



Applying SAMHSA's Principles of Trauma-informed Care to Consumer Provider Partnerships

While trauma providers have valuable knowledge and training, they should adhere to the disciplined practice of incorporating shared power as they build partnerships. It can take a lot of effort to offset the inherent power differences between the provider and consumer. However, it's worth the trouble because when shared power is incorporated, the consumer will be more invested in treatment/service goals, more satisfied with services and more hopeful about managing life beyond the service relationship. The following principles of trauma-informed care contribute to a "shared power" process.

Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues.

Discrimination and bias make it harder to establish good working partnerships because of the power and privilege differences between majority and minority cultures. A first step is to demonstrate a willingness to learn from the unique cultural expertise of the consumer. A second step is to make the environment and approaches culturally relevant. Services that "fit" will encourage better engagement than services that are being imposed from an outside culture. Families seeking services may experience the mental health service environment as a new culture, with its own vocabulary and guidelines. This is why it is important to be careful about the use of jargon that may make the consumer feel like an outsider in the process. When looking for help, families may expect the provider, the "expert," to take over and provide solutions. In those instances, the provider should stay true to the idea of helping families engage in the partnership as equal participants. Finally, a trauma informed approach recognizes that historical or generational trauma may affect the readiness to engage in service relationships.

Safety: Establishing a safe working environment requires that trauma providers invite consumers to express what feels safe and unsafe to them, in the physical environment and in interactions. If providers don't ask, important information affecting the relationship may go unaddressed. If providers do ask but don't take steps to incorporate feedback, confidence in the service relationship will suffer at a time when the relationship is just forming. Taking consumers' safety perceptions and requirements seriously is a critical first step towards establishing a sense of shared power in the service relationship.

Trustworthiness and Transparency: Safety in relationships develops when individuals are honest, demonstrate good intentions and follow through on commitments. Transparency in relationships involves openness, clear communication and mutual accountability. Trustworthiness and transparency in trauma services require that decisions are made with meaningful family involvement, awareness and consent. When providers pay close attention to trustworthiness and transparency, they demonstrate a commitment to engaging in a partnership, rather than holding all the control and power.

Peer Support: Confiding in peers with shared experiences can be a comfortable step along the path to regaining control after difficult life experiences. Experiences with peer supporters can offer a first step towards imagining a future life that includes an increased sense of personal efficacy as part of one's story of being a survivor. By definition, peer support relationships involve individuals who are more "equal" at the outset. When providers place value on peer support, they

are demonstrating an understanding that the recovery work is owned by the consumer and goes beyond the consumer provider relationship.

Collaboration and Mutuality: Unlike peer support relationships, consumer provider relationships don't start with the "equal footing" advantage. Working together towards shared goals (collaboration) and demonstrating respect for all expertise in the partnership (mutuality) offset the negative effects of power differences in consumer provider relationships.

Empowerment, voice and choice. Traumatic experiences interfere with a sense of personal power by limiting choices and the opportunity to speak up. Trauma service providers facilitate recovery by including consumers in decision making, sharing information about all available choices and encouraging self-advocacy, even when that may involve directly challenging the provider or the agency. This leads increased self-efficacy, an important element of future resiliency. For some consumers, the chance to share or challenge power will feel new and different and providers should resist the temptation to take over.



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