



Building a Statewide Trauma-Informed System of Care

Following the unthinkable tragedy that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School a year ago this month, the people of Connecticut have worked together to begin the long process of recovery and build a better future for our children. The Newtown community, state government, provider organizations and state and national experts all responded with their best efforts to help the community deal with the immediate trauma and then begin to address the longer-term effects. Policy makers responded through action that led to the creation of special committees, task forces and the passing of groundbreaking legislation to improve safety and children's mental health at the policy, systems, and practice levels.

Woven through all of these efforts has been a growing awareness of the **impact of trauma on children**—not only those affected by what happened at Sandy Hook but the thousands of children in Connecticut affected by community violence, abuse and neglect, personal tragedies and natural disasters. Connecticut's leadership has supported efforts to build a more robust system of care that better identifies and more effectively treats children suffering from traumatic stress no matter what the cause.

Understanding Child Traumatic Stress

Child trauma is widespread and the effects of untreated traumatic stress are life altering. By the time children are 15-17 years old, most experience at least one significant traumatic event. In Connecticut, children seeking mental health treatment who have experienced trauma have experienced an average of eight different types of trauma in their lifetime. We know from major studies such as the [Adverse Childhood Experiences Study \(ACE\)](#), that untreated child trauma can lead to myriad life long health, mental health, and social problems including everything from heart disease to chronic depression to social isolation and homelessness. The impact of trauma is undeniably a significant major public health concern. The good news is that Connecticut has made great strides in the past few years in building services and supports to address this serious and significant concern.

Connecticut: Child Trauma Statistics

- Over 25,000 children per year experience significant traumatic events.
- Of the over 20,000 children served in outpatient mental health clinics across the state, 53% percent report a history of trauma.
- 80% of children screened in juvenile detention report a history of trauma.

Building a Statewide Trauma-informed System of Care

A comprehensive trauma-informed system of care should include multiple systems working together to identify and provide effective treatment to children and families affected by trauma. The system of care should comprise all child-serving systems including pediatrics, mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice and education.

In Connecticut, we began laying the foundation for this system a decade ago and have made significant progress over the past three years. The Center for Effective Practice at the [Child Health and Development Institute \(CHDI\)](#) with support from the [Department of Children and Families \(DCF\)](#) and other partners, have been building a trauma-informed system of care by implementing comprehensive strategies that include: screening and identifying children who have experienced traumatic events; training professionals in best and evidence-based treatment approaches such as **Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)**; and linking children and families to needed services in their communities.

Since 2007, **CHDI has trained over 2,800 professionals** in Connecticut in child trauma-related practices. Those trained include pediatricians, school nurses, mental health providers, child welfare workers and law enforcement. These professionals have helped support, identify, screen and treat children suffering from traumatic stress symptoms.

Screening and Identifying Children

CHDI has trained professionals to identify children suffering from traumatic stress and provide the appropriate referrals and response.

- Over the past year and a half, **1,200 child health professionals** including school nurses and primary care providers were trained through CHDI's [EPIC program](#).
- Over the past four years, nearly 200 [Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services](#) **mental health clinicians** were trained to screen for child trauma.
- Through a federally funded initiative* CHDI is working with DCF to train **child welfare workers** to screen for traumatic stress in area offices served by the child welfare system.

Promoting Access to Quality Treatment

Over the past decade, CHDI has worked to ensure access to highly effective trauma-focused treatment across the State of Connecticut.

- Since 2006, CHDI has trained over **600 clinicians** at [28 mental health agencies](#) to deliver TF-CBT to children and families.
- These providers serve over **1,000 children** per year with effective trauma-focused treatments.
- Eighty percent of children who have been treated with TF-CBT in Connecticut **receive a full remission of their diagnosis** and show dramatic reductions in their post-traumatic stress disorder and depression symptoms.

Creating a Better System to Serve Children and Families

Much work has been done over the past decade to improve the quality of care and access to effective treatments for children and families who have experienced trauma; however, much remains to be done. We recommend the following steps to fully implement a robust trauma-informed system of care:

- 1) Promote trauma-informed policy and systems development across the following systems: Behavioral Health, Pediatrics, Child Welfare, School, Early Care and Education, and Juvenile Justice.
- 2) Ensure that all child-serving systems screen and identify children who have experienced trauma.
- 3) Build the capacity of existing trauma-focused programs to serve more children and train additional community-based providers (including individual practitioners) to deliver trauma-focused services.
- 4) Increase the availability of trauma-focused services across child serving systems including juvenile justice, schools, and early childhood settings.
- 5) Ensure equal access to effective trauma-focused services, irrespective of insurance status or system involvement.
- 6) Provide ongoing training and quality assurance for providers of trauma-focused services
- 7) Collect outcome data to ensure programs are effective.
- 8) Ensure adequate reimbursements and other incentives for evidence-based trauma-focused practices for providers.

For more information, please visit www.chdi.org or contact Bob Franks at rfranks@uchc.edu or 860-679-1531. **Parents and caregivers can find information on child traumatic stress and TF-CBT service locations in Connecticut at www.kidsmentalhealthinfo.com.**

** The Center for Effective Practice at CHDI is the Coordinating Center for The Connecticut Collaborative on Effective Practices for Trauma ([CONCEPT](#)) a five-year DCF initiative funded through the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, (Grant #0619) to support transformation of Connecticut's child welfare system into a trauma-informed system of care.*