MODULE 1
Creating Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice: Introduction to the Essential Elements

Training Time: 65 minutes (1 hour 5 minutes)

Key Learning Points

1. Children's exposure to traumatic events and their subsequent reactions affect child welfare workers' ability to achieve the CFSR goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. Trauma-informed child welfare practice supports efforts to reach these goals.
2. The Essential Elements describe a trauma-informed child welfare practice model that addresses and best responds to the needs of children who have been maltreated and traumatized. This module details each of the Essential Elements and introduces participants to the *Comprehensive Guide.*
3. The Essential Elements are consistent with "best practice" in child welfare, and some mirror well-established child welfare priorities, such as maximizing safety. Incorporating the Essential Elements into one's practice does not require more worker time, but rather, a redirection of time.
4. While the Essential Elements are the province of all professionals, such as mental health and education professionals, who work in and with children in the child welfare system, it is the child welfare worker who coordinates with other systems to ensure that these elements are present.
5. For each Essential Element, there are three types of strategies available for child welfare workers: **Child Welfare Tools, Resources and Supports,** and **Practical Assistance.**

ACTIVITY 1A
WELCOME, OVERVIEW, AND INTRODUCTIONS

Activity Time: 10 minutes

Materials Needed

- PowerPoint Slides 1–4
- Flip chart (Post-it® type preferred) and stand
- Markers

Trainer Activities

- Cover the following in your brief introduction:
  - Thank participants for attending the training.
  - Introduce trainer(s), and give a synopsis of trainer background.
  - Provide logistical information, e.g., locations of bathrooms, phones, coffee and food, sign-in sheets, Continuing Education Units (CEUs), beginning and ending times, schedules of breaks, etc.
  - Briefly review PowerPoint Slides 3 and 4, which include CFSR goals and specific objectives of this training.
  - Make sure to emphasize that this training is not intended to increase the workload for child welfare workers. Rather, the training will help workers reshape what they are already doing to make services more trauma-informed.
  - Use one to two minutes to ask participants for specific questions they have related to child trauma, and note their questions on the flip chart. Let participants know when during the 12-hour training their question will be addressed. If there won't be time, do your best to provide a reference or resource where the participant can get more information. If time allows, have participants introduce themselves, and ask them to include their county, assignment, and years working in the field of child welfare.

TRAINER TIP: *Optional Exercise:* As participants introduce themselves and the number of years working in the field, the trainer can quietly tally the number of years of experience in the room, and provide the sum total to the group when introductions are complete. This device honors the wisdom and experience in the room when a training audience includes veteran workers. The trainer can then state that he/she looks forward to hearing ideas and wisdom from participants, as well as fresh ideas from newer workers. A fun twist on this exercise is to ask participants to line up around the room in order of years of experience, and have the group tally the total years of experience.

ACTIVITY 1B
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS
What Impact Does Trauma Have on the Goals of Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being?

Activity Time: 15 minutes

Materials Needed

- *Comprehensive Guide,* pp. 10–11
- PowerPoint Slide 4
- Flip chart
- Markers

Trainer Activities

- Leave PowerPoint Slide 4 on the screen.
- Divide the group into three smaller groups, with five to six participants per group. (If you have a large group, you can divide into six or nine small groups, as needed.)
- Distribute blank flip chart sheets and markers to each group. Assign each of the three groups one of the CFSR goals: SAFETY, PERMANENCY, WELL-BEING. (If there are six small groups, assign two groups to SAFETY; if there are nine groups, assign three groups to SAFETY, etc.)

- Instruct each group to select a scribe and a spokesperson. Each group should brainstorm and write on the flip chart sheet their answers to the question: **"From what you know about trauma, how might a child's exposure to traumatic events and his or her subsequent reactions affect child welfare workers' ability to achieve the 'goal' assigned to your group?"** Provide an example for each goal, drawing from the ideas in the bullet points below. Give participants approximately five to seven minutes to brainstorm, and ask the spokesperson to be prepared to give a report-back to the larger group.

- Ask spokespeople to provide the report-backs to the larger group. As groups report, you may add any of the following points that may not have been mentioned in the report-backs.

  Safety: Traumatic stress can adversely impact the child's ability to protect himself or herself from abuse or for the agency to do so, in the following ways.

  - The child's inability to regulate moods and behavior may overwhelm or anger caregivers to the point of incurring increased risk of abuse or placing other children at risk.
  - The after-effects of trauma may impair a child's ability to describe the traumatic events in the detail needed by investigators.
  - The child's lack of trust may lead him or her to provide investigators or the courts with incomplete or inaccurate information about abuse experienced or witnessed.
  - Traumatic reactions may dull the child's emotions in ways that make some investigators skeptical of the veracity of the child's statements.
  - The child's altered world view may lead to behaviors that are self-destructive or dangerous, including premature sexual activities.

  Permanency: The child's reaction to traumatic stress can adversely impact the child's stability in placements.

  - The child's inability to regulate his or her moods and behavior may lead to behaviors that endanger or threaten stable placements, reunification, and/or adoptive placement.
  - The child's lack of trust in the motivations of caregivers may lead to rejection of possible caring adults or, conversely, lead to superficial attachments.
  - The child's early experiences and attachment problems may reduce his or her natural empathy for others, including foster or adoptive family members.

- A new foster parent or adoptive parent, unaware of the child's trauma history or of what reminders are linked to strong emotional reactions, may inadvertently trigger strong reminders of trauma.

Well-Being: Traumatic stress may have both short- and long-term consequences for the child's mental health, physical health, and life trajectory.

- The child's exposure to trauma may have produced cognitive effects that interfere with his or her ability to learn, to progress in school, and to succeed in the classroom and the community (and later in the workplace).
- The child's inability to regulate emotions may interfere with his or her ability to function in a family, in a traditional classroom, and with peers in the community.
- The child's mistaken feelings of guilt and self-blame for the negative events in his or her life may lead to a sense of hopelessness that impairs his or her ability and motivation to succeed in social and educational settings.
- A child's traumatic experiences may alter his or her worldview so that the child now sees the world as untrustworthy and isolates himself or herself from family, peers, and social and emotional support.
- Without more positive coping strategies, the child may engage in high-risk or destructive coping behaviors ranging from reckless behavior to substance abuse, smoking, running away, eating issues, sexual acting-out, and self-cutting.

- Summarize the discussion.

ACTIVITY 1C
LECTURE
Introduction to Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice and the Essential Elements

Activity Time: 15 minutes

Materials Needed

- PowerPoint Slides 5–19
- Supplemental Handout: *The Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice*

Trainer Activities

- Cover the following content in lecture format, using PowerPoint Slides 5–9:
  - The trauma-informed child welfare worker understands the impact of trauma on a child's behavior, development, relationships, and survival strategies, and can integrate that understanding into planning for the child and family. The trauma-informed child welfare worker also understands his or her role in responding to child traumatic stress.
  - The Essential Elements describe a trauma-informed child welfare practice model that addresses and best responds to the needs of children who have been maltreated and traumatized. The Essential Elements are the province of all professionals who work in and with the child welfare system. They span investigation, service provision and coordination, court decision-making, and permanency. Implementation of each Essential Element must take into consideration the child's developmental level and must reflect sensitivity to the child's family, culture, and language. Systems grounded in the Essential Elements will be better able to achieve goals of the Adoption and Safe Families Act—safety, permanency, and child well-being.
  - Refer participants to the Supplemental Handout: *The Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice.* This handout can be used as a reference throughout the training.

- Introduce the Essential Elements:
    1. Maximize the child's sense of safety.
    2. Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion.
    3. Help children make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences.
    4. Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's behavior, development, and relationships.
    5. Coordinate services with other agencies.
    6. Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's trauma experiences and their impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services.
    7. Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.
    8. Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers.
    9. Manage professional and personal stress.
- The Essential Elements are consistent with "best practice" in child welfare.
- Trauma-informed child welfare practice mirrors well-established child welfare