TRAUMA AWARENESS

Moving from awareness to trauma-responsive care

Trauma can shape how people experience safety, connection, authority, and change. You cannot know someone's history by their behavior. You **can** choose a relational posture that respects dignity, reduces avoidable harm, and supports choice.

TRAUMA-AWARE

Recognize that trauma may affect thoughts, emotions, relationships, and responses to stress.

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

Intentionally adapt your presence, practices, and environment to foster safety, trust, voice, and resilience.

THE CARES PROGRESSION: KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE

01 NOTICE

Recognize possible effects, without labeling people.

02 CONSIDER

Ask what safety, dignity, and agency require.

03 RESPOND

Adjust your actions; learn from the impact.

WHY THIS MATTERS AT EVERY LEVEL

INDIVIDUAL

You may need predictability, choice, space, or support before you can engage.

RELATIONSHIP

Your tone, timing, boundaries, and curiosity can support or erode trust.

LEADERSHIP

Policies, power, and expectations can create safety or repeat harm.

NOTICE WITHOUT DIAGNOSING

Withdrawal, irritability, silence, heightened alertness, or difficulty focusing may have many causes. Do not assume trauma, demand a personal story, or confuse compliance with felt safety.

THE FOUNDATION: CONSIDERATION

"The conscious regard for the needs, values, and dignity of others, especially when making decisions."

From knowing to becoming responsive

Trauma-responsive leadership is not simply knowing more about trauma. It is becoming more intentional about how you relate, share power, maintain boundaries, and respond when someone is under stress.

RELATIONAL CARE: MEET THE NEED BEFORE THE CHALLENGE

CARES aligns this progression with Dr. Frida Rundell's Relational Care Ladder. Move with readiness, not through a rigid script.

01	**STRUCTURE / SAFETY** Stabilize the environment.	Offer predictable steps, clear limits, and a calmer pace. **Try:** "We can slow down. Here is what happens next."
02	**NURTURE / AWARENESS** Humanize before interpreting.	Respect feelings and worth without assuming a diagnosis. **Try:** "You do not have to share more than you choose."
03	**ENGAGEMENT / FEELINGS** Invite voice when ready.	Ask permission; listen without pressing for disclosure. **Try:** "Would you like to share what would help?"
04	**CHALLENGE / EMPOWERMENT** Support choice and accountability.	Collaborate on a realistic next step, with needed support. **Try:** "What is one step you can choose, and what support helps?"

Readiness matters: Establish safety and nurture first. Engagement and challenge should be invited only when appropriate and safe; return to earlier needs whenever necessary.

A QUICK CHECK FOR LEADERS AND RELATIONSHIPS

- ☐ I offer choice, rather than force disclosure.
- ☐ I slow my pace when someone is distressed.
- ☐ I uphold boundaries without shame or threats.
- ☐ I explain expectations and next steps clearly.
- ☐ I listen before interpreting someone's behavior.
- ☐ I adjust practices, not just my language.

THE CHARGE

Do not stop at "I understand trauma." Ask: **"What will I change in how I relate, lead, or make decisions?"** Begin with one observable change. Revisit its impact.

Educational guidance, not diagnosis or treatment. Informed by SAMHSA and NCTSN; CARES application. careslp.org