Information Professionals as Social Justice Advocates: **Trauma-Informed Librarianship**

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UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

DEFINITION
Trauma is overwhelming stress that impacts a person's experience and perception of their environment. It occurs as a result of basic needs for safety.

CAUSES
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction
- Emergencies and acute crisis
- Oppression and victimization

SOURCE: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/resources.html?

PREVALENCE
- 25% of US adults experienced trauma during childhood
- 45% of school-aged students have at least 1 ACE

IMPACT
The experiences of trauma are unique to each person and its impacts vary. Experiencing trauma, especially at a young age, changes the way human brains process future events.
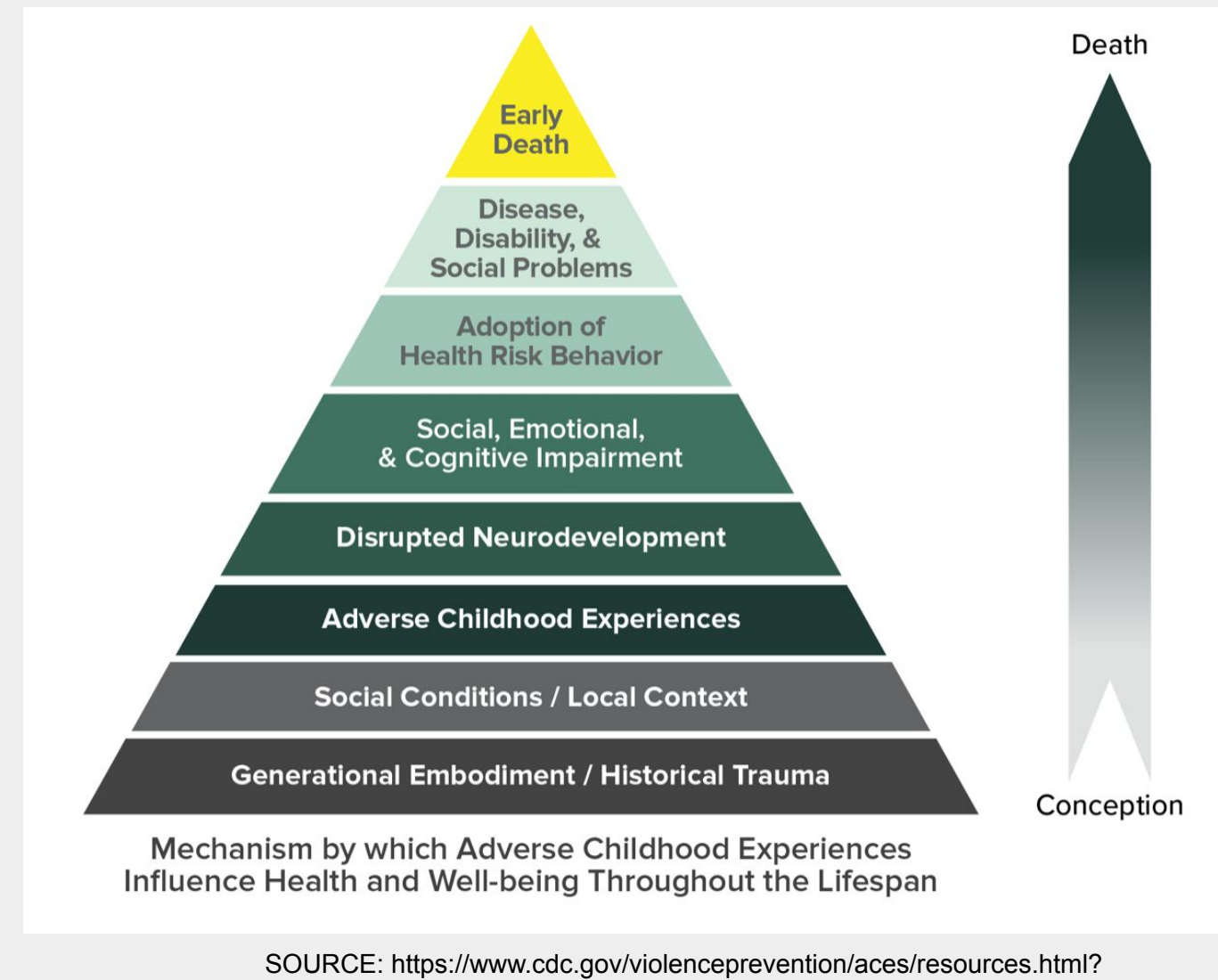
> *"When one experiences a trauma, a stress response often occurs. During the event, the parts of the brain that help sequence events and orient one in time may shut down. As a result, the traumatic memory is not integrated like a typical memory, rooted in the past. This causes the brain to respond to moments in daily life as if the initial traumatic event was still happening."*
> *(Conley, et al., 2019,)*

Conley, s., Ferguson, A., & Kumbier, A. (2019). Supporting Students with Histories of Trauma in Libraries: A Collaboration of Accessibility & Library Services. *Library Trends* 67(3), 526-549.

CORE VALUES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Trauma-informed approaches recognize that **people who have experienced trauma can heal and thrive with the support of trauma-informed professionals** and advocate for systematic shifts within organizations and institutions that deliver helping services.

Source: Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. (2015). The Five Principles of Trauma-Informed Care Infographic Transcript [Infographic]. University at Buffalo School of Social Work. http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html

LIBRARY VALUES IN ACTION

Trauma-informed libraries directly promote key library values of:

- **Equity, diversity, and inclusion** by providing free and equal access to libraries and their services
- **Social justice** by creating welcoming library places that treat patrons as people with agency and autonomy and provide an "oasis of space" where community needs are addressed
- **Intellectual freedom** by removing barriers to information and providing clear policies and expectations that allow all people to feel confident in using the library, regardless of social norms
- **Dedication to service** by providing staff a framework for delivering service to users with a different way of experiencing the world, including compassionate approaches to address behaviors
- **Lifelong learning** by engaging in training and professional development to transform library services and meet the needs of diverse constituencies

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> **"A trauma-informed library is a place where people who have been affected by trauma are welcomed, respected, and helped to find the resources they need, where library staff are supported to understand the challenges of patrons who have experienced trauma and to respond in a positive and non-judgmental way, and where the space of the library itself conveys a message of safety and caring."**
> **(Scheyett, 2019)**

Scheyett, A. M. (2019). Trauma-informed library transformation: The next step in library social work. *The New Social Worker.*

ABSTRACT

Trauma is an exposure to overwhelming stress that may change the way one's brain processes future events, presenting challenges to coping with everyday life. Though its causes are unique, trauma is prevalent in the US. A need to transform library policies, practices, and services has emerged.

The values guiding library ethics overlap those of trauma-informed care. Trauma-informed practices seek to remove barriers to information and create safe, culturally competent, empowering environments in which people who have experienced trauma can thrive. The library values of equity, inclusion, and diversity align with this approach. Trauma-informed service advocates for systemic change and is rooted in social justice, transforming libraries into places of trust and equitable access to information.

Public, school, and academic libraries can each benefit from trauma-informed approaches. The public library is accessible to all people in a community, connects users to resources, and are frequently involved in responding to emergencies. Library social workers drive trauma-informed initiatives in public libraries, participating in policy changes and staff training.

School libraries are uniquely qualified to provide trauma-informed services to students. Nearly half of all children are exposed to trauma at a critical point in their brain development. Its reach through the entire school positions the school library to provide trauma-informed care directly and to train faculty and staff to serve the needs of students. Similarly, academic libraries can evolve to better serve its users and support university mental health initiatives.

In addition to training employees to adopt this approach, libraries need to provide support and resources to their staff. To be truly trauma-informed, the library must be safe for all- patrons and staff alike.

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Librarianship is a **helping profession**, which puts librarians in direct contact with people of all walks of life and with varying experiences of trauma. Being in the presence of trauma has personal and professional implications such as:

- **Compassion Fatigue** resulting from the energy required to maintain empathy
- **Vicarious Traumatization** and **Secondary Traumatic Stress,** which occur when the trauma of patrons transfers to the professional and creates a trauma response in their brain

> *"Self-care and peer support are essential elements of the trauma-informed library."*
> *(Tolley, 2020)*

Trauma-informed libraries provide a safe and supportive place for library staff and include:

- Trauma education and training
- Administrative support for staff care and wellbeing
- Intentional culture of caring within the workplace

Image and Quote Source: Tolley, R. (2020). The Weight We Carry: Creating a trauma-informed library workforce. *American Libraries*, 51(11/12), 44-47.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries are physical locations accessible to all people in a community and already provide services that are suited to trauma-informed approaches:

- Second responders in times of crisis
- Deliverers of programming for children And parents of young people
- Places of refuge for people experiencing homelessness
- Providers of access to information regardless of economic status, race, creed, gender, or sexual orientation,
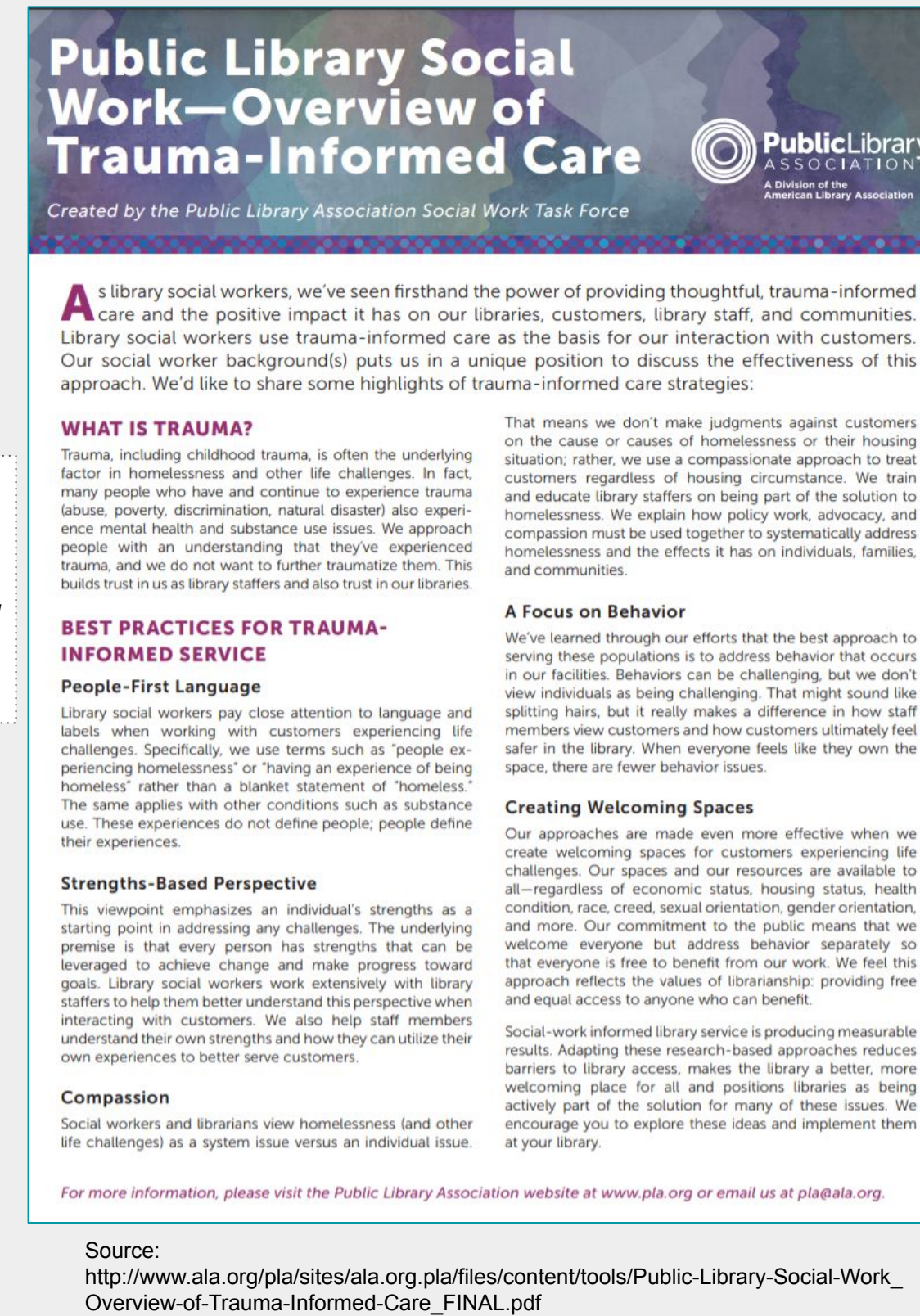
> *"The public library is a natural fit for a trauma-informed care initiative, as it is considered a safe and welcoming space for all, regardless of a person's socioeconomic status or life experiences."*
> *(Eades, 2019)*

Eades, R. B. (2019). Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach. *Public Libraries*, 58(6), 58-63.

Library social workers are the drivers of trauma-informed initiatives in public libraries, applying their skills to:

- Assess the library's community and its current policies and practices
- Help libraries adopt trauma-informed practices
- Educate library staff to understand trauma and become confident in practicing trauma-informed services
- Partner with the library to transform its space, programs, and services

Source: http://www.ala.org/pla/sites/ala.org.pla/files/content/tools/Public-Library-Social-Work_Overview-of-Trauma-Informed-Care_FINAL.pdf

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IS THE HEART OF THE SCHOOL, and much of what happens in the school includes the library in some way, shape, or form!

Childhood trauma occurs at a high rate in the United States, frequently measured by tracking the number of ACEs a person has. ACEs influence the way a child's brain develops and how they learn, causing:

- Chronic fear and issues with trust in environments and relationships
- Difficulties understanding social norms
- Decreased levels of leading readiness
- Issues with school attendance, behavior, and schoolwork completion

> *"Removing barriers for students with traumas so they can focus on the work they need to do at school is our goal."*
> *(Pelayo, 2020)*

School libraries can help young people heal from trauma so they can live healthier lives as adults by:

- Advocating for trauma-informed policies throughout the school
- Implementing education for faculty rooted in resilience planning
- Selecting books that address the various needs of students who experience trauma
- Providing a safe haven where students have consistent experiences, understand policies and rules, build trusting relationships, and feel supported to learn

Image & Quote Source: Pelayo, E. (2020) A SPACE FOR ALL: Trauma-Informed School Libraries. *Knowledge Quest*, 48(3), 50-55.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Trauma-informed approaches in academic libraries contribute to campus-wide mental health initiatives and can improve the experience of staff, faculty, and students who have experienced trauma by:

- Creating safe learning spaces for locating information and discussing ideas
- Identifying and working to eliminate bias in the library
- Building practices of cultural humility and empowerment when providing reference services
- Working to eliminate barriers to accessing research support
- Recognizing the diversity of the academic community and providing culturally competent services and materials

> *"[When] trauma informed, libraries are uniquely situated to be safe spaces of intellectual freedom. A trauma informed library is a library in which the librarians and staff better understand how to help and serve those library users who have mental health challenges, illnesses, and stresses."*
> *(Thomas and Lovelace, 2019)*

Thomas, S., & Lovelace, K. (2019). Ending the Silence: Utilizing Personal Experiences to Enhance a Library Mental Health Initiative. *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, 4(2), 3-4.