

Independent Custody Visiting Association
Briefing for Independent Custody Visitors and Scheme Managers
Children and Young People in Custody
ACEs and Trauma Informed Approach
January 2021



Background

The National Expert Forum (NEF) have requested a briefing on what ACEs are, and what a trauma informed approach is. These are relatively new terminologies that may be heard by schemes and by ICVs around the custody suite and more broadly in policing, pertaining to both police staff and detainees.

The following gives a brief overview of what the terms mean, how schemes and ICVs might use the information to inform their work and some links to resources for further information.

What is an ACE?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events, particularly those in early childhood that significantly affect the health and well-being of people.

These experiences range from suffering verbal, mental, sexual, and physical abuse, to being raised in a household where domestic violence, alcohol abuse, parental separation or drug abuse is present¹. The more of these experiences a child has, the more likely they are to experience a range of issues in later life.

These issues could be poor physical and mental health outcomes, poor educational outcomes, deprivation, and involvement in the criminal justice system either as a victim or offender.

It is important to note that ACEs aren't just about children, they affect people of all ages and aren't just about people living in poverty, they cross every social boundary. However, research shows that those living in areas of deprivation are at greater risk of experiencing multiple ACEs.

The impact of ACEs is not the same for each person, nor are they a forgone conclusion. There are a range of resilience factors which can mitigate the impact of child or adults ACEs. These resilience factors include things such as personal skills, positive relationships,

¹ <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/adverse-childhood-experiences/> accessed 04.12.2020

community support and cultural connections. The stronger the resilience factors are, the lesser the impact of ACEs (in general terms).

What is a trauma informed approach?

The terminology of being trauma informed originated in the United States².

A process, organisation or system that is trauma-informed, has been defined in the US as having the '4 R's' those being:

- *realises* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery
- *recognises* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, family, staff, and others involved in the system
- *responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices
- seeks to actively *resist* re-traumatisation.

A trauma informed approach can be implemented in any type of setting or organisation. A point to note is that having a trauma informed approach as a general ethos differs from trauma-specific interventions and treatments, specifically designed to address the consequences of trauma.

Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures.³ These are:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration
5. Empowerment
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

A trauma informed approach takes account of an individual's needs in each of these respects and adapts the approach accordingly.

² <https://napac.org.uk/trauma-informed-practice-what-it-is-and-why-napac-supports-it/> accessed 05.01.2020

³ <https://www.mentalhealth.org/get-help/trauma> accessed 05.01.21

How can schemes and ICVs adapt monitoring and approaches?

Whilst some of the ideas below on how to ensure our own professional approaches are trauma informed seem obvious and we would always want to think we act in that way; it is always helpful to spend some time reflecting and considering our own actions when we interact with others.

- Be kind.
- Be respectful of all regardless of their presentation to you.
- Do what you say you will do.
- Rather than considering what someone has done, consider what may have happened to them to lead them to their current circumstances.
- Think carefully about language, rather than asking someone 'what's wrong with you?' for example, try asking, 'what has happened to you?'

Where can I read more on ACEs, resilience factors and trauma informed practice?

ACE Aware Wales have a range of resources and further reading that you can access [here](#). Resources include slide packs and videos.

Bangor University and Public Health Wales have produced a detailed report specifically regarding sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences. You can access this report [here](#). There is a factsheet detailing resilience factors for mental health specifically which is a more 'at a glance' resource [here](#).

You may like to read ICVA's blog on [changing the narrative](#), and the benefits of ensuring that we separate behaviour from the person.