Jewish Federations of North America

Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care

Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Principles in the Workplace

Alana Knoppow, MSW

Assistant Director, Programs and Training

May 13, 2026

The Center

Mission

Expand the nation's capacity to provide Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed (PCTI) services and supports for Holocaust survivors, older adults with a history of trauma, and family caregivers.

Goal 1

Develop Innovations

Fund and support subgrants to develop PCTI programs for Holocaust survivors, older adults with a history of trauma, and their family caregivers.

Goal 2

Build Capacity

Increase the knowledge and skills of aging service providers to implement PCTI care for Holocaust survivors, older adults with a history of trauma, and their family caregivers.

Our Work



Grant Making



Training



Coaching



Evaluation



Research

Objectives & Agenda

- Understand the prevalence of trauma among employees and volunteers in the workplace and how trauma relates to interpersonal behaviors
- Understand the principles of the person-centered, trauma-informed (PCTI) framework
- Apply the PCTI principles to promote a work environment free of retraumatization
- Q&A

Disclaimer

Types of Trauma

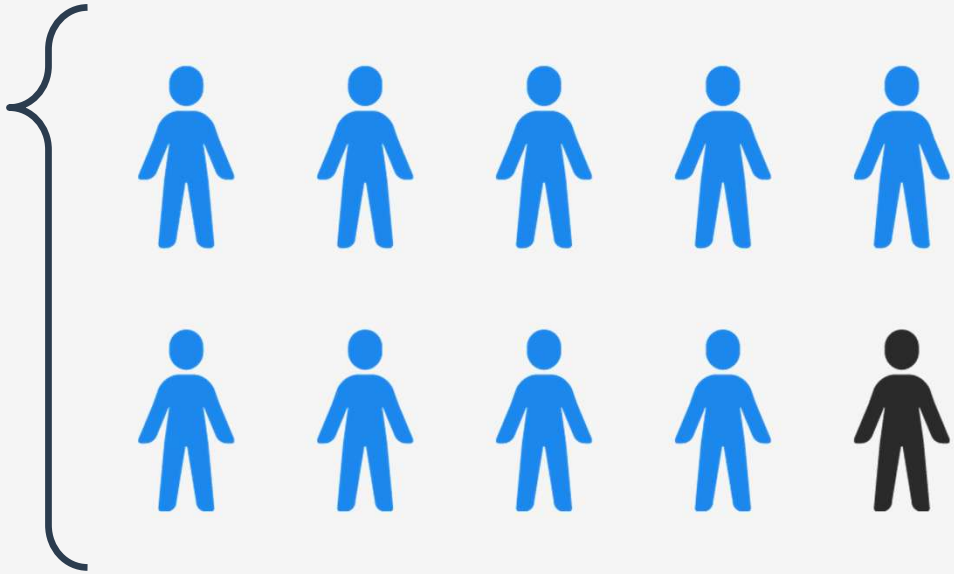
- Childhood
- Adulthood
- Workplace
- Single event
- Ongoing
- Cultural & Historical
- Collective: 9/11, 10/07



Trauma Prevalence

90%

As many as 90% of older American adults have experienced a traumatic event in their lifetime.



Kilpatrick et al., 2013

Health & Trauma

An individual's trauma exposure is linked to their propensity for developing a wide range of conditions that negatively impact their health.

Cognitive Health. Dementia, sleep disorders, cognitive impairments

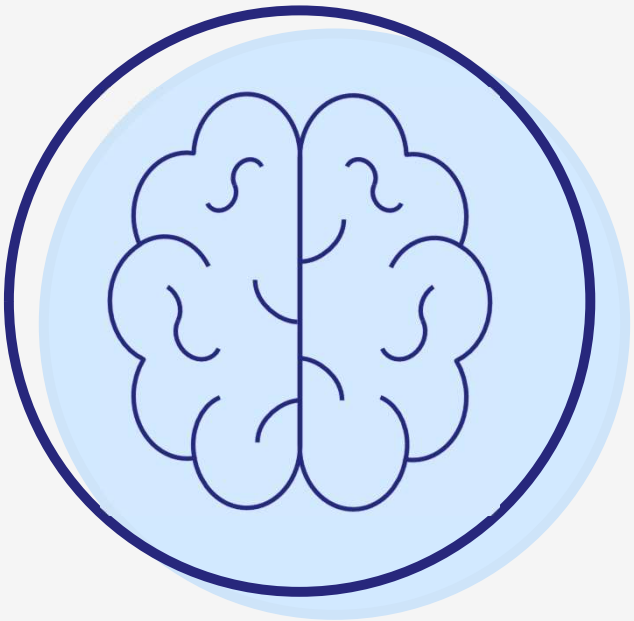
Mental Health. Anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, mood disorders, substance abuse

Physical Health. Lung disease, gum disease, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal disorders, endocrine disorders, reproductive disorders

Trauma and the Brain

Traumatic events can affect various areas of the brain and lead to lasting changes in neurological response resulting in persistent traumatic stress symptoms.

These symptoms include constant fear, hypervigilance, and difficulties sleeping, concentrating, thinking clearly, and managing emotions.



Sweeton, 2017

Why Address Trauma?



Increased Retention



Decreased Burnout



Improved Relationships



Improved Quality of Work



Improved Engagement

US Attorney General, 2022

Trauma Triggers

A stimulus that prompts traumatic response and includes sound, smell, touch, sight, taste, feeling, or circumstance that reminds an individual of a past trauma. Once experienced, triggers can elicit a fight, flight, or freeze response in the body.

Veterans	Holocaust Survivors	First Responders
Fireworks	Medical Procedures	News cycles of disasters

Common Trauma Triggers in the Workplace

Healthy Environment

- Current events
- Organizational change
- Giving or receiving critical feedback
- Boss or coworker leaving the org
- New boss coming in
- Boss or coworkers are late to meetings
- Changes in population demographics

Unhealthy Environment

- Exclusion
- Yelling
- Micromanagement
- Someone else taking credit for your work
- Harassment
- Bullying
- Knowledge hoarding
- Dishonesty

Trauma and Behaviors

- Resistance to change
- Feelings of abandonment
- Hypervigilance
- Defensiveness
- Anger and irritability
- Taking things personally
- Extreme aversion to conflict
- Decreased work performance
- Substance abuse
- Self-isolation
- Increased errors and accidents
- Difficulty focusing
- Absenteeism and attrition
- Poor boundaries

Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed (PCTI) Principles

The PCTI Approach

The person-centered, trauma-informed (PCTI) approach is a holistic model of care that promotes the health and well-being of individuals by accounting for **the role of trauma** across the life course and by **resisting retraumatization**, while also focusing on the **strength, agency, and dignity of the person** receiving care.

SAMHSA's Six Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness & Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration & Mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice, & Choice
6. Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

SAMHSA, 2014

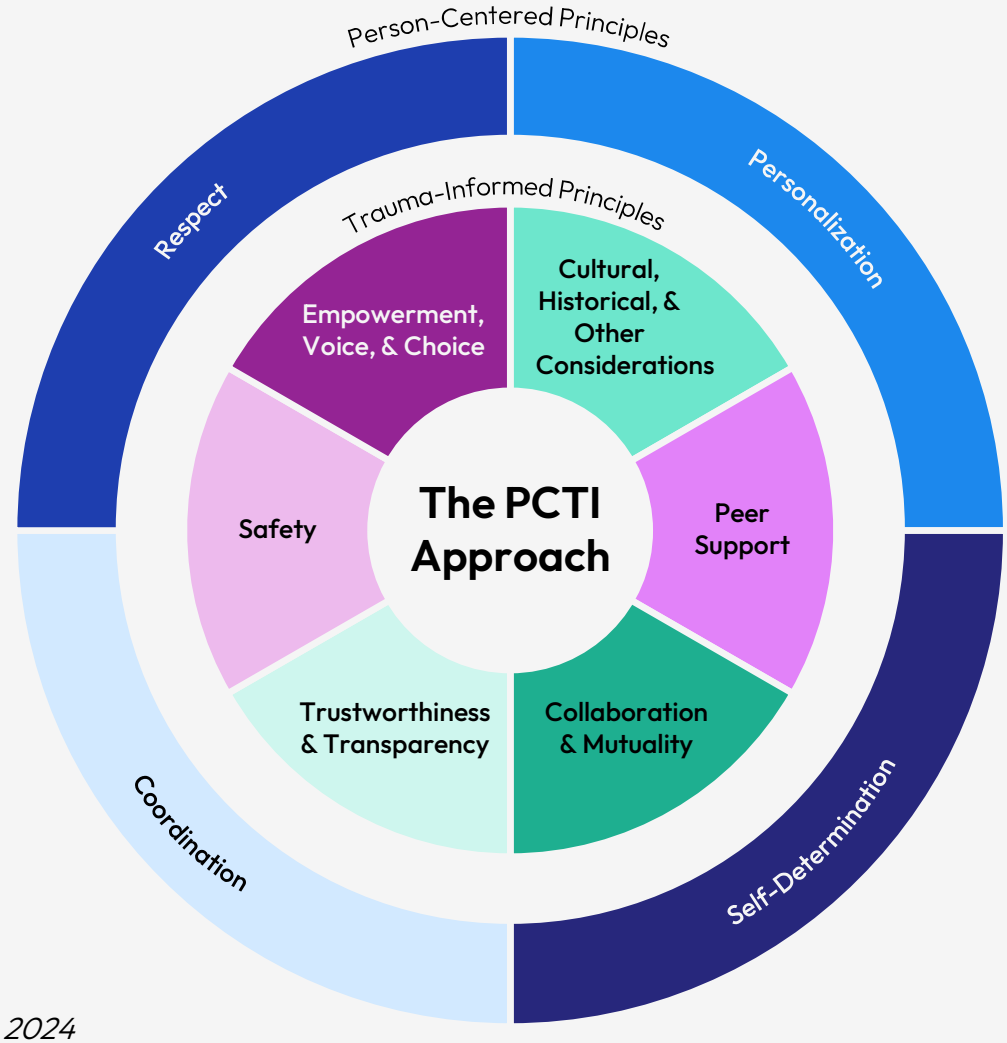
Four Principles of the Person-Centered Approach

1. Personalization
2. Self-Determination
3. Coordination
4. Respect

Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care, 2024

PCTI Principles

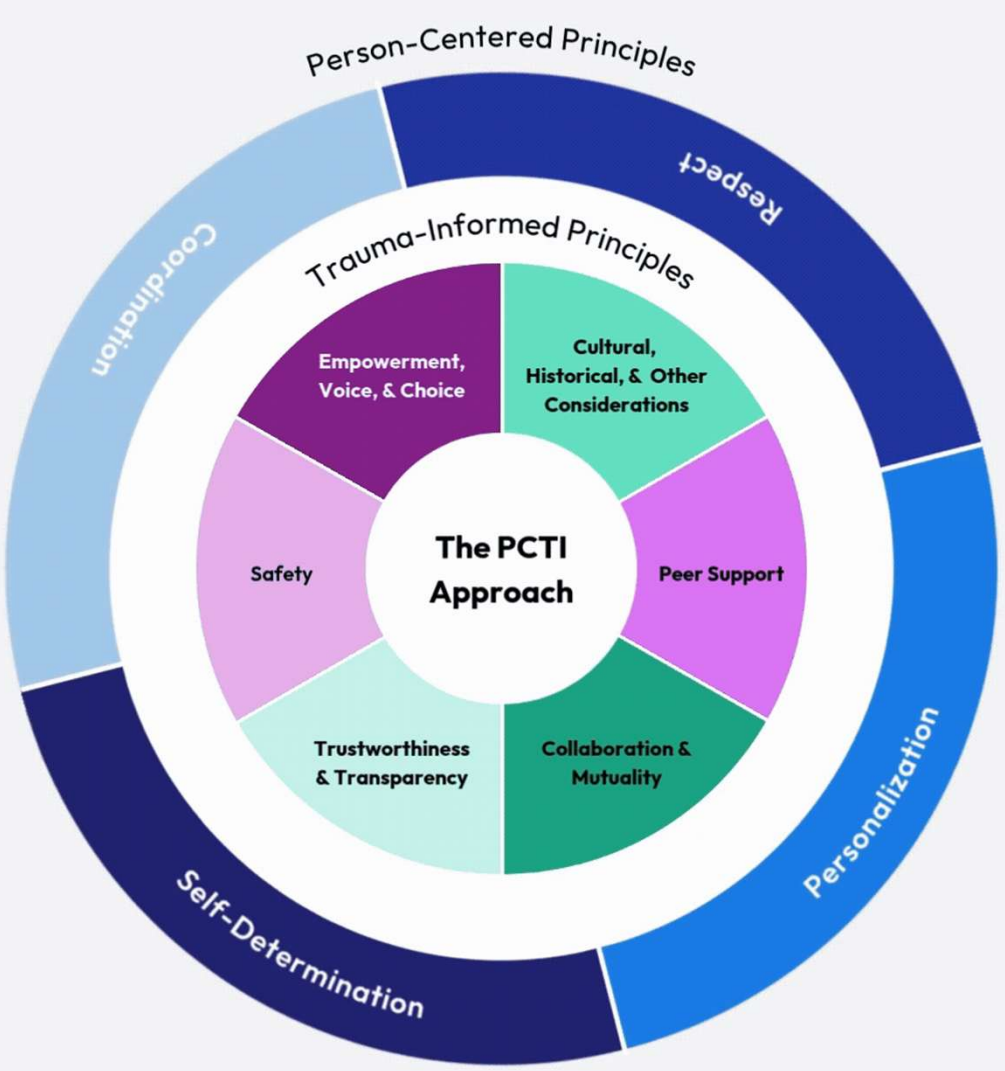
The PCTI approach implements SAMHSA's principles of trauma-informed care through the lens of the person-centered principles.



Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care, 2024

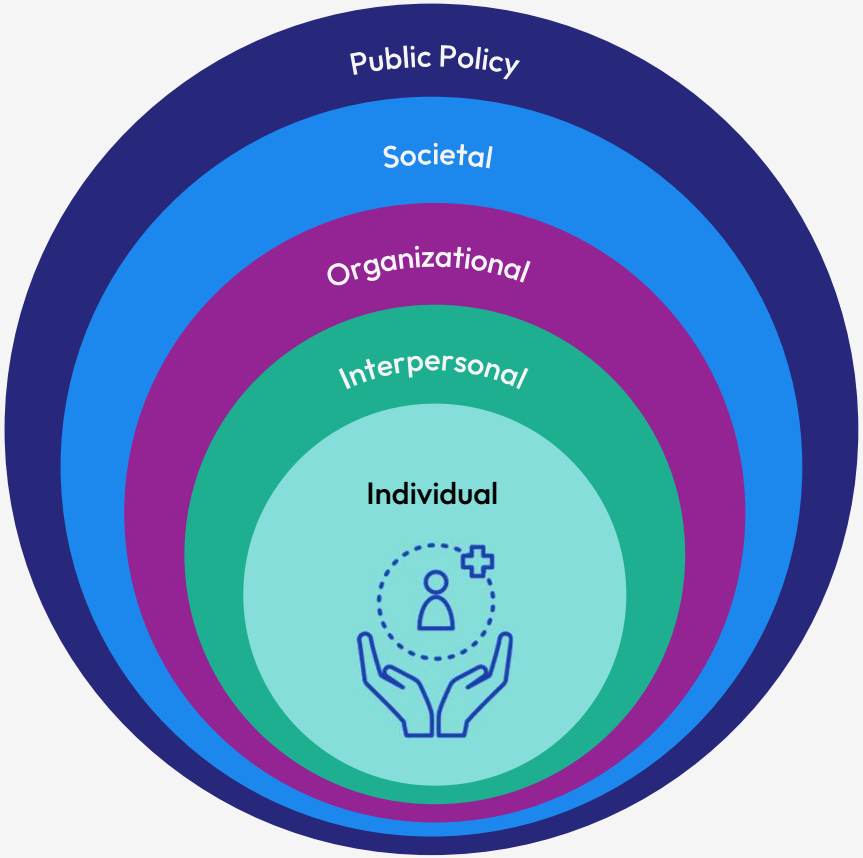
PCTI Principles

The PCTI approach implements SAMHSA's principles of trauma-informed care through the lens of the person-centered principles.



Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care,

The Universal Approach



Eisinger, M., & Bedney, B., 2018

PCTI Strategies in the Workplace

Direct Service

Safety

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Peer Support

Collaboration & Mutuality

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Safety

Direct Service

- Ensure that physical space is **well-lit** inside and outside, such as in parking areas
- Ensure signage is legible with **large, bold fonts**
- Provide adequate seating and **space between seats**
- Place **check-in calls** following a community crisis, enlist volunteers to assist
- Provide **empathetic listening** without judgment
- Offer to **meet in the client's home** when possible, if it is safer for the client
- Ask for **consent before physically touching anyone**, whether a supportive hug or medical procedure
- **Demonstrate understanding** when clients display emotional or behavioral trauma symptoms
- **Smile**, model respectful behavior with other staff and volunteers

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Direct Service

- Introduce yourself, **explain** your role, the purpose of your meeting, what to expect, and next steps
- Check for **understanding** and inform client that they can ask questions or take breaks at any time
- During intake or evaluations**, explain why** personal information is being collected, how it will be used or shared, and how privacy will be protected
- **Communicate if you will arrive late** or appointments are running behind, even if it's only 5 minutes
- Demonstrate **patience and understanding** when clients hesitate to use services
- Provide a **client newsletter** with organizational updates
- Provide clients with a **point-of-contact** who they can reach out to for information and assistance
- Provide clients with **time to gain comfort** with providers prior to asking personal questions or performing invasive procedures

Peer Support

Direct Service

- At social events and support groups, **introduce clients** to each other, offer nametags
- **Enlist clients** to assist with outreach to new prospective clients
- Place **reminder calls** to individual clients before events, utilize volunteers to help place calls
- Consider programs to provide **socialization** for clients: intergenerational, friendly visitor volunteers
- Post resources and materials that **acknowledge caregivers, and allow them** to accompany clients
- **Encourage clients to share** their challenges and solutions with one another

Collaboration & Mutuality

Direct Service

- Provide opportunities for **clients to inform the design** of physical and virtual spaces
- Ask clients **how they prefer** to answer questions
- **Follow up with clients** one-on-one on how their experience has been going
- Communicate to clients **how feedback was integrated** into programming
- Acknowledge that **staff at all levels** shape a client's experience
- Provide **PCTI training** to frontline staff and volunteers tailored to their roles
- **Train partners** and vendors, build a PCTI referral network or collaborative to avoid re-traumatization

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Direct Service

- Respect clients' **self-determination**, even if we would make different choices
- Ensure clients know **they can opt out** of services at any time with no penalty
- **Encourage clients** to take an active role in their care plans
- Actively listen to clients and **give their experiences a direct role** in shaping services and programs
- Ensure that all **clients are informed** of the services for which they are eligible
- Educate clients on **symptoms of trauma** exposure
- If a service or procedure is required, **explain why** it is required
- **Avoid rigid and inflexible** schedules or procedures for clients
- **Thank clients** for meeting with you and for their time

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Direct Service

- Ensure that **frontline staff are trained** on the unique needs and histories of the populations served
- Understand that cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minoritized **communities are not homogenous**
- Provide services in the **preferred language** and culture of clients
- Use visuals to demonstrate a welcoming space for **clients of all backgrounds**
- Adapt services to meet the **unique needs of individual** clients, whenever possible
- Provide **culturally appropriate food** for services, procedures, and events
- Ex: Serve **plated meals** rather than having clients wait in line, have takeout containers available

Organization

Safety

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Peer Support

Collaboration & Mutuality

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Safety

Organization

- Encourage honest feedback demonstrating that there is **no retaliation**
- Set **ground rules at meetings** about listening respectfully, not interrupting, etc. and uphold them
- Ensure that physical space is **well-lit** inside and outside, such as in parking areas
- Provide adequate seating and **space between seats** during meetings and events
- Allow staff to **choose where they sit** at meetings and events
- Provide **content warnings** when preparing to discuss difficult subject matters
- Encourage staff to **take breaks** and tend to their physical needs

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Organization

- Employees and leaders **follow through** on commitments and take **accountability**
- Establish a culture of **transparent communication** between staff and their supervisors
- Supervisors give **credit to employees** for their ideas and contributions
- Employee **accomplishments are recognized** by leaders
- Provide **active listening** and be open to self-reflection
- **Leadership communicates** organizational and department goals and plans clearly
- Meeting and event **agendas are shared** in advance

Peer Support

Organization

- Convene **staff gatherings to debrief** about difficult situations and to celebrate successes
- Establish **employee resource groups** (ERGs) and provide them with adequate support
- Create employee **mentorship programs** or assign new hire partners
- **Respect** employees' and coworkers' **boundaries**

Collaboration & Mutuality

Organization

- Encourage **input from staff and volunteers of all levels** when developing and modifying programs
- Acknowledge that **frontline and direct service staff** have the most accurate knowledge of logistics
- Leadership displays **accountability and candor** regarding their own areas of improvement
- Provide opportunities to **receive employee feedback**, and be prepared to act on the results
- **Solicit staff contributions** to meeting agendas in advance
- Provide **PCTI training** to staff and volunteers at all levels of the organization

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Organization

- Create opportunities for staff and volunteers to utilize their **individual strengths and skills**
- Ask employees how they **prefer to be recognized**, and note that there is no one size fits all
- Work with employees to set goals that are **realistic and achievable**
- Provide an **adequate training** experience with the tools employees need to be successful
- Ensure **dietary needs** are accounted for when planning catering for meetings or events
- Ensure you have obtained **consent before sharing photos** of employees on social media, press releases, literature, and your website
- When scheduling meetings or interviews, provide **multiple date and time options**

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Organization

- Confirm that major events do not overlap with **religious holidays**, especially fasting holidays
- Recruit staff and volunteers who **match the population** being served
- Use visuals to demonstrate a welcoming space for **staff of all backgrounds**
- Ensure marketing and communication materials use language and visuals **representative of the population** you serve
- Ensure decorations in the organization are **representative of many cultures**
- **Engage communities you serve** in the design of programming initiatives

Policies & Procedures

Safety

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Peer Support

Collaboration & Mutuality

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Safety

Policies & Procedures

- Create and define clear **policies for addressing bullying and harassment**
- Provide **antibullying and antiharassment training** to staff at all levels
- Ensure safe and confidential avenues for reporting discrimination or harassment **without retaliation**
- Do everything possible to **protect employee confidentiality** when investigating incidents
- **Practice emergency drills**, ensure adequate signage and supplies are accessible
- Ensure that emergency drills **accommodate individuals** with mobility limitations
- **Enforce security measures**, such as not propping doors to locked buildings
- Adapt and evolve emergency preparedness policies in **response to emerging threats**

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Policies & Procedures

- Make policies **easily accessible** to employees in terms of location and wording
- **Explain** to staff and volunteers the purpose and rationale behind policy changes
- Ensure **availability of leadership or Human Resources** support to answer employee questions
- Make position descriptions as comprehensive as possible, with **clear rationale** for how duties relate to the position
- Ensure space in meeting agendas for **questions and answers**
- Incorporate **PCTI 101 training** into onboarding and ongoing training

Peer Support

Policies & Procedures

- Structure new employee onboarding to include **introductions to staff** and time to foster connections
- Build **check-in and reporting out** time into team meetings at the beginning of the agenda
- Incorporate **processing time** into workloads
- Provide employees with access to **assistance programs** and other supportive services

Collaboration & Mutuality

Policies & Procedures

- **Elicit input** in shaping policies and procedures from **employees at all levels**
- Ensure that **policies are enforced equally** across staff levels and positions

Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

Policies & Procedures

- **Provide flexibility** whenever possible for employee schedules and work locations
- Create space in position descriptions for individual **employee strengths to shine**
- **Welcome questions and feedback** on policies and procedures, and be open to making changes when possible
- When a controversial policy cannot be changed, **provide a clear rationale**

Cultural, Historical, & Other Considerations

Policies & Procedures

- Ensure that **anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies are upheld** and that staff reports are taken seriously
- Provide adequate **time off for holidays** from different religions
- Ensure that dress code policies are other neutral and **accommodate** religious attire
- Provide opportunities for organizational leadership, staff, and volunteers to **improve cultural humility and competence**
- Provide opportunities for staff and volunteers to **reflect on their own cultural backgrounds**, values, beliefs, assumptions, **and biases**

Questions?

Jewish Federations of North America

Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care

Thank You!

Jewish Federations Resources

Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Essentials for Aging Services Online Course

Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Backgrounder

Join our mailing list: email Aging@JewishFederations.org

Next Steps

- View our resources at AgingAndTrauma.org
- Connect with service providers in your area who are leaders in PCTI
- Discuss our PCTI Backgrounder at a staff meeting
- Follow the Center on LinkedIn @Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care
- Consider: How will you infuse the PCTI approach into your work?

Jewish Federations of North America

Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care

Thank You!

Citations

Britton, P. C., Duberstein, P. R., Conner, K. R., Heisel, M. J., Hirsch, J. K., & Conwell, Y. (2008). Reasons for living, hopelessness, and suicide ideation among depressed adults 50 years or older. American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 16(9), 736–741. https://doi.org/10.1097/JGP.0b013e31817b609a

Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice. (n.d.). Guide to trauma-informed meetings, discussions, and conversations. https://www.ctipp.org/post/guide-to-trauma-informed-meetings-discussions-conversations

Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care, The Jewish Federations of North America. (2024). The person-centered, trauma-informed (PCTI) approach.

Eisinger, M., & Bedney, B. (2018). Teaching about trauma: Models for training service providers in person-centered, trauma-informed care. Kavod, 8(Spring).

Kessler, R. C., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Alonso, J., Benjet, C., Bromet, E. J., Cardoso, G., Degenhardt, L., de Girolamo, G., Dinolova, R. V., Ferry, F., Florescu, S., Gureje, O., Haro, J. M., Huang, Y., Karam, E. G., Kawakami, N., Lee, S., Lepine, J. P., Levinson, D., Navarro-Mateu, F., & Koenen, K. C. (2017). Trauma and PTSD in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 8(sup5), 1353383. https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2017.1353383

Kilpatrick, D. G., Resnick, H. S., Milanak, M. E., Miller, M. W., Keyes, K. M., & Friedman, M. J. (2013). National estimates of exposure to traumatic events and PTSD prevalence using DSM-IV and DSM-5 criteria. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 26(5), 537–547. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21848

Levy, B. R. (2022). The role of structural ageism in age beliefs and health of older persons. JAMA Network Open, 5(2), e2147802. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.47802

Miller, K. D. (2024, March 15). Positive aging: 10+ principles to shift beliefs around age. https://positivepsychology.com/positive-aging/

Citations

National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. (n.d.). Trauma survivor bill of rights.

National Council on Aging. (n.d.). Get the facts on healthy aging. https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-healthy-aging

Rabin, C., Bedney, B., & Rubenstein, V. (2023). Aging with a history of trauma: Strategies to provide person-centered, trauma-informed care to diverse older adults and family caregivers. Center on Holocaust Survivor Care and Institute on Aging and Trauma, The Jewish Federations of North America.

Riegel, D. G. (2024, May 15). Your meetings need to be trauma-informed. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/speak-easy/202405/your-meetings-need-to-be-trauma-informed

Sweeton, J. (2017, March 13). How to heal the traumatized brain. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/workings-well-being/201703/how-heal-the-traumatized-brain

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

U.S. Surgeon General. (2022). Framework for workplace mental health & well-being.

Wong, R. Y. (2018). A new strategic approach to successful aging and healthy aging. Geriatrics, 3(4), 86. https://doi.org/10.3390/geriatrics3040086

World Health Organization. (2022, October 1). Ageing and health. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health