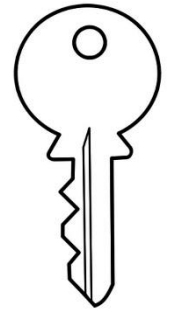


Week 2: Advocacy...what is this “trauma-informed” talk all about?

Key idea: In order to advocate for children and families impacted by trauma, your church should consider trauma-informed ministry



Key verses:

- “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)
- “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that **we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.** ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.” (2 Cor. 1:3-6)

Starting out:

Go around the circle or table and introduce yourself by sharing the following:



- your name,
- the names and types of any pets you have, and
- a time when someone spoke up for you or defend you. How did it feel?
- [if time] When have to advocated for someone else?

Open the study in prayer:



“God, we praise you that you are indeed the God of all comfort who comes alongside those who suffer and grieve. As you have comforted us, may we bring comfort to others. Jesus, as you have been our advocate, help us to advocate for others. Holy Spirit, you intercede for us even when we cannot put words to our groanings, longing and pain. May we, and our fellowship here, look more and more like this beautiful Trinity of Comforter, Advocate, and Intercessor—all for the sake of a world deeply in need of your love and grace. Amen.”

From Chaplain Chris to the group:

(please read aloud, with a facilitator reading, or taking turns reading around the circle or table)

An advocate is someone who speaks on behalf of someone or something that they feel strongly about. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Advocacy is a willingness to put some “skin in the game,” affecting change in a system, situation, or society through personal effort. It involves speaking out, speaking for, and being there for someone or something outside yourself. It is, ideally, a purely selfless act.

Of course, when we are talking about advocacy in this sense, there is no better example than Jesus. Jesus is God with “skin in the game”—God, who is Spirit (John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17), made flesh (John 1:14) to dwell among us... the incarnation. And, now that Jesus has come and gone, he has left the Spirit with us to empower us to minister to a hurting world as he would if he were still physically present!

Advocacy is also a recognition that, while we can't do everything, we can do something. And, that something just might make the world brighter, more beautiful, and more full of hope.

Mother Teresa said, “Not all of us can do great things, but we can all do small things with great love.”

As we consider helping children in adversity and those families working through trauma, it's not about having a full-time children's minister or the coolest church nursery in town. In fact—it's not a matter of resources, but relationship. If God causes us to see a need, it's often because God is calling us to do what we can to meet the need.

It's about help, not rescue.

It's about doing what you can and trusting God with the rest.

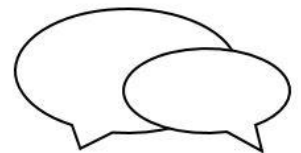
Speaking of help, who helped you along your way and served as an advocate for you?

By mining your personal history, you are bound to find something you can advocate for, even redeeming something from your past that was difficult or troubling. The great thing is, when you take your past pain and put it into service in the present, you are able to connect with those you are helping in a much more profound and compassionate way. As you have been comforted by God, family and friends, you can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4).

Communities of faith can be great places for advocacy, and by embracing our role as advocates and ambassadors for the good news of Jesus, you can gain a better sense of purpose as a faith community (2 Cor. 5:20).

Discuss:

- What does it mean to be an advocate? Can you advocate for something or someone if you remain emotionally distant and intellectually removed? Why or why not?
- When have you had an opportunity to “pay it forward” in regards to a kindness done to you or someone advocating on your behalf? What was the situation? How did it make you feel?



- The ACE Study has shown us that adversity affects a significant number of children across social, economic, cultural and racial lines. Who advocates for these children in your community? How can your church be a part of this advocacy?

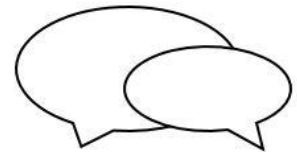
Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-6



“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that ***we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.***⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.” (2 Cor. 1:3-6)

Discuss:

- Why do you think Paul refers to God as “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort?” When have you needed this aspect of God’s character in your life?
- According to this passage, why does God comfort us in our troubles? Also, how does this passage make a connection between our sufferings and difficulties and those of Christ?
- Why do you think it makes such a difference when you are going through a difficulty or hardship to know that the person you are being comforted by has also been through the same difficulty? With this in mind, who might be the best “comforters” of children experiencing adversity and trauma?



Video:

Insert companion DVD and play the selection for “Week Two.”



Applying science, applying the Word:

Please read aloud the following from Chaplain Chris...

There is a growing trend in education, mental health, social services, and health care: *becoming trauma-informed*. For those in ministry, “trauma informed” can be a confusing phrase, bringing up images we might not naturally associate with the church and its mission and ministry.

Trauma results from something that occurs in a person’s life that is experienced as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. An event, circumstance or series of events that are traumatic leaves lasting effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. It is as much about the person’s internal processing of a stressful and difficult situation as it

is about the circumstance that results in the trauma. What might traumatize one individual deeply might not as dramatically affect another.

According to the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#), the concept of a trauma-informed approach would mean that “a program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

1. **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist **re-traumatization.**”

A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting or organization, including churches and para-church ministries, and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing, like [Intermountain](#). SAMHSA also prescribes the following six key principles of a trauma-informed approach to service. They are:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues



From SAMHSA’s perspective, it is critical to promote the linkage to recovery and resilience for those individuals and families impacted by trauma. This makes sense, doesn’t it? It is one thing to recognize when someone in your church or ministry setting has deep woundedness. It is something entirely different to equip yourself and your ministry team to be able to bring healing and hope to that individual or family system.

So, should you and your ministry be interested in exploring becoming “trauma-informed,” here are some points of connection I see between the 4-point definition of a trauma informed approach above, as well as a proposed ministry definition of the 6 key points. First, we will reframe the definition within the context of ministry.

A Trauma-Informed Ministry intentionally shapes a culture within their worshipping community that:

1. **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma—those deeply distressing and emotional experiences that leave lasting effects—and provides practical ministry interventions as well as support for ongoing mental health interventions.

2. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in the children, youth, men and women it ministers to as well as the effects that living with a traumatized individual has on all relationships—marriage, family, work, and social.
3. **Responds** to the need within its worshipping community and the needs of its neighbors by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into church and ministry policies, procedures, and ministry practices. And,
4. Seeks to actively **resist re-traumatization** that can occur when appropriate recognition and intervention is not wed with compassion and a commitment to stabilizing relationships and supportive structures that destigmatize mental health issues.

Intrigued? Here are some questions for ministry that address the needed six key principles to a trauma-informed approach:

1. **Safety:** Not just physical safety, but emotional and relational safety as well. *Is there structure in place that allows for vulnerable people to feel included and protected within the worshipping community?*
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** *Is authenticity a characteristic valued highly within your community of faith? Do those in ministry leadership appear as broken people in need of God's grace, just as those they minister to? Are confidences kept?*
3. **Peer support:** *Does the church go beyond being friendly to being a place someone can make friendships? Can a traumatized person find a listening ear and a welcome with others that are walking the same road to recovery, grace, and love of self and others? Can this happen both in large group and small group settings? Are ministry leaders modeling self-care through their personal practices?*
4. **Collaboration and mutuality:** *Does the church view its ministry to victimized people, traumatized individuals, and vulnerable children as integral to its call to Kingdom work for God or is it simply a niche ministry? Can the church work with others, even across ideological and denominational lines, for the betterment of hurting people?*
5. **Empowerment, voice and choice:** *Are those that are ministered to also given opportunity and empowered to minister within the church, understanding that they bring value and wisdom to the worshipping community? Are they fully integrated into the life of the church and given a voice for self-advocacy as well as outreach and mission?*
6. **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** *Does the church recognize the unique cultural issues sometimes bound up with trauma? Within the context of what has defined your worshipping community, is there room for the expression of faith and practice in ways that honor the unique cultural, historical, and gender backgrounds of those you seek to serve?*

As you can see, I have purposefully borrowed the structure and language of SAMHSA's definitions and guidelines so that a church hoping to become "trauma-informed" can speak the same language as those in the educational, mental health, medical or other fields also working to be trauma-informed. Purposefully seek out those within your church who can connect you to resources and expertise outside the church. As you build those bridges to those outside the church, you will help your ministry strengthen and grow!

Parting questions:

- **What is one thing that impressed you and you'll remember from the video?**
- **Looking over the questions framed around the six key principles of a trauma-informed ministry above, which do you think your church could answer positively? Where do you see room for growth?**

Close in Prayer:



“God our Comforter, Jesus our Advocate, Holy Spirit our intercessor—you care so deeply about us and the woundedness we carry with us each day. Help us see our weaknesses as strengths when we allow your light, love and grace to shine through us. Work on our hearts and our minds in this coming week to consider our role as advocates as we consider becoming a trauma-informed community of faith. Amen.”