

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EA professionals

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21 years  
of service!

## Trauma-Informed Care *Best Practice for EAPs*

*By Leah Szemborski*



*responding to people who have likely been impacted by trauma by providing safety, compassion, and mindfully avoiding re-traumatization.*

### Background: ACEs

Most mental health counselors have heard of the ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study. The original study, with over 17,000 participants, investigated childhood abuse and neglect and the correlation to health and well-being later in life. Nearly two-thirds of participants had at least one ACE, and more than 20% of participants had three or more.

Further, researchers found that as the number of ACEs went up, so did the risk of many types of health problems including: Alcoholism, depression, drug use, heart disease, poor work performance, financial stress, domestic violence, smoking, suicide attempts, early sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, sexually transmitted diseases, and so much more (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

*Social workers, doctors, teachers, counselors, and others in human services fields are waking up to this reality. A person who presents with anxiety, depression,*

*borderline personality, or a plethora of other mental health syndromes and maladies might just be expressing symptoms of their traumatic history.*

For example, the lady making a scene in the grocery store line may have a history of trauma, or the 14-year-old girl who repeatedly skips school, or the 6-year-old boy

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Mental health practitioners are continuing to expand the understanding and treatment of trauma. Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is not just a fad, it is becoming a standard practice in human service agencies. According to The Trauma Informed Care Project, “Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma” (Trauma Informed Care Project, 2018).

TIC isn’t a clinical intervention, although it certainly helps in terms of informing clinical intervention. Rather, *TIC is a way of seeing and*

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who beats up other kids on the playground, or the person with chronic anxiety and depression who has had years of counseling with minimal improvement.

*Trauma manifests in many ways, and unless a person is mindfully looking for the signs, it may be missed completely. Trauma-informed helpers are trained to see trauma where others just see chaos.*

### How TIC Differs

As noted earlier, TIC isn't a clinical intervention – it's a way of seeing and responding to people who have likely been impacted by trauma by providing safety, compassion, and mindfully avoiding re-traumatization.

EAPs and other human service agencies can adopt a trauma-informed approach both from a business perspective and as professional helpers. When providing trauma-informed care, there are six key principles to keep in mind (SAMHSA, 2014):

1). **Safety.** This doesn't just refer to physical safety—although that is certainly part of it. Making sure parking lots are well-lit and there are adequate exits can certainly contribute to a trauma-informed workplace, but safety also includes psychological safety. Do all persons feel respected regardless of gender, color, creed, or socioeconomic status? Are all people treated with dignity and respect? Are helpers using person-first language in all their interactions with staff and clients? These are just a few examples of safety in the workplace.

2). **Trustworthiness and transparency.** Organizations that operate with transparency help people—both staff and clients—to

feel more secure and informed about policies, procedures, services, and expectations.

3). **Peer support and mutual self-help.** No longer do we live in a top-down world. Good ideas, strength, and support can come from anyone, in any position, as long as we are open to be both supporting and supported.

4). **Collaboration and mutuality.** This principle implies that there are power differentials in basically every relationship. We must move beyond those dynamics in order to share power and make collaborative choices that encourage participation and ownership from everyone involved.

5). **Empowerment, voice, and choice.** Those who have survived trauma know the vulnerability and fear embedded in those experiences. Offering safe environments where individuals are encouraged to speak up and make meaningful decisions regarding their life, work and leisure is integral to recovery.

6). **Cultural, historical, and gender issues.** Every person has a story—experiences, perceptions and events that have shaped them to be who they are. Trauma-Informed Care sees every life within the broader context and acknowledges the impact these experiences have on the person today.

As you can see, these six principles are the cornerstones of trauma-informed care. Many organizations and agencies use them to guide their work, training programs, and services. For more in-depth consultation and training, there are several online TIC orga-

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Designer - Laura J. Miller

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nizational training programs available for both businesses and helping professionals looking to become "trauma-informed."

### How EAPs can Assist

EA professionals are often on the frontline of mental health trends in the workplace, and often the first place employees go for help. EAP practitioners who are knowledgeable about

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Trauma-Informed Care might conduct a simple trauma assessment in order to accurately identify the reasons behind presenting symptoms—especially if problems are chronic and pervasive.

There are many free trauma assessments online. Collaborating with trauma-trained mental health practitioners in the community can facilitate great referrals for people who would benefit from some help (and hope) in processing trauma, improve coping, and ultimately leading to better mental health!

There are some excellent evidenced-based interventions for this, including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT— for children) or Eye-Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR—for adults).

In addition, EAP counselors can help the client learn and practice effective coping skills while they wait to get in to long-term therapy with a trauma-focused therapist. *Remember, assessing for risk of suicide, homicide, and self-harm, and planning for safety as needed should always be at the forefront of conversations about trauma.*

## Summary

Trauma-Informed Care is becoming standard practice in mental health and human service agencies. When a trained professional has learned to utilize the spirit of Trauma-Informed Care, the practitioner can shift their entire worldview. In other words, *TIC is not just something to do at work, but also a way for an individual to live in the community, interact with their family, and take care of themselves.*

TIC offers six key principles that can help inform our work and shape the way we help others



## Editor's Notebook

“Trauma-Informed Care.” If you haven’t heard of it, you will, according to Leah Szezborski,

author of this month’s cover story. According to Leah, *“TIC is a way of seeing and responding to people who have likely been impacted by trauma by providing safety, compassion, and mindfully avoiding re-traumatization.”* The cover story, and *Brown Bagger* insert demonstrate how the EAP can adopt a trauma-informed approach. Since, “EA professionals are often on the frontline of mental health trends in the workplace, and often the first place employees go for help,” TIC makes a lot of sense.

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Bosses are certainly important to workplace success, as are employees. But what about the “culture” of a given workplace? This month’s *EAR* kicks off part one of a series on “improving company culture.” Corporate, or company, culture is an overlooked aspect of workplace success. It has

a lot to do with whether employees are biding their time, perhaps even working hard, but still largely there to pick up a regular paycheck – as opposed to employees who are fully engaged, who “get” what the company’s mission is all about, who regularly go “above and beyond” in their work, and are *appreciated* for their hard work. I’ve seen the difference first-hand, and I’ll bet you have, too!

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What does language have to do with depression? Quite a bit, according to another article in this month’s *EAR*. See page 4.

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Finally, we all know that February marks Valentine’s Day. But is office romance a good idea? Blogger Steven Mintz takes a look at this sometimes controversial topic in this month’s *Lifestyle Tips* insert. Happy reading!

*Mike Jacquart*

Mike Jacquart, Editor  
(715) 445-4386  
mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com

using standards of best practice. It’s easy to learn, and there are a lot of resources available online to help. They include <https://traumatichstressinstitute.org/> and <https://www.acesconnection.com/>. ■

*Leah Szezborski, LPC, has over eight years’ experience in EAP counseling. She is currently the Training Coordinator and Mental Health Therapist at Samaritan Counseling Center in Menasha WI. Leah enjoys doing narrative, trauma-focused work and frequently works with individuals impacted by domestic violence. Editor’s note: For more on this topic, including a case example of Trauma-Informed Care, see this month’s Brown Bagger insert.*

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# Language can be Clear Sign of Depression – Part I

From the way a person moves and sleeps, to how someone interacts with other people, depression changes nearly everything. It is even noticeable in the way an individual speaks and expresses themselves in writing.

Sometimes this “language of depression” can have a powerful effect on others. Consider the impact of the poetry and song lyrics of Sylvia Plath and Kurt Cobain, who both killed themselves after suffering from depression.

Scientists have long tried to pin down the exact relationship between depression and language, and technology is helping us get closer to a full picture.

A new study, published in *Clinical Psychological Science*, unveiled a class of words that can help accurately predict whether someone is suffering from depression.

Traditionally, linguistic analyses have been carried out by researchers reading and taking notes. Today, computerized text analysis methods allow the processing of extremely large data banks in minutes.

This can help spot linguistic features that humans may miss, calculating the percentage prevalence of words and classes of words, lexical diversity, average sentence length, grammatical patterns, and many other metrics.

So far, personal essays and diary entries by depressed people have been useful, as has the work of well-known artists such as Cobain and Plath. For the spoken word, snippets of natural language of people with depression have also provided insight.

Taken together, the research findings reveal clear and consistent differences in language between those with and without symptoms of depression.

## Content

Language can be separated into two components: content and style.

The content relates to what we express – that is, the meaning or subject matter of statements. It will surprise no one to learn that those with symptoms of depression use an excessive amount of words conveying negative emotions, specifically negative adjectives and adverbs – such as “lonely”, “sad” or “miserable”.

Even more interesting is the use of pronouns. Those with symptoms of depression use significantly more first person singular pronouns – such as “me”, “myself” and “I” – and significantly fewer second and third person pronouns – such as “they”, “them” or “she”.

This pattern of pronoun use suggests people with depression are more focused on themselves, and less connected with others. Researchers have reported that pronouns are actually more reliable in identifying depression than negative emotion words.

We know that rumination (dwelling on personal problems) and social isolation are common features of depression. However, we don’t know whether these findings reflect differences in attention or thinking style.

Does depression cause people to focus on themselves, or do people who focus on themselves get symptoms of depression? ■

NEXT MONTH: Style and implications.

*Additional source: Mohammed Al-Mosaiwi, “The Conversation.”*

## “I Need to Make a Change to My Subscription!”

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**EMPLOYEE  
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# Integrating EAPs & Leave of Absence

According to a 2013 study by the Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI), the prevalence of depression among workers is nearly 20 percent, with more than 60 percent of those individuals going untreated. Moreover, 97 percent of employees who file a leave claim for depression also report other comorbid conditions.

For employers, the IBI study estimated the yearly cost in lost work time and medical treatments at \$62,000 per 100 employees. In an internal analysis of its parent company, WorkPartners discov-

ered that employees who took a leave of absence were 5 percent more likely to suffer depression than they were before taking the leave.

A pilot program included employees who called in to request a leave to care for a spouse, child and/or parent. The leave intake specialists processed the requests, and then transferred the employee to a live phone connection with an EAP provider.

Next, the EAP care manager engaged the employee in a conversation, giving the employee information on services that may

assist the employee based on the details of the individual situation. Each employee's initial EAP care manager made a follow-up call 30 days later to review the employee's needs and provide additional support if appropriate.

Most individuals using leave need to manage multiple issues. EAP managers report they helped to address nine or more different areas of need related to health, emotional issues, work-life balance, financial, legal and others. ■

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## Workplace Survey

# 'How are You?' Questions Work

The business case for investing in employee satisfaction and inclusion is clear: When employees feel like they belong at work, they're happier, more productive, and more engaged, which means they do better work and drive higher returns for their employers. Plus, working with a bunch of "Negative Nellies" is a real downer.

So, how do employers make their workers happy? Conventional wisdom calls for things like accolades (think "employee of the month" awards), and financial benefits (promotions, bonuses).

Beneficial as these measures are, a new study conducted by the consulting firm EY (formerly Ernst & Young) suggests the key to employee satisfaction and belonging is much simpler, and less expensive to boot. Nearly 40% of American workers surveyed said they feel the greatest sense of belonging and happiness at work when colleagues simply check in with them, asking how they are doing both personally and professionally.

Surface-level as such questions may seem, taking the time to ask workmates how they're feeling, what

they're struggling with, or how their life is going outside of work goes a long way. The study found that more than one third of the survey respondents feel the greatest sense of belonging at work, especially when their colleagues are invested in their personal and professional well-being. ■



# Why Companies Need an EAP

**W**hen trying to attract new clients, do they have difficulty believing that EAPs are truly cost-effective? Ask prospective clients to consider the following statistics and the impact they might have on their workforce.

## Work/Life Issues

- ❖ Child care referral programs can reduce employee absenteeism due to child care problems by 40%.
- ❖ Workers need help with caregiving concerns. Caregiving employees take off nearly 19 vacation and sick days each year to deal with personal issues related to caregiving.
- ❖ Lost productivity due to employee caregiving concerns cost employers at least \$11 billion annually.

## Substance Abuse

- ❖ Drug-reliant employees incur 300% higher medical costs compared with non-using co-workers, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Workers at Risk, Drugs and Alcohol on the Job.
- ❖ 70% of illegal drug users are employed (CSAT).

## Benefits of an EAP


- ❖ 66% decline in absenteeism after alcohol abusers have been identified and treated.
- ❖ 33% decline in utilization of sickness benefits; 65% decline in work-related accidents; and 30% decline in workers' compensation claims. ■

*Additional sources: Interface EAP; Family Caregiver Alliance; National Family Caregivers Association.*

## Improving EAP Utilization

- ❖ **Too many employees don't know what EAPs are.** Like most industries, there's a lot of jargon floating around in Human Resources (HR). As a result, a lot of employees don't really understand what EAPs are all about, which could be to their own detriment. Are you doing enough to make your corporate client aware of your services? If not, why not?
- ❖ **Improve the lines of communication.** In many cases, EAPs are underutilized because they're often bundled onto other products and services and subsequently poorly communicated. Work with HR to communicate the various features of the EAP. Small-to-mid-size companies are likely to have better participation rates, probably because communication is more effective. ■

## Resources

 **Critical Incident Response**, by Robert Intveld, \$9.99, Amazon, Kindle Edition, <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07H1KZS3T>. Employees and organizations rebounding from the impact of a critical incident do not wait around for EA professionals to arrive onsite. The trajectory of resilience has already started. The author explains what EAPs need to know about a multi-systemic resiliency approach to CIR. ■

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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# Improving Company Culture – Part I

**A**t the heart of every successful organization is a thriving company culture. Your people are your greatest asset, and when they feel connected to a company's mission and values, they're much more likely to produce their best work and help the business grow.

It's important to remember that good company culture can't be faked or bought. Instead, you and your leadership team need to continually check its pulse and make sure that your engagement strategies are working. And if they're not, you need to try something new.

Not sure where to start in improving your – or your client's – organization? The following are some strategies from Forbes Agency Council members. (Additional recommendations will appear next month.)

❖ **Unlimited time off** – One thing we do that our staff loves is offer unlimited time off and don't follow a schedule. We simply state that if it is abused it will be changed. Our staff loves the fact they can work from home some days and take personal time when needed. As long as the work is completed and they plan accordingly, it works. It keeps the staff happy and energetic.

– Justin Christianson,  
Conversion Fanatics

❖ **Innovation Day** – We implement Innovation Day twice a year. Everyone drops their normal work and teams form to conceptualize

and prototype innovations that improve the lives and experiences of our customers and employees.

On day two, the teams all demo their creations to a panel of judges and everyone votes for the best innovation. We have implemented over 50% of the innovations in our software and processes.

– Michael Baxter,  
dataxu.com

❖ **Encouraging conversations at the coffee bar** – Do you want your morning brew? You gotta walk for it. At Empower,

coffee is centralized on the first floor. All three floors are forced to travel to a single coffee bar supplied by our beloved Coffee Emporium. The result? Lots of friendly banter during the morning rush and a 3 p.m. caffeine surge versus mindless refills siloed on each floor. We savor our cup of Joe and talk with each other.

– Ashley Walters, Empower  
Media Marketing

❖ **Group fitness classes** – Client pressures and deadlines often make communication between employees all work and no play. About once a month, we plan for a group Soul Cycle class. The 45 minutes spent on the bike with your team provides invaluable camaraderie and connection. Everybody looks forward to these days, and coming back to the



office after an uplifting class does wonders for productivity.

– Priscilla Martinez,  
The Brand Agency

❖ **Perks aligned with company values** – A strong company culture aligns perks with company values. That way, the perks represent an extension of the company's underlying beliefs and not just something cool that helps with recruiting. For example, one of our values is: "You Are Unique." As a perk, we give everyone a paid day off on their birthday to celebrate the fact that they are a unique miracle who should be celebrated. ■

– Brett Farmiloe,  
Markitors Website Development

*Source: Forbes Agency Council, an invitation-only organization for executives in successful public relations, media strategy, creative and advertising agencies. Find out if you qualify at [forbesagencycouncil.com/qualify](http://forbesagencycouncil.com/qualify).*

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# The Right to Disconnect Mobile Devices?

**M**any of us are guilty of refreshing our email inbox — even after normal work hours or while on vacation. According to a Workplace Options survey, 59 percent of American workers say they use their mobile devices to continue to work after normal business hours.

After-work communications can blur the line between work-life and home-life, which makes it difficult for employees to achieve a positive work-life balance. *Forbes* magazine reports that this issue is receiving national attention due to a proposed law in New York City.

The “right to disconnect” bill proposed by New York City Councilman Rafael Espinal would make it unlawful for businesses with at least 10 employees to require their staff check or respond

to emails, phone calls, text messages, or any other work-related communication after normal work hours. *This law would be the first of its kind in the country.*

If passed, the law wouldn’t make it illegal for employers to send emails or text messages to employees during non-work hours; rather, it would protect employees from any form of retaliation from employers if they choose not to respond to after-work communications. The choice to respond would be completely up to the employee. Employers who violate this law would pay a fine of \$500 for the first offense, with increasing fines after that.

While New York has the longest work week in the country, many employees across the nation are subjected to regular overtime and after-hours communication. In fact, according to 20-Something

Finance, the United States is the most overworked developed nation in the world.

It was also stated that 86% of males and 67% of females work more than 40 hours a week. Adding required out-of-office communications on top of long work weeks could lead to unfavorable health consequences that affect both the employee and the employer.

A 2016 study from researchers at Colorado State University found that after-hours emails negatively impact the emotional health of employees — leading to burnout and a diminished work-family balance. Authors of the study stated that this type of “job norm” and workplace culture creates “anticipatory stress” for employees — regardless of the actual time that is required for responding to after-hours emails. ■

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## Quick Ideas

# Become a More Engaging Speaker

### ❖ Focus on a single idea.

Many speakers make the mistake of overwhelming their audiences with too much information. Nick Morgan, author of “Targeted Leadership – Building a Team that Hits the Mark” recommends focusing a presentation on a *single* idea. “Write that one idea down in one sentence, and paste it up on your

computer,” Morgan suggests. “Then eliminate everything else, no matter how beautiful a PowerPoint slide it’s on, that doesn’t support that idea.”

❖ **Look at the big-picture rather than nitpicking over the small stuff.** “Ask yourself honestly, if YOU were attending the training session, would the

information interest you, or bore you?” asks Jim Hopkins, author of “The Training Physical.” “At a previous training, were participants listening intently – or half-heartedly while multi-tasking on other things at the same time?” Hopkins adds. “If the latter is the case, obviously you have some improving to do.” ■