Hosting a Trauma Informed meeting

Why: Walking into all our meeting spaces is “trauma”

* Stories of ACES
* The trauma from families
* Violence in our communities
* Anger, difficult or overwhelming experiences
* Limited resources

-This trauma resides in our bodies and shapes behavior and the ability to listen, learn and participate.

-We’ve all adapted and most who show up at our meetings have found ways to function.

-Trauma affects our executive functioning:

* Organization: How we organize information and tasks
* Reactions: Learn and process information and can affect memory

Preparing for a meeting:

* Have water and healthy snacks available. Limit processed sugar and increase protein
* Have fidgets available.
  + Helps with focus and releases nervous energy
  + Too many options can be a distraction
  + Basket or a few piles that are accessible to all
  + Options: Rubber bands, stress balls, play dough, color pencils/mandalas, pipe cleaners
* Room environment
  + Ensure access to the door
  + Mindful of size, lighting, temperature ect.
  + Seating is not too close
  + Outside distractions
* Think about materials
  + As many formats as possible: paper, screens, audio
  + Provide in advance
  + Easy to interpret: graphs, charts, only necessary words, vocabulary usage, color coded, flow charts, bulleted points, picture use
  + When variables cannot be controlled-debriefing the group on what may come up

Starting the meeting: Create space for grace, patience and understanding

* Description of expectations and reminders about caring for yourself
  + Length of the meeting
  + Moving around to be comfortable-standing, walking, stretching
  + Directions to the restroom
  + Break times, however you can leave when needed
* Right brain activity
  + Icebreaker or sharing-meeting “check-in”
  + People can connect before moving into the content
  + Remind people that they can pass
  + Model the game to set clear expectations
  + Activities should not include touching or sharing personal trauma information

During the meeting

* Language
  + Explain acronyms, provide/post a list of frequently used acronyms
  + Reflect on the choice of words that you use
* When possible, let everyone know that you want to make this a safe space
  + Build agreements, check assumptions
  + Give a trigger warnings if you must talk about something that could be triggering
  + Balance between respect for needs and permission to meet own needs: Set standards for the group
  + Acknowledge that people know best how to take care of themselves and each other and what they need to learn best
  + Tell enough of my story so they know I am real, genuine, and caring
  + If stress levels are raised, need ways to release energy
  + Create space for non-traditional participation
  + Tell enough of my story so that they know I am real, genuine and caring
  + Confidential way to get feedback about the meeting-include questions about comfort level
* Practice emotional intelligence
  + Acknowledge emotional responses. “This is a tough issue…” -set the stage for emotions
  + Stay in your own center when emotion and story show up, not let it derail
  + Grace, understanding, compassion, empathy
  + Practice self-regulation-check my own practices
* Take breaks
  + Have scheduled breaks but let them know that they can leave when they need to