



**Topic: Ohio McKinney-Vento Community of Practice Notes**  
**Session 8 – Providing Trauma Informed Care to Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

**Date: 01/10/2024**

**Time: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm EST**

**Materials**

**Presentation Slides:** <https://cohhio.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/OH-MKV-Session-Eight.pdf>

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/T0L5CcVZtnA>

**Feedback Survey:** <https://forms.gle/cdaEBnQPPeNW9UzaA>

1. Welcome and Introductions
  - a. Guest Speaker
    1. Amy Hawthorne, Mental Health Administrator, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OHMAS)
      - a. [Amy.Hawthorne@mha.ohio.gov](mailto:Amy.Hawthorne@mha.ohio.gov)
2. Trauma Among Homeless Youth
  - a. Cultural and Trauma Brief
    - i. Homeless youth have significant mental health problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and substance use disorders (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler & Cauce, 2002).
    - ii. Most of these youth experienced potentially traumatic events before they left home, and many of them are retraumatized once they arrive on the street (Stewart, Steiman, Cauce, Cochran, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2004).
    - iii. These youth struggle to recover from both previous and new traumatic experiences while trying to survive unstable housing and hostile street environments.
  - b. Family Breakdown
    - i. Parental substance abuse or mental health problems
    - ii. Child abuse and neglect
    - iii. Familial conflict
    - iv. Family homelessness
    - v. Youths rejected by their families due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or lifestyle
  - c. System Breakdown
    - i. Failure of child welfare
    - ii. Failure of juvenile justice and/or mental health systems
    - iii. Failure of foster care system
    - iv. Youth arrested for status offenses (curfew violations, running away, etc.)
  - d. Common traumatic events include:
    - i. Child physical and sexual abuse and neglect

- ii. Witnessing violence at home between parents or caregivers
- iii. Removal from home by child protective services
- iv. Incapacitation of parents due to mental illness, substance misuse, or incarceration
- v. Witnessing community violence
- vi. Experience violence in their own relationships
- vii. Harassment or violence due to homelessness, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity
- viii. Physical and sexual assault on the street
- ix. Incarceration
- x. Human Trafficking
- e. Responses to complex trauma
  - i. Difficulties sleeping and/or eating
  - ii. Inability to concentrate or complete everyday tasks
  - iii. Feelings of inadequacy and guilt
  - iv. Stomach aches, headaches, and other health complaints
  - v. Acting out or impulsive behaviors
  - vi. Behaving as if they were younger than they are
  - vii. Heightened moodiness and irritability
  - viii. Pushing away caregivers
  - ix. Impulsive or aggressive behaviors
  - x. Some of those common responses to trauma can look like laziness, apathy, arrogance, or excessive anger. Staff need to be mindful that attitudes and behaviors that look like non-compliance may be responses to trauma.
- 3. Practical Strategies
  - a. To make youth feel safe, welcome, important, and worthy:
    - i. Make the first contact warm, respectful, and non-threatening
    - ii. Introduce yourself and describe your role in relation to them
    - iii. Allow time to learn about the young person and their needs and wants
    - iv. Explain rules and provide structure in a matter-of-fact way and explain why rules are in place
    - v. Explain resources that are available
    - vi. Be prepared to repeat information many times
    - vii. Be prepared for them to challenge you
    - viii. Assess immediate needs
  - b. Homeless youth reported that they wanted their mental health providers to:
    - i. Be non-judgmental
    - ii. Have a good sense of humor
    - iii. Empower rather than enable
    - iv. Offer choices instead of advice
    - v. Build trust by being honest regarding confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality
    - vi. Be patient and not give up on them
    - vii. Be aware of their own personal problems
    - viii. Consider their behavior in the content of their life experiences including their traumatic life experiences

- ix. Prioritize their immediate needs – youth with unmet primary needs may have difficulty focusing on forming a trusting relationship
- c. Safety and Comfort
  - i. Many homeless youths come to school to find respite from being homeless. The more successful we are in helping them feel safe and comfortable, the more likely they are to stay in school
  - ii. Safety can mean different things to different people – a safe environment is one where people are treated with respect
  - iii. Recognize that many homeless youths are hyper-alert and vigilant – these are survival skills
  - iv. Youth can be re-traumatized and reminded of traumatic events by sounds, smells, and interactions.
- d. Calm and Orient
  - i. Enlist help from friends
    - 1. Friends can provide a sense of familiarity and social support. Be aware that some youths are socially isolated and do not have any friends or peers they trust.
  - ii. Invite youth to move to a different space
    - 1. Make sure the space is not isolated but respect a young person's privacy and give them a few moments to orient and calm before asking questions. Try taking a walk or going outside if possible.
  - iii. Share concerns and offer help
    - 1. Calmly tell the youth your concerns and say that you are here to help. If they don't want help in the moment, say you'll check back later. Remember to follow up and make a commitment to do so.
  - iv. Remain calm, quiet, and present
    - 1. Naturally, staff can get angry, upset, nervous, or frustrated, but it is important that you stay calm. When a young person is agitated or excited, don't try to engage. Let the person know that you're close by if they need you.
- e. Practical Assistance
  - i. Based on information gathered, reflect on the needs the young person has identified and prioritized, and available services. **Homeless youth may have difficulty asking for help** or being clear about what help they want from you. **They may be unaware of the resources available** to them or may feel powerless to take steps toward meeting their needs.
- f. Harm Reduction
  - i. It is imperative to implement social and emotional learning programs to educate homeless youth and all students on mental health
    - 1. Once educated with social and emotional skills, homeless youth are better equipped to ask for help
    - 2. Give homeless youth access to mental health professionals who can teach them how to cope with their trauma
    - 3. Offer mental health first-aid training for all staff working with homeless youth
  - ii. Identify

1. Offering social emotional education increases environmental support and helps homeless students recognize their feelings and understand their trauma
  - iii. Increase Access
    1. Know the available resources and provide warm hand off's
    2. Increase education for all staff
  - iv. Next Best Options
    1. Offer space for rhythmic exercise, mindfulness, and finding support systems
    2. Create inclusive spaces
  - v. All research suggests that prevention is the most effective measure in eradicating trauma, but it is a far more difficult feat. Prevention starts with treating the existing trauma within homeless populations, which helps people rise out of homeless situations, so their children can have better futures without trauma.
4. Resources
- a. National Center for Homeless Education - <https://nche.ed.gov/resources/>
  - b. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network - <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/psychological-first-aid-pfa-youth-experiencing-homelessness>
  - c. Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma Informed Schools - [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating\\_supporting\\_sustaining\\_trauma\\_informed\\_schools\\_a\\_systems\\_framework.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf)
  - d. Culture and Trauma Brief: Trauma Among Homeless Youth - <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/culture-trauma-brief-trauma-among-homeless-youth>
  - e. Youth Who Experience Homelessness - <https://www.nctsn.org/what-child-trauma-populations-risk/youth-who-experience-homelessness>
5. Next Steps
- a. Reminders
    - i. Visit the COHHIO Course to HOME webpage [here](#)
    - ii. Request technical assistance by emailing [homelesseducation@cohhio.org](mailto:homelesseducation@cohhio.org)
    - iii. Join our mailing list [here](#)
  - b. Next Session
    - i. February 7th at 1 PM – Local Liaison Showcase