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In Delaware:
Trauma Peer Support Specialists— These are individuals working in community-based mental health programs throughout the state. They have experienced trauma in their lives and they are examples of individuals experiencing success through healing. They can offer advice and support to individuals coping with trauma.

This booklet was produced by the staff and Trauma Peer Support Specialists of the Mental Health Transformation Grant on Trauma-Informed Care in the State of Delaware.

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Definition
What is Trauma?

Trauma occurs when an individual experiences an event or series of events which causes extreme emotional distress that overwhelms normal coping mechanisms. This can include: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, natural disasters, harassment, discrimination, bullying, or war experiences.

These experiences are of a degree of intensity that they continue to affect the individual who experienced them for a long period of time, and this can make day-to-day living difficult.

Words of Advice and Inspiration

by DREAM YVONNE J. PERKINS ~ Trauma Peer Support Specialist in Delaware

Change, whether good or bad, right or wrong, studied or dismissed, change can not alter the present until it actually happens. Change can open the door to your future... Or close the door to your past. Change is accepting the fact that a change is needed. One needs to, if not wants to, accept change because change is a reflection of maturity. Maturity is a reflection of growth. Growth stimulates ambition and desire to do more with your life, your thoughts, and progresses toward a recovery one may only dream of. Dreams restore ambitions; ambitions to fantasize. Fantasy builds character in a world only invented by dreams. With fantasy, one can bring forth challenges of the mind. The mind, not where only dreams can enter, but where ambition and desire can conquer and thrive.

And we do thrive to survive.
Change can be stubborn, or change can be gradual. Change can challenge, or change can bring forth successes. With success, endless opportunities turn into the journeys of one’s life. We can shun change, we can edit change, we can follow change, or we can hide from change. We can even change—change. However we occupy, manipulate, deny, or accept change we must learn our true beliefs about change.

Because what you refuse to learn, surely you will refuse to know; and knowledge is power. Without inner knowledge there can be no change. And life will stagnate. Merit and stability will perish.

There is not anything that isn’t, or should not be unchangeable. Yes, there can be minute change, but when change is feeble and useless, what’s the point? How will a feeble and useless change pattern your path to recovery? The very recovery you dream and fantasize about. Or, will this be the recovery you have longed for? Your milestone? The recovery of acceptance, promotion, self-honor, and success! Invite recovery as one of your most fulfilling changes!

Change is growth. Change is healing. Change is freedom. Change is asking for help. Change is adventure. Change is an emotion... And emotional. Change is fear... And fearful. Change is conquering and abolishing destructive habits; those very same habits that stripped you of your change.

Change is whatever you want it, or YOU, to be. Realize the essence and rewards of change. Trust in your own good, your own worth. Be patient with yourself. Change everything that you can of yourself, not of others... and lovingly accept the rest.
The Effects of Trauma

Trauma impacts individuals differently, but there are some similarities in how it can affect individuals. It can reduce an individual’s ability to deal with intense emotions or stressful events. Trauma survivors frequently experience feelings of distrust, insecurity, confusion, and isolation.

The feelings that come after experiencing trauma can make an individual feel overwhelmed, making it difficult to manage emotions, connect with other people, and deal with day-to-day stresses. This can lead to drug use, alcohol use, or engaging in other harmful behaviors in order to reduce the intensity of these difficult emotions.

Trauma’s impact can be long-lasting. Traumatic events experienced in childhood can continue to follow an individual into adulthood.
Causes of Trauma

An event can lead to emotional or psychological trauma if:

- It happened unexpectedly
- It happened repeatedly
- You were unprepared for it
- Someone was intentionally cruel
- You felt powerless to prevent it
- It happened in childhood

Types of events that can cause trauma include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One time incidents like:</th>
<th>Ongoing experiences like:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>Abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural disasters</td>
<td>Living in a crime-ridden neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent attacks</td>
<td>Life changing health problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Successful Recovery

Many people have successfully overcome and recovered from traumatic experiences becoming very well known individuals, such as:
- Oprah Winfrey—famous TV personality
- Charlize Theron—Actress
- Tyler Perry—Movie Director/Writer/Actor
- Joe Torre—Major League Baseball player and manager

Here are some words of advice from ordinary people, who are survivors of trauma:
- “Talk as much as you can, write things down, enlist the help of gentle and patient people such as patient therapists, family, and friends.”
- “Have compassion for yourself.”
- “Take it one step at a time and challenge yourself when you are thinking negatively.”
- “Bottling up the feelings doesn’t work in the long run. Find some body to talk to.”
- Most importantly, “Remember that it is not your fault.”
- “Have a life of your choosing, be a one who thrives!”

Created; August 6th, 2014
Trauma Recovery Suggestions

Stay Connected:
- Ask for help and support from others
- Participate in social activities
- Join a support group for trauma survivors
- Volunteer

Stay Grounded:
- Stick to a daily routine
- Break large jobs into smaller, manageable tasks
- Find activities that make you feel in the body (like exercise, art, music, spending time with friends or family, etc.)
- Allow yourself to feel (being present in the physical body) what you feel when you feel it

Take Care of Your Health:
- Get plenty of sleep
- Avoid drugs, alcohol and other addictive behaviors
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Reduce stress

Signs and Symptoms of Trauma

It is important to recognize that how an individual reacts to trauma is not “wrong.” Rather, the reactions are really normal responses to abnormal situations. These can include:

**Emotional and psychological symptoms:**
- Shock, denial, disbelief
- Anger, irritability
- Mood Swings
- Guilt, shame
- Feeling hopeless or sad
- Feeling numb or disconnected

**Physical signs and symptoms:**
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Agitation
- Aches and pains
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Nightmares
- Easily startled
- Racing heartbeat
- Edginess
- Muscle tension
- Digestive/gastrointestinal problems
Childhood Trauma

When a child experiences trauma, it can have a lasting impact on how they see the world. It can cause them to see the world as a fearful and dangerous place. This sense of fear and helplessness can carry into adulthood if not addressed and healed. Trauma survivors experience the world as unsafe, and therefore expend a lot of energy simply attempting to avoid any harm. Avoidance causes the individual to become disconnected from themselves and others and unable to experience the joys and satisfactions of life.

Childhood trauma can result from the child experiencing any of the following situations:

- An unstable or unsafe environment
- Serious illness
- Intrusive medical procedures
- Separation from a parent
- Sexual, physical or verbal abuse
- Neglect or not being protected
- Bullying and community violence

Healing from Trauma

There is hope for those experiencing psychological or emotional trauma. With treatment and guidance provided by a trained individual/therapist, and with social support, an individual can engage in the healing process and lead a happy, healthy, and productive life.

Healing from trauma includes:

- Processing trauma-related memories stored in the body and learning to identify and connect with feelings
- Discharging pent-up “fight, flight, freeze” energy and behaviors
- Learning how to regulate strong emotions
- Building or rebuilding the ability to trust people
- Developing healthy coping skills