



# **Building Relationships With Children Who Have Experienced Trauma**

**Suamhirs Rivera**

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# Divisions

- Mental Health
- Alcohol & Drug Services
- Corrections & Rehabilitation

MHS now operates over 100 programs  
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# CLINICAL PILLARS



TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DISORDERS

CLIENT CENTERED

GENDER  
RESPONSIVE

CULTURAL  
INCLUSION

CO-OCCURRING  
ISSUES

LEGAL

ETHICAL

HOPE • INTEGRITY • INNOVATION • DIGNITY • EXCELLENCE • ACTION

ACCURACY • COMMITMENT • COMMUNICATION • DIVERSITY • EDUCATION • ETHICS • LEADERSHIP  
PROFESSIONALISM • RESPONSIBILITY



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# Suamhirs Rivera, My Personal Story

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# Mental Illness Facts

- **Mental illness can be mildly bothersome to severely disabling.**
- **Approximately 26% of American adults have a diagnosable mental disorder.**
- **1 child in 10 has is diagnosed with serious mental & emotional disorders.**

-National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

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# What are the Causes of Childhood Mental Health Problems?

- Genetics
- Brain Damage
- Biochemical Causes
- Congenital Causes
- Childhood neglect or environmental exposures
- Childhood & Adolescence Trauma



# What Happened to Me?

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# CSEC, Child Sex Trafficking in America

- 300,000 kids at risk of being victims. *U.S. Department of Justice*
- An estimated 14,500 to 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the United States each year. *U.S. Department of Justice*
- The global market of child trafficking at over \$12 billion a year with over 1.2 million child victims. *UNICEF 2012*



# Foster care in America

- Over 600,000 kids are in Foster Care in the U.S.
- More than 8,000 in San Diego County
- Over 75% of individuals in jail were in foster care for at least a day
- Only 3% of Former Foster Youth graduate from college



# Stigma

- **Discrediting**
- **Shame & Isolation**
- **Person is seen as the problem rather than the condition being the problem**
- **Person seen as undesirable**
- **Can cause denial, delay of treatment, and avoidance of daily activities**
- **Individuals are often “labeled”**



## Trauma-Informed Care

Assume every child you come in contact with has experienced some kind of trauma in their life, and treat them accordingly.



# Discrimination

- ❖ Children get put in separate classes in school, or in special schools
- ❖ Children get put into residential treatment centers, hospitals, or homes with strangers
- ❖ Many children are left out of family and social circles



# Public Attitudes Toward Mental Illness

In a survey...

- 78% of adults with mental health symptoms and 89% of adults without such symptoms agreed that treatment CAN help persons with mental illness lead normal lives.
- 57% of adults without mental health symptoms believed that people are caring and sympathetic to persons with mental illness.
- Only 25% of adults with mental health symptoms believed that people are caring and sympathetic to persons with mental illness.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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and the CDC  
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# How Does Poverty Impact the Mental & Physical Health of Children?

- “Poor children are more often exposed to risk factors that may impair brain development and affect social and emotional development.”

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# Impact of Exposure to Violence

- “Children exposed to domestic violence live in fear and hopelessness; often perform poorly in school; and may be unable to participate in normal childhood activities.”

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A vertical illustration on the left side of the slide. At the top, a yellow star is in a dark blue sky. Below it, a white dove is flying. The scene transitions to a cityscape with purple and pink buildings. At the bottom, a white silhouette of a person is walking towards a door. In the foreground, a hand in a red and black sleeve holds a branch with green leaves and a red ribbon.

“Children from violent households often have increased aggression; increased risk of victimization; problems forming healthy relationships; lowered social competence; and poorer academic performance.”

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# SAMHSA's Definition of Trauma-Informed Awareness

- *A program, organization, individual, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.*

[SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov)

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# How Can I Be A Trauma-Informed Caregiver?

- Be kind to every child.
- Assume every child you meet may have experienced trauma.
- Don't use "labels".
- Don't discriminate.
- Treat everyone as an equal.
- Recognize & honor the strengths of every child.
- Encourage, support, empower, and offer hope.



# Can just one person make a difference in a child's life?

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There are tools you can use to help  
as you build relationships with  
children based on  
Trauma-Informed Awareness

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*There is nothing  
more healing  
than the expectation  
of a better tomorrow.*

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# Contact Information:

## Suamhirs Rivera

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COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO



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## *Communication Youth Want: What Worked/Works*

\_\_\_ Believe me

\_\_\_ "hold my hand"

\_\_\_ Show me love

\_\_\_ Don't jump to conclusions

\_\_\_ Holding on (even youth mess up)

\_\_\_ Self-disclosure

\_\_\_ Validate that I am important

\_\_\_ Build strong relationships

\_\_\_ Be Kind and gentle

\_\_\_ Be silly, it's cool

\_\_\_ Be empathetic

\_\_\_ Care about me

\_\_\_ Be transparent with me

\_\_\_ Be honest with me

\_\_\_ Be real in your conversations with me, and feel free to get down to it

\_\_\_ Be Available

\_\_\_ Explain Confidentiality to me

\_\_\_ Use I statements

\_\_\_ Allow me to have my own style self-expression when talking

\_\_\_ Find connections with me (something in common)

\_\_\_ Giving (snack, comfort, space)

\_\_\_ "Join" me

\_\_\_ Use Open-ended questions with me

\_\_\_ Follow-through on commitments with me

\_\_\_ Attentively Listen to me

\_\_\_ Underline and highlight my strengths

\_\_\_ Sharing your own experiences with me

\_\_\_ Share your wisdom with me

\_\_\_ Provide me opportunities for growth