

Trauma-Informed Care Interview Questions

Domain 3- Trauma-Informed, Educated and Responsive Workforce

When interviewing candidates for employment at your organization, you may want to consider their knowledge of and experience with trauma-informed care. Below are sample interview questions that members of our listserv have used to understand how a potential employee may fit into your organization as you incorporate trauma-informed care.

Sample Interview Questions

To assess their experience working with clients exposed to trauma

- ❖ Ask questions to understand the applicant’s awareness of the incidence of trauma in the general population, the impact of trauma on employees, and the impact of secondary traumatic stress.
- ❖ Our agency is working to become more trauma-informed. How do you define trauma? How might past experiences affect a person’s current situation? Describe how this might inform the services you provide.
- ❖ What is your understanding of trauma-informed care? Tell us about a time you worked with a client who was exposed to trauma. How did you respond to their specific needs?
- ❖ Please describe ways that you will both model and encourage trauma-informed care and practice.
- ❖ What do you expect in a trauma-informed agency?
- ❖ For support staff: Although you will not have direct contact with clients most of the time, what might you do in your job to support our efforts in being trauma-informed?
- ❖ Tell us about a “success story”—a client that you have had a significant role in making a difference in their treatment. What were the issues/problems, what were their strengths, and what did you do to make a positive impact?
- ❖ Tell us about a “not such a success story”—a client with whom you weren’t able to be successful. What were the issues and what lessons did you apply from the experience?
- ❖ Please describe some of the methods you have used to measure a client’s progress toward a goal or a particular task
- ❖ Please describe how you will provide feedback to your clients who have been exposed to trauma regarding their behavior.



- ❖ Tell us about a time when you were sensitive or compassionate to a client in an emotional or tense situation.
- ❖ Tell us about a time when you had to respond quickly to a crisis situation. Can you describe your approach? What was the outcome?
- ❖ Tell us about a time where you had to remain calm when dealing with a hostile client. What did you learn from the experience? How did you handle the situation?

To assess their experience working with youth exposed to trauma

- ❖ Tell me about your professional experience working with young adolescents and teens, particularly those affected by trauma
- ❖ Describe your experience working with youth with histories of multiple placement failures, high levels of aggression, trauma, or violence. What lessons did you apply from this experience?
- ❖ Please share your thoughts about the impact that trauma has on the mental health of youth and any ideas you have for building resilience in youth who have experienced trauma.

To assess their understanding of a safe, trauma-informed environment

- ❖ Please describe ways that you will both model and encourage trauma-informed care in your supervision of others.
- ❖ What does a trauma-informed work environment look like to you?
- ❖ What type of environment do you work best in?
- ❖ Describe the steps you will take to create a safe environment of trust and respect.
- ❖ Describe a time when you had to approach people with different perspectives for support or cooperation. How did you approach them? What was the result?
- ❖ What has been the most difficult challenge that you have faced personally in working cooperatively with another person who did not share your values, beliefs, or ideas?
- ❖ Occasionally our work is judged or criticized unfairly or our intent is misunderstood. Can you tell us about a recent situation that fits this description? How did you approach the situation?
- ❖ Tell us about a time when you felt compelled to express an unpopular viewpoint? What did you say and how did you say it?

- ❖ What do you think causes secondary traumatic stress?
- ❖ How will we know when exposure to secondary traumatic stress is impacting you? What are the first signs of this for you? What helps you at these times? What do you need from your supervisor or manager to help you recognize the impact of secondary traumatic stress and support your self-care?
- ❖ What strategies would you use to build resilience on your team, recognize secondary traumatic stress risk, and address this risk for the team or an individual?

To assess their relationship-building skills

- ❖ What techniques have you found to be effective in developing trusting relationships and rapport with clients?
- ❖ Give us some examples of how you engaged a distrustful or distant client in the past.
- ❖ Tell us about a time when your active listening skills really paid off in regard to a client's feelings or needs.
- ❖ Collaborative work relationships often ease tension and facilitate productive relationships. Can you give me a recent example where you intentionally enhanced a relationship to achieve a goal?
- ❖ Give an example of a time when you were part of a great team. What did you do? How did it impact your relationship with the team?
- ❖ Tell us what steps you personally take to build trust with your supervisor and co-workers.
- ❖ Healthy boundaries are important when working with our current population. Please explain what "healthy boundaries" mean to you and how you have demonstrated these in the past.

To assess how they respond to difficult situations

- ❖ Tell us about a time when you found yourself in a stressful situation at work. How did you respond?
- ❖ Tell me about a time when you had to calm an upset individual who was being irrational and escalating. What worked and what was not effective?
- ❖ Describe your approach to conflict resolution involving adolescents/children. Give examples of how you have applied this approach.



- ❖ Describe the steps you would take to diffuse an escalated situation with a youth or family member.
- ❖ It is almost time to go home and your manager wants to meet with you, your voicemail is almost full, you have several emails waiting for responses, a child on your case load is struggling and needs to process and you have a staffing tomorrow that you are not fully prepared for. How do you prioritize these demands and the reasoning behind your choices?
- ❖ Some situations with clients require us to express ideas or opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell us about a time when you were successful with this particular skill.
- ❖ Tell us about a time when you disagreed with a client, supervisor, or coworker. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- ❖ We all learn from our mistakes. Tell us about a time when you confronted a coworker or a supervisor because you knew they were making a mistake. What was the issue and how did it turn out?
- ❖ What was the most difficult work problem you ever faced? How did you resolve the problem?

To assess how they incorporate self-care

- ❖ What have you done to support staff self-care in your most recent position?
- ❖ What have you done to display healthy self-care skills during the past year? What have you done to maintain a healthy work-life balance?
- ❖ What do you need from the organization to help make sure you are successful?
- ❖ In times of high demand or increased stress, it is easy to become rattled. Tell me about a time when you became overwhelmed with your work. What were the earliest signs that you were becoming overwhelmed? How did you resolve the situation?
- ❖ Please provide an example of how you monitored/managed the morale and health of your coworkers to make sure they were working to their potential.

Other Tips

- ❖ “We try to conduct two way interviews at CMMHC. Our thought is we need evaluate the candidate to determine if they are a good fit for the organization, but we also want the candidate to know our culture to determine if this is a good job for the candidate.



Before the interview is concluded we spend 10-15 minutes discussing our definition of TIC, how this impacts employees, our clients and the community. This helps the individual determine if this is the type of environment they want to work in.” –*Steven Loos, Central Minnesota Mental Health Center*

- ❖ “We chose to do a set of guidelines and questions for interviews as opposed to only questions. We thought some programs in our organization would rather make their own questions but we still wanted to be able to provide some guidelines as to what to look for in the applicants answers.” –*Savina Treves, Aurora Mental Health Center*

Sources

The Illinois Collaboration on Youth

Appalachian Behavioral Healthcare

Stephanie Kutcher, Stark County Mental Health & Addiction Recovery

Cori McFarlane, Door County Department of Human Services

Katie Myhre, Community Partnerships

Penny Middaugh, Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services

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