

## WHAT CAN I DO? (CONTINUED)

### ***Minimize change***

Managing transitions and changes in plans can be difficult for youth who are a part of the child welfare system.<sup>1</sup> Plan and prepare with the youth as much as possible and offer reassurance that change, such as taking on new duties, will be taken in gradual steps.

### ***Be understanding***

If communication or behavioral challenges arise, try to not take them personally. Think of ways you can use the incident to help the youth learn a different way of handling the situation the next time it arises.



### **Resources:**

<sup>1</sup> Employment for Youth with Trauma Histories: Lessons from Research and Experience. Brandeis University, Heller School for Social Policy and Management.

<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Solutions.

<sup>3</sup> Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools. Education Law Center.



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## BEING A TRAUMA- INFORMED CHAMPION IN THE WORKFORCE



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Youth who are a part of the child welfare system have faced very difficult challenges, also known as traumatic events, in their lives. Some of those challenges may include: the death of a loved one; being removed from family and placed into foster care; being the victim of or witnessing family violence, abuse or neglect; or school violence.

It is important to have a basic understanding of what trauma is and how it can affect those who have experienced it; however it is much more important to understand, as a manager, that you have a unique opportunity to help youth in foster care build the confidence and skills necessary for young adults to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma results from an event or set of circumstances experienced by an individual that is physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

Being trauma-informed in the workplace means being informed about and sensitive to trauma, in addition to providing a safe, respectful and trusting environment.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT CAN I DO?

### **Celebrate accomplishments, large and small**

Be patient, provide extra reassurance and celebrate accomplishments to build confidence, and self-esteem.

Example: A youth has completed a day of cash register duty. Celebrate this accomplishment and point out things he or she did well (for example, handled a difficult customer well).

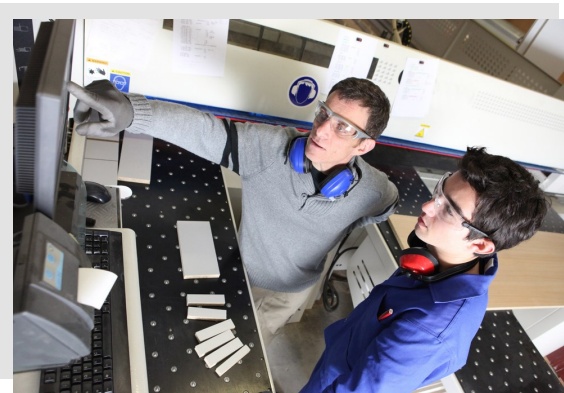
### **Make corrections with care**

Be mindful of the approach used with youth who are under-performing or who have made a mistake.<sup>3</sup>

Example: A youth is struggling with making change and as a result his/her drawer is always off at the end of the shift. Use this as an opportunity to teach the youth rather than disciplining him/her.

### **Lead by example**

By speaking to co-workers with respect, listening, and maintaining appropriate boundaries you can set a positive example for foster youth you are supervising.



### **Check in and listen to the youth**

Genuinely asking how they are doing and listening make all the difference in the world. It lets the youth know that you and the business cares.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, checking in provides opportunities for you to assign the youth to a job duty they like if they are having a challenging day.

Example: A youth is feeling very sad and down because his mother missed a visit with him. Offer to let him do something he enjoys for the day (such as operating the custard machine if that is a responsibility that he prefers).

### **Step in when things get tough**

In/after difficult situations, offer the youth a break and provide the youth the opportunity to talk about it. Offer the youth the option to switch to a different task out of the public eye.

### **Be mindful of language**

Be sensitive to the fact that many youth may not have traditional families, i.e. biological parents at home. Youth may be living with a relative or even with a non-related foster family. Shift language in the workplace from “parent” to “caregiver” or simply “family.”<sup>3</sup>