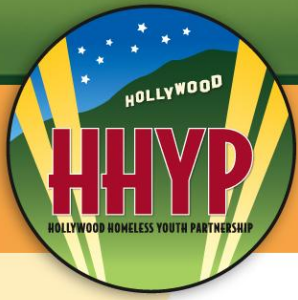# Trauma Informed Consequences for Homeless Youth

How we got here?

- Learning about trauma
- Thinking about how we respond to youth when they break rules at our agency
- Re-considering some of the rules themselves

Rules at RHY Agencies

- Maintain safe and supportive environment
- Help youth make progress in program
- Ensure alignment with agency mission and philosophy
- Ensure compliance with funding agencies
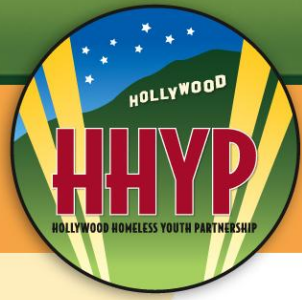- Others?

Rules and consequences

Must take into account the following factors:

– normal adolescent development

– the impact of trauma on development and behavior

– the realities of homelessness

– the unique histories of each young person we encounter

Punishment vs. Consequences

- Punishment is used to enforce obedience to a specific authority.

- Punishment is usually used to assert power and control and often leaves a young person feeling helpless, powerless, and shamed.

- Consequences are designed to teach, change, or shape behavior.

- Consequences are clearly connected to the behavior, given with empathy and in a respectful tone, and are reasonable based on the behavior

Tension between Consistency and Individualized Response

Consistency

- We want to create rules and consequences that apply to everyone, understanding that predictability and consistency can help a youth feel safe
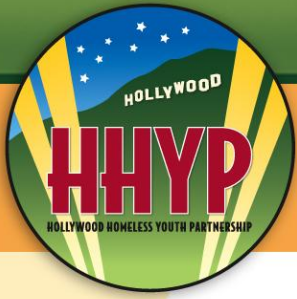
Individualized Response

- Some youth are more highly impacted by past traumatic experiences. Consequences must be consistent with the needs and level of functioning of youth, while also holding them accountable for their actions.
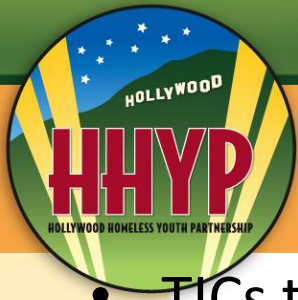
What we know about adolescent development

- The adolescent brain is acutely sensitive to **positive** reward and relatively insensitive to negative consequences.

- Some youth will repeatedly test limits and challenge staff with their behaviors until they feel more connected and trusting of staff.

- Disrupting service delivery as a consequence may lead to more negative outcomes than positive.

- If we must ask a youth to leave our agency or restrict their access to specific services, maintaining contact with that individual can "open the door" to important learning opportunities and engagement.

Characteristics of TICs

- Trauma informed consequences (TICs) slowly shape youths' behavior by helping them recognize the impact of their behaviors on themselves and their community.

- TICs build youth's capacity to manage strong emotions, and increase their confidence in what they are able to do or accomplish.

- TICs minimize disruptions to attachment (i.e. connections to caring adults).

- TICs attempt to retain youth in services, in spite of problematic behavior.

- TICs support youths' access to basic services, such as housing and food.

Characteristics of TICs

- TICs take into account the severity of the infraction and respond with thoughtful and appropriate actions that help the youth with their specific needs.

- TICs consider the function of the problematic behavior and help youth develop more effective strategies for getting their needs met.

- TICs take into account trauma triggers and past traumatic experiences.

- TICs take the long view and understand that change is slow and incremental.

- TICs invest great energy, creativity, and resources upfront in order to support long term success in helping youth.

Challenges of implementing trauma-informed consequences

- TICs may require a shift in the way staff understand and respond to challenging and disruptive behavior.
- TICs require more planning, patience, and creativity.
- TICs are best implemented in a calm and thoughtful manner.
- Changing agency policy and practice to incorporate TICs is challenging for staff and supervisors.
- Providers must balance what is best for the individual young person with the needs of other youth.
- Agencies must provide adequate supervision and support to staff learning and implementing TICs.

Practice

- The problem behavior
- Traditionally, what do staff think this behavior means?
- What are common punishments/consequences for this behavior at RHY agencies?
- How can we understand this behavior from a trauma-informed perspective?
- What are possible trauma-informed consequences?
- Can the same response (e.g. exiting a youth from an agency) be both a punishment in one situation and a trauma-informed consequence in another? Why or why not?