

Trauma-Informed Immunization Practices

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**“We now know that trauma’s imprint is both psychological and somatic. Long after the events are over, the body continues to respond as if danger was ever present.”
- Dr. Janina Fisher**

- “Trauma can be defined as a psychological or emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing”
- The experience of trauma is not so much about the event itself, but our nervous system’s response and encoding to an event
- A large meta-analysis found that an estimated 16% of US adults avoid influenza vaccination due to needle phobia
- Examples of Traumatic Experiences
 - A past painful immunization that led to syncope
 - An allergic reaction
 - Mental imagery from horror movies of needles
 - Others’ shared frightening experiences
 - Healthcare trauma
 - A situation where they were harmed by a person in power over them
 - A situation where they didn’t have control over what was happening to their body
 - A traumatic situation where the smell of alcohol (or some other medical-related smell) was present
- With traumatic memories, the past and present can blur together, such that it feels that the past is playing out once again in the present

Trauma-Informed Care

- **A Trauma-Informed Approach**
 - A “trauma-informed approach incorporates three key elements:
 - (1) realizing the prevalence of trauma
 - (2) recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce
 - (3) responding by putting this knowledge into practice” (SAMHSA)... all with the goal of avoiding re-traumatization

- **Principles of Trauma-Informed Care**
 - **Safety**

 - **Collaboration and Mutuality**

 - **Trustworthiness and Transparency**

 - **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice**

 - **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues**

 - **Peer Support and Connection**

The Preferred Cognitive Styles and Decision-Making Model

A cognitive style is a basic thinking style. It is a “lens” that impacts how an individual *perceives and processes* information – particularly under conditions of uncertainty.

While an individual may have a preferred primary style, typically they also use other secondary styles to help process information.

- The model recognizes different cognitive styles and utilizes informed strategies for productive conversations – with the end goal of improving the odds of the desired outcome(s)
- The model guides HCPs in having a productive conversation using language and strategies most meaningful to patients, leading to a higher likelihood of behavior change
- This model was originally published in a 2011 article in *Vaccine* (reference included below)

Listening to Understand vs. Listening to Reply in Vaccine Communication

- “The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.” – Stephen Covey
- When we listen to understand we begin to understand the stories, fears, and motivations of the patient
- We learn how to more effectively build trust and communication

Vaccination Decision-Making Empathy Tool

- Utilizes principles from human-centered design
- Facilitates the process of the HCP listening to understand and building trust with the patient
- This process meets several of the principles of TIC, including collaboration, trustworthiness, empowerment and choice/voice, acknowledgement of cultural/historical/gender issues
- Recognizes that building trust and vaccine acceptance is a journey, not a “one-shot” approach
- Originally published in a 2021 article in *Vaccine* (reference included below)
- Important questions to ask and information to gather through conversation:
 - What are the patient’s values and concerns surrounding the vaccine?
 - Who are their primary influences regarding vaccine acceptance or hesitancy? How strong is this influence?
 - How does the individual feel about these influences?

The Six C’s – Key Strategies for Trauma-Informed Healthcare Appointments

- **Context:** Review patient history, assessments, take a patient’s context and systemic factors into account
- **Clarity:** Provide clear, straightforward information. Be transparent.
- **Consent:** Obtain ongoing permission
- **Choice:** Offer choices and respect preferences and concerns
- **Comfort:** Use comfort and grounding measures. Incorporate aspects of safety into the environment.
- **Connection:** Build trust, communicate in the preferred cognitive style, listen to understand, and address systemic issues.

Additional Resources:

- Poland CM, Poland GA. Vaccine Education Spectrum Disorder: The Importance of Incorporating Psychological and Cognitive Models into Vaccine Education. *Vaccine*. 2011 Aug 26;29(37):6145-8. PMID: 21840462.
- Poland CM, Matthews AKS, Poland GA. Improving COVID-19 Vaccine Acceptance: Including Insights from Human Decision-Making under Conditions of Uncertainty and Human-Centered Design. *Vaccine*. 2021 Mar 12;39(11): 1547-1550.
- Poland CM, Ratishvili T, and Poland GA. Trauma-Informed Immunization Practices: A New and Transformative Approach to Vaccine Hesitancy and a Call to Action. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2025;100(2):192-196
- Poland CM, Ratishvili T. Vaccine hesitancy and health care providers: Using the preferred cognitive styles and decision- making model and empathy tool to make progress. *Vaccine X*. 2022 Jun 6;11:100174. doi: 10.1016/j.jvaxc.2022.100174. PMID: 35782719; PMCID: PMC9241108.

Caroline M. Poland, MA, LMHC, LCAC, CCTP, CCFP, NCC is a licensed mental health counselor, certified clinical trauma professional, and the Founder and CEO of Poland and Associates Consulting, LLC. Caroline has also completed the Lifestyle and Wellness Coaching Course through Harvard Medical School.

Ms. Poland is the creator of the Preferred Cognitive Styles and Decision-Making Model, which was first discussed in a 2011 article published in *Vaccine*. This model outlines a series of cognitive styles that individuals employ in decision making, and outlines communication strategies that health care providers can use to communicate effectively with that patient to create behavior change – in particular in regard to vaccine acceptance.

In her work, Ms. Poland brings insights from psychology, mental health, and science to the topics of compassion fatigue and burnout, trauma, trauma-informed organizations, women in the workplace, decision-making, and sexual assault, with the goal of establishing healthy trauma-informed organizations. Ms. Poland has worked with organizations around the world on issues of trauma-informed care, healthy workplaces, impactful leadership, decision-making, and the unique experiences of women in the workplace, leading to optimal productivity, health, and flourishing.

Her website is www.polandandassociates.com, and you can contact her at caroline@polandandassociates.com . You can find her on YouTube at “Poland and Associates Consulting”. Her free monthly newsletter, *Conversations with Caroline*, discusses topics related to healthy workplaces, including how to optimize individual well-being for success and flourishing in the workplace and in life. You can sign up at <https://conversationswithcaroline.substack.com/> or scan the QR code below:



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