauma Healing Tools**

*Robert Cooper Jr., Young Men Becoming Men*

In this workshop, participants will consider the role of vulnerability as a critical component in the healing process and how creating safe spaces for open communication can aid in encouraging and embracing vulnerability within the family. Strategies to build and maintain healthy, supportive relationships will be presented and discussed. Presenters will explore how family dynamics can be transformed to break generational trauma patterns, providing practical tools and strategies for families to heal and thrive despite past hurts and brokenness.

## **AFTERNOON LEARNING LABS**

### **Trauma-Informed Relationships: You Don't Need to Be a Therapist to be Therapeutic**

*Gordon R. Hodas, MD & Caren Rosser-Morris, PhD, Pennsylvania Children's Bureau and the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS)*

In mental health and human services with children and adolescents and their families, trauma-informed care includes establishing and maintaining trauma-informed relationships in which there is an effort to understand the whole person, including interests, strengths, and goals, instead of focusing primarily on challenging and maladaptive behaviors. A commitment to safety and the use of the trauma lens are additional key elements of trauma-informed relationships, along with collaboration and the promotion of voice and choice within a person-centered framework. This presentation offers stories and perspectives that can help broaden the focus and efforts of those committed to the well-being of children, adolescents, and their families. This includes consideration of trauma and adversities, social determinants of health, family culture, and the need to build strong trauma-informed relationships that instill hope.

### **Our Kids: Trauma-Informed Collaboration**

*Kristen Hennessy, PhD, Licensed Psychologist, & Chief Charles Streightiff, Huntingdon Borough Police Department*

Featuring a police chief and child psychologist, this workshop presents a collaborative approach to supporting our most vulnerable youth. This session explores what becomes possible when we come together from a trauma-informed approach on behalf of the children in our communities. The workshop will discuss the importance of safety and felt safety through a trauma-informed lens. Case vignettes will be used to illustrate the effectiveness of collaboration and working as a team; solutions to barriers will be identified. The presenters will guide attendees to explore creative ways to find and make use of their community allies on behalf of children, families, and communities.

**Building Resilience: Effective Coaching in Child-Serving Environments**

*Colleen Cox, MSW, LSW, TPC, University of Pittsburgh's Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center*

Explore practical coaching strategies that enhance resilience and engagement in child-serving systems. This session provides techniques for improving staff skills, well-being, and service delivery, promoting positive outcomes for children and families. Participants will explore strategies to engage staff and families effectively and discover methods to strengthen family engagement through coaching. Throughout this presentation participants will identify ways to integrate trauma-informed practices into coaching to create supportive and safe environments for both staff and children. This workshop will conclude with an interactive activity and case study highlighting successful resilience-building strategies.

**Supporting Kids at Court: Trauma-Sensitive Strategies to Improve the Court Experience**

*Alexandra Dolan, MSS, LSW & Beth Perez, LSW, Esquire, Support Center for Child Advocates (SCCA)*

The SCCA Center for Excellence in Advocacy believes every child deserves a strong advocate. Going to court for a child can be retraumatizing, especially without adequate support in place. In this interactive session, participants will identify and practice trauma-sensitive strategies to support children and their caregivers before, during, and after court. Participants will identify skills for recognizing signs of distress in children and strategies to help enhance a sense of safety and calm. The workshop includes an interactive activity that reinforces strategies on how to debrief, ground, and restore after attending court.