

What's SHARING POWER Got to Do with Trauma-Informed Practice?

We developed this tip sheet to encourage providers to share power in the context of trauma-responsive practice. If you are a family member, you may want to share this resource and your thoughts about it with current or future service providers.

Thank you for reading! — Partnering with Youth and Families Committee, National Child Traumatic Stress Network

SHARING POWER is a deliberate approach to engagement with families, youth, and children. It seeks to combine the knowledge and training of the provider with the lived experience of the families receiving services. Sharing power has become as integral to trauma-informed care as any psychoeducation, narrative, or skill-based practices. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has included this concept in its definition of trauma-informed care, stating that, "Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences... Healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making." (See SAMHSA's [Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#).)¹

When shared power is incorporated, the families receiving services will be more invested in reaching goals, more satisfied with services, and more hopeful about managing life beyond the service relationship.

THE JOURNEY:

How Is Sharing Power Integral to Trauma-Informed Services?

Enhanced Participation

Family members are more likely to show up and continuously engage in the service process when their service provider is willing and able to share power.

Do you like to be told what to do? Or do you like to work with someone who cares about your interests, respects your experience and intellect, and provides you with the information and support you need to make your own decisions?

Combined Expertise

Providers get to be experts in what they were trained to do. Families get to contribute lived expertise and claim their own journeys. The sum of the combined expertise is greater than its parts!

Simply put, two heads are better than one!

A Focus on Learning, Not Just Compliance

When a provider actively avoids the role of the "sole expert" who requires the family to "follow advice," the provider has more time and energy to focus on teaching skills instead of enforcing compliance.

Here's the choice: be a coach for people who want to improve their game and build on specific goals and skills; or be a referee whose only job is to call fouls. It's much more productive and fun to coach.

More Honest Communication

When the partners in a shared power relationship are comfortable acknowledging that they don't have all the answers, then differences in perspectives are easier to discuss and new solutions are easier to find.

Have you ever wondered if a family was just telling you what they thought you wanted to hear? It happens. It's natural for the family to want to please you, the provider, by making you think your services are helping and that they are meeting your expectations. Families will be more likely to "speak their truth" and provide frank feedback if the relationship is built on mutual respect for what both partners bring to the table.

Increased Compassion Satisfaction for the Provider

Sharing power counteracts compassion fatigue! When you share power you also share with the family the creation of change and commitment to progress. Providers who focus energy on their "impact zone"— areas of expertise and responsibility within their control – are more present with families and even more effective. They are not exhausted by efforts to rescue or solve what they cannot

control. Increased compassion satisfaction follows when providers recognize what they can actually do, and then do that well.

It's a hard truth that life changes after trauma, and trauma exposures can't be undone. For providers, staying optimistic in the face of that truth is a constant challenge. Sharing power creates the opportunity for both the provider and the family to experience a sense of increased effectiveness and

value, which promotes genuine optimism about services. When families feel more effective at managing life after trauma, their sense of resilience increases along with their confidence about managing future challenges. Seeing the lasting value of services is gratifying for providers.

THE DESTINATION:

How Does Sharing Power Improve Outcomes of Trauma-Informed Care?

Greater Sense of Empowerment for the Family

Families feel responsible for their successes when they have been encouraged to identify their own power and self-determination in the care process.

According to SAMHSA's principles of trauma-responsive care, "Staff are facilitators of recovery rather than controllers of recovery."

New Mastery and Independence for the Family

Having practiced decision-making within the safety of a shared power partnership, families experience increased mastery, leading to less reliance on the provider over time. This independence fosters an increased sense of confidence in the family's ability to recognize quality services if needed in the future.

SAMHSA principles emphasize "a belief in the primacy of the people served, in resilience, and in the ability...to heal and promote recovery from trauma."

More Enduring Change

When lived experience is counted as another source of expertise – and is combined with the provider's experience

and training – the sum of what the partners have to offer leads to greater and more lasting change. That powerful combination is put to work at every point in the relationship but especially when it comes to setting goals and evaluating progress. When families who feel valued contribute to identifying what they want to work on, their progress is much easier to notice and celebrate as it is happening.

"Clients are supported in shared decision-making, choice, and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward," states SAMHSA.

Expanded Professional Growth

In human services, professional development involves content expertise but also a willingness to learn about self and others. This requires a recognition that each family and family member is unique and has something to teach, and can give as well as receive within the relationship. Approaching each family with "cultural humility" also lets providers expand their knowledge about themselves and others. They carry this knowledge in the form of wisdom that benefits their own lives and those of families they work with in the future.

AS YOU GO FORWARD

Relationships based on sharing power encourage help-seeking behaviors and support lasting change. Families who look back on their care and see that their experiences were validated and that they learned new skills will feel good about accessing help in the future and about recommending the services to other families.

Without shared power, it is not trauma-informed care.

¹ <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>

This project was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.