



DEKALB MISDEMEANOR MENTAL HEALTH COURT

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Trauma-Informed Care

The aftermath and ongoing effects of the unprecedented novel coronavirus has caused an overwhelming need to focus on our emotional and psychological state of mind. These effects have been so vast that it has been compared to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and leads us to explore how trauma, when left untreated, has an adverse impact on our mental and physical health and overall well-being.

MMHC strives to promote an environment of recovery and healing through a trauma informed care (TIC) perspective, which recognizes the pervasive nature of trauma experienced by our program participants. Each member of the MMHC interdisciplinary team engages in TIC training so that we can continually promote safety, enhance well-being and above all avoid re-traumatization.

The following excerpts were copied from an article written by Monica Furhmann of American University's Justice Programs Office who provides research on how trauma-informed care is essential to addressing and treating individuals with a history of trauma. The full article may be found at https://ndcrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The_Urgency_to_Address_Trauma_in_Our_Treatment_Courts_What_it_Means_to_be_Trauma-Informed.pdf.

"Trauma is now our most urgent public health issue, and we have the knowledge necessary to respond effectively. The choice is ours to act on what we know."

- Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D., 2014

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

Much has been written on the topic of trauma, but there remain many essential aspects of trauma and trauma-informed care that require further exploration and understanding. This is especially true for those working in treatment courts with individuals who often have substance abuse and mental health issues, as these individuals are more likely to have experienced trauma in their lives. Without a full understanding of trauma, these individuals may be written off as "treatment resistant" or "difficult."ⁱⁱⁱ Research has shown that individuals in mental health and substance abuse treatment are less likely to recover if their history of trauma is not addressed.^{iv} In order to provide the most effective treatment to these individuals, it is essential that we address any history of trauma to ensure that their traumatic experiences do not prevent them from attaining full recovery. Effectively implementing a trauma-informed approach requires a realization of the pervasiveness of trauma, an understanding of the effects of trauma, and finally practical application of this knowledge.^v

It is difficult to definitively say how many individuals in the United States have trauma histories, but results from the Adverse Childhood Experiences study and others have revealed that there is a significant prevalence of trauma, estimated to be close to 2/3 of the population.^{vi} The number of individuals with clinical diagnoses of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) varies, but has been estimated to be between 10%-20% of the population.^{vii} Even if an individual has not been given a clinical diagnosis of PTSD, there is still a high likelihood that they have experienced a traumatic event and that this traumatic event is having an impact on their lives. Oftentimes, individuals with trauma histories "don't recognize the

significant effects of trauma in their lives; either they don't draw connections between their trauma histories and their presenting problems, or they avoid the topic altogether. Likewise, treatment providers may not ask questions that elicit a client's history of trauma, may feel unprepared to address trauma-related issues proactively, or may struggle to address traumatic stress effectively within the constraints of their treatment program, the program's clinical orientation, or their agency's directives."^{viii}

Individuals who have experienced trauma have a higher risk of substance use and mental health issues, as well as physical conditions including autoimmune diseases, sleep disorders, etc.^{ix} Furthermore, traumatic experiences can affect an individual's relationships, their sense of place in the world, and their feelings towards themselves. Historically, discussions of trauma have focused on the mental and psychological impacts of trauma without addressing the physical and physiological effects of trauma. Research from three new disciplines (neuroscience, developmental psychopathology, and interpersonal neurobiology) has "revealed that trauma produces actual physiological changes, including a recalibration of the brain's alarm system, an increase in stress hormone activity, and alterations in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant."^x These findings are of critical importance in our efforts to treat trauma by providing access to services that can address both the mind and body.

(article cont'd on page 3)

Resource Information

Hotlines & Helplines

SAMHSA's National Helpline

1-800- 662-HELP (4357) or
1-800-487-4889 (TDD)

(<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential information and treatment referral for mental and substance use disorders in English and Spanish.

SAMHSA's

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

(<https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>):

Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

Crisis Text Line

TEXT HOME to 741741

(<https://www.crisistextline.org/>):

Provides 24/7 support for individuals experiencing a crisis via text message.

Graduate Gab

We are proud to highlight a recent graduate of MMHC!



Please join us in congratulating Mrs. P, a 30-year-old African American female who completed the MMHC in November 2020. Mrs. P's diagnoses were PTSD & Major Depressive Disorder; she entered MMHC after being arrested for Simple Assault. Mrs. P. has an associate degree in welding, is a published author and an aspiring Marriage & Family Psychologist. To reach her goals, Mrs. P. began pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Psychology while enrolled in MMHC.

Mrs. P. advised that MMHC was instrumental in assisting her with conflict resolution. Prior to MMHC, Mrs. P. would "shut down" and retreat during stressful encounters. However, thanks to skills obtained in Women's Group and Thinking for A Change, Mrs. P. advised that she feels confident advocating for herself and others when appropriate. Mrs. P. is now working full time while enrolled in college. MMHC is proud to witness Mrs. P.'s progress and looks forward to hearing of her continued success as she aspires to provide clinical support to those in need.

PROCESSING TRAUMA AND STRESS

After a traumatic experience, it can be helpful to get your thoughts outside of your head. Writing down your experiences can help you gain perspective about your situation and help to reduce how distressing they are. Use the lines below to jot down anything that comes to mind related to your traumatic experiences.

When you've experienced multiple traumatic experiences, or carried trauma for a long time, it can shape the way you see yourself, the world, and others. These changes in beliefs are there to protect you from future harm, even when threats are gone. They can change the way you relate to others, whether or how you take risks, or how you feel positively about yourself.

HOW HAVE YOUR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES SHAPED THE WAY YOU SEE:

YOURSELF?

OTHERS?

THE WORLD?

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Reflecting on your writing experience above, do you notice how your body has changed in response to your feelings? Use the space below to identify the feelings you experience while reflecting on your story and draw lines to the corresponding area of your body where you experience that emotion.

FEELINGS



FEELINGS



Practicing grounding techniques can help you get unstuck from your mind and your body. Use the *Keep Your Mind Grounded* worksheet to learn and practice staying grounded as a coping skill for your unwanted thoughts and feelings. Use the *Stopping Stupid Thoughts* worksheet to reflect on and change the beliefs above.

Both worksheets, as well as others, can be accessed at screening.mhanational.org/diy.



"Names are always safeguarded or redacted in order to protect the identity of the Participants"

Georgia COVID-19
Emotional Support Line
866-399-8938

The Georgia Covid19 Emotional Support Line provides free and confidential assistance to callers needing emotional support or resource information as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emotional Support Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals and others who have received training in crisis counseling from 8 am - 11 pm.*



Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL)
1-800-715-4225



COVID-19 Hotline (844) 442-2681

The State of Georgia has a new COVID-19 hotline. If you believe that you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to the novel coronavirus, please contact your primary care doctor or an urgent care clinic. Please do not show up unannounced at an emergency room or health care facility.



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

(CONT'D)

What Can You Do in Your Treatment Court?

Judge	Demonstrate a commitment to providing trauma-informed care; consider the language used in the courtroom and by the team.
Coordinator/Case Manager	Conduct trauma screen; compile list of trauma resources and programs for participants; plan trainings on trauma; reexamine policies and procedures.
Treatment Provider	Conduct a validated trauma assessment and provide or refer the individual to appropriate trauma-informed treatment services.
Defense Counsel	Receive training on trauma; learn grounding techniques to help your client feel safe; communicate with your client in a respectful manner.
Prosecutor	Receive training on trauma; be transparent in interactions with participants.

Trauma-Informed Treatment Courts

There are 6 principles of TIC: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support and mutual self-help; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and, cultural, historical, and gender issues^{xi} The common thread running through these principles is a focus on addressing the individual's unique needs by creating a safe, respectful, and reciprocal treatment environment. Furthermore, it is essential in a trauma-informed approach to view "trauma-related symptoms and behaviors as an individual's best and most resilient attempt to manage, cope with, and rise above his or her experience of trauma."^{xii} In other words, one should begin to see "traumatic stress reactions as normal reactions to abnormal situations."^{xiii} This approach shifts the focus from problematizing and stigmatizing an individual with clinical diagnoses to acknowledging and empathizing with the individual's resilience and strength.

According to SAMHSA, "Becoming trauma-informed requires re-examining policies and procedures that may result in participants feeling loss of control in specific situations, training staff to be welcoming and non-judgmental, and modifying physical environments. The goal is to fully engage participants by minimizing perceived threats, avoiding re-traumatization, and supporting recovery. There is often little or no cost involved in implementing trauma-informed principles, policies, and practices."^{xiv} For example, even something as minor as reconsidering the signs posted in the courtroom and either removing or replacing them with respectful language can have an impact on an individual's feelings of safety in the court. Language also plays an important role in trauma-informed environments – i.e., instead of referring to a "dirty drug screen" one could simply say that the drug screen is positive or shows the presence of drugs thereby removing the judgmental language.

As we continue to explore the effects of trauma and move toward a more trauma-informed approach to treatment, it is imperative that we properly assess individuals with comprehensive tools focused on recovery. The MMHC will continue to promote safety and enhance the well being of its participants.

Grounding Exercises:

- ◆ Take 10 breaths, focus on each breath as you inhale and exhale.
- ◆ Splash cool water on your face.
- ◆ Listen to calming music.
- ◆ Plant your feet firmly on the ground.
- ◆ Look at your surroundings and note the details.

**One of the trauma screening tools MMHC clinical evaluators use is the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) test, which will be the topic of our next Mental Matter article.

Endnotes

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- vii. SAMHSA, 2014.
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- ix. van der Kolk, B.A. (2014). The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- x. SAMHSA, 2014.
- xi. SAMHSA, 2014.
- xii. SAMHSA, 2014.
- xiii. SAMHSA, 2014.
- xiv. SAMHSA, 2013.

Mental Matters



"At the root of this dilemma is the way we view mental health in this country. Whether an illness affects your heart, your leg or your brain, it's still an illness, and there should be no distinction."

MICHELLE OBAMA

JOIN US FOR AN OBSERVATION OF A MISDEMEANOR MENTAL HEALTH COURT SESSION

You are welcome to observe a MMHC court session. MMHC convenes every Thursday at 9:00a.m with the exception of the 5th Thursdays of each month. Please contact for COVID -19 updates.

DeKalb County Courthouse,
Magistrate Court of
DeKalb County
First floor, Courtroom 1200D

For further information, or if you would like to receive the MMHC newsletter or submit an article for consideration, contact:

Sharla Taylor, Coordinator
staylor@dekalbcountyga.gov
phone 404-371-3254
fax 404-371-3206

Mindfulness Exercises

By: The Mayo Clinic Staff

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Spending too much time planning, problem-solving, daydreaming, or thinking negative or random thoughts can be draining. It can also make you more likely to experience stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression. Practicing mindfulness exercises can help you direct your attention away from this kind of thinking and engage with the world around you.

Meditation has been studied in many clinical trials. The overall evidence supports the effectiveness of meditation for various conditions, including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Pain
- Depression
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure (hypertension)



Preliminary research indicates that meditation can also help people with asthma and fibromyalgia.

Meditation can help you experience thoughts and emotions with greater balance and acceptance. Meditation also has been shown to:

- Improve attention
- Decrease job burnout
- Improve sleep
- Improve diabetes control

There are many simple ways to practice mindfulness. Some examples include:

- **Pay attention.** It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all of your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment.** Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

Aim to practice mindfulness every day for about six months. Over time, you might find that mindfulness becomes effortless. Think of it as a commitment to reconnecting with and nurturing yourself.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Shari Jones



Shari Jones is from San Francisco, California. She moved to Atlanta, Georgia to attend the illustrious Clark Atlanta University, where she graduated as Valedictorian. During her college years, Shari studied abroad at Yangzhou University in Yangzhou, China where she minored in Mandarin Chinese. Shari is a 2010 graduate of Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she met her law school sweetheart, and now husband, Justin Jones. Upon passing the Georgia Bar, Shari practiced civil litigation before both Superior and Federal Courts. Shari spent the last seven years as the Community Prosecutor in the Fulton County District Attorney's Office. While there, she earned and received several accolades including: Woman of Service Award (2020), Public Service Award (2019 and 2017), Law & Justice Woman of the Year (2019), Prosecutor of the Year (2018),

Community Prosecutor of the Year (2016 and 2015), and the 30 Minute Trial Verdict Award (2015). Shari is beyond blessed that her journey has brought her to the DeKalb Family as the new Deputy Chief of the Diversion Unit of the DeKalb County Solicitor General's Office! Shari looks forward to working with and beside the citizens of DeKalb County in her continued commitment to serve the community. Shari Jones' life motto is, "With Faith, the word impossible does not exist!"