

# The AZ Health Zone's Trauma-Informed Approaches: Educators Expand & Adapt Practices

In FY21, the AZ Health Zone encouraged the use of trauma-informed approaches (TIAs) through a year-long training series for Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) and the adoption of the *Around the Table* trauma-informed curriculum (see the **Adult Direct Education** chapter).

The State Evaluation Team (SET) explored TIA uptake via 15 one-on-one interviews with direct educators who were: 1) participating in the training series, and 2) implementing, or planning to implement, *Around the Table*. Qualitative data from these interviews provided a unique tapestry of emerging themes related to TIA:

*Pinnacle Prevention and Leah's Pantry facilitated the year-long training.*



“When I heard that we were going with the trauma approaches, I was like ‘Wow, that’s amazing!’ because there are people who have different lived experiences and different traumas that we don’t know about, and that’s their primary thing that they’re dealing with. They’re trying to survive, whatever it is they have going on... [Then] we’re like: ‘Nutrition, nutrition! It’s important. Physical activity!’ and not taking into account other things that they might be dealing with.”

– Rural Educator

## Training

A majority of the interviewees (11) emphasized two broad training concepts as the most useful:

- Deeper consideration of participants’ contexts and experiences
- Adopting or adapting language to be more inclusive and enhance participant choice

Nine staff who offered negative perspectives on the trainings questioned whether certain TIA tenets were right for their participants, particularly in rural areas. Several interviewees contested concepts around race and cultural issues, as well as how these concepts were presented.

## Practices

Educators most often described practicing four principles (blue) from the CDC’s TIA model:



Source: [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6\\_principles\\_trauma\\_info.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm)



## Creating Safer Learning Spaces

Educators reflected on past lessons that they “never even realized could be traumatizing.” They expressed a desire to “be more conscious of how I word things” and “create a safe space” for learning.



## Supporting Voice & Choice

Offering opportunities for participants to share their choices was a way to “give that voice” and build on what they were already comfortable with in their own lives, versus “going in and saying, ‘You should do this.’”



## Responding to Cultural & Historical Contexts

Access to the conditions that support healthy choices for participants was recognized, as well as acknowledging “different [cultural] dynamics.” Adapting recipes as well as concepts like resilience, even after translation, was also described as relevant to educator roles.



## Developing Trust & Transparency

Connecting with participants to build trust was important, to “really focus on listening” and let participants know that what they may choose to share “doesn’t go past here.”



### Recommendations from Educators

- **Be open minded.** “Sit back, listen” and do “uncomfortable” reflective work to be able to “connect better” with participants.
- **Cultivate connection.** Learn about and ask questions so “we know each other a bit,” and “think about the differences between people.”
- **Meet people where they are at.** Have an “awareness of what they’re doing, what they’re bringing, and how I can enhance that.”

### Challenges

One overarching theme from educators centered on discomfort for themselves or participants. Five interviewees shared uncertainty about what to do if they inadvertently “dig up” participants’ trauma, or “create something bigger than we know how to help [with].” Educators also worried about balancing educational content with a sense that “you can’t modify everything,” and that it is impossible to know every concept or word that might cause discomfort or bring up past trauma in a participant’s life.

## Emerging Perspectives on TIA and PSEs



Nine educators identified linkages between TIA and Policy, Systems, and Environmental approaches (PSEs). The most common theme was meeting PSE stakeholders where they are at, particularly with respect to the physical environments of their sites and communities, and participants’ lack of access to nutritious food. Educators described exploring TIA and PSEs with community-level responses to COVID, linking the social emotional health model with school policy work, applying TIA to childcare policy, working with coalitions, and enhancing food bank environments and policy.