



The Maine Children's Trauma Response Initiative

At Maine Behavioral Healthcare we are committed to ensuring that any child in the state of Maine who has been exposed to violence or other types of trauma has access to mental health treatment that has been proven to work. Launching The Maine Children's Trauma Response Initiative is the first step in ensuring that no matter where a child lives, they will have access to evidence-based treatment close to home.

Through funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and as part of The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH) has been awarded a four-year grant to develop this initiative, a state-wide trauma-informed system of care for children who are suffering as a result of exposure to violence and other types of trauma. It is a partnership of multiple community programs and agencies throughout Maine whose goal is to raise the quality of care for children who have been exposed to violence and trauma.

MBH is proudly partnering with numerous agencies throughout Maine in order to provide a full range of trauma-informed mental health services, including outreach, community education, assessment and triage, training, and treatment.



Core Messages

- We believe that children and adolescents deserve a home and community that is safe.
- Children and adolescents are impacted by violence and trauma both directly and indirectly, and not all will react in the same way. The impact of violence and trauma on children can be short- or long-term.
- Children and adolescents are resilient and should have every opportunity to lead happy and healthy lives. When given the proper support following exposure to violence and trauma, children can heal and thrive.
- Early intervention, coordinated support, and/or evidence-based treatment following exposure to violence and trauma can help children and adolescents recover from these experiences.
- There should be no wrong door to quality, evidence-based services for children and families that have been exposed to violence and trauma. Responses and services should be coordinated, collaborative, and culturally competent.

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What Is Trauma?

Trauma is an overwhelming experience that can interfere with the way children grow, learn, and behave. Some traumatic events are obvious, such as the sudden death of a parent. Others are less clear, such as growing up with violence at home or in the community. When these events happen, children can be frightened; their world may feel unsafe and insecure. Exposure to violence and other traumatic events can overwhelm children and teenagers and lead to problems in their daily lives. Some examples of traumatic events include:

- Exposure to domestic violence
- Physical violence/abuse
- Sexual violence/abuse
- Neglect
- Impaired caregiver (mental illness, substance abuse, etc.)
- Emotional/psychological abuse
- Natural disasters
- Medical procedures/illness/serious accident
- School violence/bullying
- War/refugee trauma
- Dating violence
- Community violence
- The unexpected death of or separation from a loved one
- Prolonged illness or death of a loved one

Signs and Symptoms of Traumatic Stress

- Sleep troubles, nightmares, fear of falling asleep
- Headaches, stomach aches, aches and pains
- Having trouble concentrating
- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- Not showing feelings about anything
- A very high activity level
- Increased aggression or anger
- Loss of skills learned earlier
- Increased anxiety/worry or depression
- Substance abuse, dangerous behaviors, or unhealthy sexual activity



Why Focus on Trauma?

- One in four children and adolescents in the U.S. experience at least one potentially traumatic event by the age of 16.
- One in three children who witnessed intimate partner violence reported being abused physically.
- Children who have been exposed to violence can have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and are at higher risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, and headaches.
- There is increasing evidence that early life stressors, such as abuse, witnessing intimate partner violence, and related adverse experiences, cause enduring brain dysfunction that, in turn, affect health and quality of life throughout the lifespan.
- The effects of exposure to violence, and other types of trauma can be diminished with appropriate supports and interventions.

Early support for children and their families can prevent long lasting problems.

What Will the Maine Children's Initiative Provide for the Community?

The purpose of the Maine Children's Trauma Response Initiative is to develop a culturally competent statewide system of care for children who are suffering as a result of exposure to violence and other types of trauma.

The Initiative is creating a unified network in which there is no wrong door to services. It will provide comprehensive, integrated, and culturally competent assessment, outreach, treatment, community education, and public awareness.

The three primary goals of the Initiative are to:

- a. Develop community coalitions throughout the state with key members who represent such areas as mental health, state agencies, juvenile justice, schools, police, medical providers, domestic violence advocacy programs, and others. These coalitions meet regularly to develop a needs assessment for the region, determine ways to meet these needs, and ensure that children exposed to trauma in that region receive quality care.
- b. Provide community education and public awareness in each region of the state about the effects of violence and trauma on children and ways to help.
- c. Train master's-level mental health clinicians throughout Maine in the evidence-based model Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT).

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or TF-CBT, is a type of therapy proven to help children who have experienced a traumatic event. It combines individual therapy with participation of the parent or caregiver. TF-CBT allows children to address trauma in a supportive, helpful manner. It teaches methods for relaxation, stress management, and safety skills. This lets children and youth learn new ways to cope and helps caregivers support them in the process.

Call Maine Behavioral Healthcare at (207) 874-1030 or visit MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org for more information.


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