

Caring for Give Back a Smile  
Patients:

# Tips for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach



GIVE BACK A SMILE®

# Caring for Give Back a Smile Patients

**T**hank you for setting valuable time aside to volunteer your time and services for someone who has experienced abuse. We are here to support your volunteer experience. The following tips are intended to provide you and your team with guidance for working with Give Back a Smile patients (or any patients) who have survived trauma. Implementing a few practical trauma-informed strategies can profoundly improve patient outcomes as well as patient and volunteer experiences.

Seventy percent of adults have experienced some form of trauma in their life (source: National Council for Behavioral Health). Trauma occurs in all populations and the impacts of trauma are long-lasting. Trauma affects development, wellness, and stress responses across the lifespan.

## Preparation:

- Be sure your entire team is aware of your Give Back a Smile participation and that your services are donated. Everyone should be aware of the patient's name, and when they are scheduled.
- Assign a designated team member the role of greeting the patient.
- For the first appointment, consider scheduling an extended visit length and plan for a private place to meet with the patient.
- The patient has been prescreened for GBAS program eligibility. Your consultation appointment is to decide from a clinical standpoint whether you can provide the dental services the patient needs. It is important to trust the patient's experience. Please be aware that inquiring about the patient's past trauma/abuse can be retraumatizing. GBAS provides you with a copy of the patient's application in advance, which describes the prior abusive situation, so that the patient does not need to discuss this difficult topic during the appointment.

## Environment:

- Establish a sense of calm, welcome, trust, and safety for the patient.
- Have tissues around and be aware of chair positioning. Some people find comfort in being able to see the door or feel more comfortable with a chair in a corner.



## Interactions:

- People who have experienced violence and trauma have likely experienced boundary violations and abuses of power. When greeting patients, staff should always communicate in a manner that makes patients feel they are equal to staff. When interacting, everyone should be seated to address power imbalance.
- Create an atmosphere that allows patients to feel validated and affirmed with each contact. I.e., “Hello, my name is... Is there anything I can do to make your visit easier?”
- Have a conversation with patients rather than accomplishing the checklist in front of a computer.
- When assisting a patient to another location, ask them whether they would like to walk ahead of, behind, or beside the staff member.
- Explain all steps of the visit. Communicate clear and accurate expectations about services. There should be no surprises or blindsiding. Inform patients of every step in the initial intake and offer them a choice about whether to proceed with any steps that are optional.
- Ask permission before ALL steps for any exam.
- Ask about comfort. Set up signal for stopping. Arrange non-verbal cues for discomfort.
- Patients need to feel like they have control over their own health. Give patients a role in their treatment plan and services. For example, provide treatment plan options when feasible.
- Help patient's return to care by confirming their contact information and let them know the phone number that will appear for appointment reminder calls.

**Additional resources for implementing  
a trauma-informed approach in your practice:**

**PurpLE Health Foundation**

*CLICK HERE*

**National Council for Behavioral Health**

*CLICK HERE*

**AACD Central Course, “Meet Them Where They’re At: Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach”**

*CLICK HERE*

**Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)**

*CLICK HERE*

**GBAS Contact Information:**

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. If for some reason you cannot provide services for the patient, please contact us right away.

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