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Contents

Preface vii
Acknowledgements xi

Part I: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care

1 | Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences 3
2 | The Trauma-Informed Approach to Service 17
3 | Trauma-Informed Care and Libraries 27
4 | The Trauma-Informed Library Environment 35

Part II: The Six Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Approaches

5 | Safety 47
6 | Trustworthiness and Transparency 61
7 | Peer Support 73
Part III: Creating a Culture of Trauma-Informed Care in Libraries

11 | Assessing Organizational Readiness 113

12 | The Library as Sanctuary 123

13 | Becoming a Trauma-Informed Library Workforce 131

14 | Planning for Trauma-Informed Services 145

Appendix: Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire 151

References 155

Index 163
Preface

The idea for this project began as an article and then expanded into a book. I’ve always found inspiration for new library customer service models from outside the profession and have thought about ways to adapt them to our operations. New approaches to customer service in libraries, and in all service industries, are popular and needed because they identify new practices and help us develop systems that serve our library patrons where they are. When I say “where they are,” I mean at the point of need, but I also mean where patrons are personally and at what level they are comfortable accepting our help. Some libraries excel at customer service, while others fail. There are various reasons for this. It may be an individual library staff problem, or it may be due to the operational or organizational climate. A trauma-informed framework can help us build empathy for those whom we serve at the individual staff level, as well as investing empathy within our operations and throughout the organization.

In the last few years, graduate and undergraduate students with whom I’ve worked have exposed me to trauma theory, mostly in their need for articles to support papers and assignments in nursing. Over the course of the last two or three years those requests for help expanded from students and faculty in psychology, and then in social work, education, and public health. Many of those research requests came from students working with faculty in those departments because East Tennessee State University’s (ETSU) faculty are
well-grounded in adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma-informed care (TIC). As a member of our Women’s Studies Program’s Steering Committee, I was asked to moderate a panel on feminist pedagogy at the Southeastern Women’s Studies Association’s annual conference at Clemson University in 2018. While there, the department’s administrative assistant posed questions to participants on independent panels about whether or how their work was trauma informed. She and the program director for ETSU’s Women’s Studies program wanted to bring trauma-informed practices to a higher education setting where we serve a population of students who have experienced childhood trauma. They invited me and other Steering Committee members to the Highlander Research Center in New Market, Tennessee, for a summer retreat, “Trauma-Informed Care & Changing the Narrative of Gender-Based Violence on Campus and in the WMST Classroom,” where one of our social work faculty members educated everyone about ACEs and trauma-informed philosophies.

From then on, my awareness of childhood trauma, ACEs, and resilience skyrocketed. I read scholarly articles and popular books. I watched TED Talks. I attended more trauma-informed care workshops, self-care workshops, and the like until I was saturated in the topic’s philosophy and practices.

Naturally, I wondered how effective a trauma-informed approach might be for making improvements to customer service in libraries. An awareness of ACEs and childhood trauma increased my empathy for everyone I help in the library, and frankly, all of humanity. It is my hope that sharing information about this framework with library staff can increase their compassion and responsiveness in the areas of customer service. But trauma-informed care also holds promise for organizational transformation, as well. In fact, an objective of trauma-informed care moves beyond awareness and education and into organizational systems and transmitting the framework via institutional policies, practices, and procedures.

While every library may not be ready for these changes at the organizational level, an awareness of trauma-informed care by individuals can help nudge libraries in that direction. Wanting to change and improve our libraries’ customer services is an ongoing objective. Transforming that urge and passion into action can be difficult, however. This book will give library staff ideas for small ways they can change their thinking, as well as ways to change their personal practices of librarianship and customer service in pursuit of these goals. Change can come from above, from the middle, or from below. A commitment to small but meaningful personal changes can pay off in large ways. However, for sustainable and universal adoption of the TIC framework, leadership must buy in. Therefore, this book is for both individuals and organizations.
In part I of this book I will explain psychological trauma and adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed approaches to services, trauma-informed care and libraries, and the trauma-informed built environment. In part II I will address the six key principles of trauma-informed care: safety; transparency and trustworthiness; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues. In part III I will discuss assessing organizational readiness, the library as sanctuary, building a trauma-informed library workforce, long-term planning for trauma-informed services, and short-term solutions for trauma-informed services.

Please note that some people are very opposed to identifying anything psychological as trauma. Some professionals and scholars only recognize trauma as experienced in war zones. They don’t recognize that domestic and family violence can create as much or more post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in survivors as wartime experiences can. Likewise, some institutions are careful with their language. Rather than use trauma, Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child uses the term toxic stress to identify the same dynamic. Still other institutions and authorities use the term traumatic stress. But all three of these concepts are synonymous. And all three of them use adverse childhood experiences as a baseline for understanding the dynamic, explain the same neurobiological adaptations the brain and body make to childhood trauma, and discuss the same interventions that lead to resilience and positive lifelong outcomes.
PART I

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care
When we think about psychological trauma, many of us default to thinking about overt, external examples, like the emotional trauma suffered by war veterans or the survivors of natural disasters. And it is true that trauma was traditionally classified as resulting from events outside the range of normal human experience. But Mark Epstein (2013) reminds us that trauma isn’t just what happens after Hurricane Katrina, school shootings at Virginia Tech, or a terrorist incident. Trauma happens to everyone. He says that the undercurrent of trauma informs ordinary life.

**WHAT IS TRAUMA?**

So what exactly do we mean by the term *psychological trauma*, or simply *trauma* (as it is now often referred to)? Psychological trauma is damage or injury to the psyche that results from an extremely frightening or distressing event or experience. These events and experiences usually involve a threat to our psychological or physical well-being. Trauma can result from a single painful event, a prolonged event, recurring events, or a series of ongoing, relentless stresses.
trauma typically occurs due to an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds a person’s ability to cope or to integrate the painful emotions involved.

Life-threatening events like combat or natural disasters have traditionally been associated with trauma, and particularly with PTSD, but trauma resulting from childhood abuse or neglect, domestic violence, or rape is far more common in the population and occurs on a larger scale. Children are especially susceptible to emotional trauma because they are generally more vulnerable and lack the coping skills and capacities of adults. Traumas sustained during childhood are known as adverse childhood experiences or ACEs.

A trauma survivor, especially those whose traumas date from childhood, may not be able to remember what actually happened to them because the painful emotions they experienced at the time have been buried in the unconscious, a phenomenon known as repressed memory, or repression. These repressed memories can cause various mental disorders later in life that involve anxiety, depression, dissociation, or other syndromes. The recommended treatment for these mental disorders is some type of therapy. More broadly, any psychic damage done to the individual early in life can have serious, negative consequences over the long term.

After a traumatic experience, a person may reexperience the trauma mentally due to trigger reminders, or triggers. This phenomenon is also known as re-traumatization. The flashbacks, panic attacks, and nightmares that afflict combat veterans and other PTSD patients are the best-known examples of this tendency to relive or reexperience a traumatic event from the past.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

It is important to note that the definitions of trauma, and of the adverse childhood experiences that are its chief cause, have continued to broaden in recent years. A landmark study on ACEs conducted by Kaiser-Permanente from 1995 to 1997 studied over 17,000 patients receiving health care from the organization. The results of the data collected indicated that nearly two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs. Surprisingly, a majority of this population was white and middle-class. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website offers much information on adverse childhood experiences, including findings from this study (www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy). Figure 1.1 is derived from an infographic on the CDC website and shows demographic information from the ACE study.

Given our cultural biases, researchers and laypersons assume and expect ACEs in communities of color and poor populations. Since the ACE study’s data disproved our ideas about trauma’s prevalence within the underclass, policymakers ignored its findings for many years because of what it revealed about American families and the universality of childhood experiences. The
results hit too close to home; the truth is that nearly everyone experiences adverse childhood trauma. It crosses socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, race, religious beliefs, geographical regions, and all the other demographic markers.

Categorized by incidents of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction, ACEs include situations or events happening prior to the person’s eighteenth birthday that extend beyond the normal challenges of growing to adulthood that everyone experiences. The period of time between childhood and adulthood has lengthened over the years, in part due to elementary and secondary education requirements, as well as child labor laws and changes to American parenting philosophies that infantilize people well into their third decade. The lengthening life span of Americans has also expanded the time given to children, adolescents, and young adults to navigate developmental tasks as they try on different identities. This is a typical part of exploring careers and lifestyles before settling into long-term goals for adulthood.

The developing brain is affected by chronic, or toxic, stress. The brain’s response to stressful events heightens, and when its stress response is on constant high alert, this results in long-term inflammation and disease, but more importantly, it leaves the adult with a high ACEs score, which makes them more likely to overreact to everyday stressors like heavy traffic, waiting in long queues, or not finding a parking space at work; occasions that many adults easily navigate. When a person’s baseline is this high, the smallest incident
may trigger a negative feedback loop from which escape is difficult without deep reflection and the use of healing modalities. Chronic stress also ages the child on a cellular level, eroding their telomeres as well, thus setting them up for early debilitating disease. The more the brain is stressed in childhood, the more the hippocampus shrinks. The hippocampus is responsible for processing emotion and memory and managing stress. Between the brain's high stress setting and the hippocampus's dwindling size, it's easy to understand how children feel chronic anxiety and its long-term physiological effects.

Children with high ACEs scores who lack loving adults in their lives transition into adolescence with poor decision-making skills and executive functions and are more likely to develop mood disorders that involve anxiety or depression. This pattern continues into adulthood, leaving adults with high ACE scores easily stressed and overreactive in most situations, unless they’ve encountered and incorporated coping skills like therapy, meditation, mindfulness, yoga, immersion in nature, acupuncture, and other brain-body approaches.

When children experience one or more of ten types of traumatic incidents recognized by the ACEs study instrument, the resulting stress can impair their coping skills for the challenges of everyday life, and can even increase their risk factors for chronic, debilitating disease. The most commonly occurring of these ten types of experiences are child abuse, household challenges (chiefly domestic violence), and child neglect. Within these categories, childhood experiences are divided further.

**ABUSE**

Abuse includes emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Emotional abuse may involve an attempt to control another person, and often the adult is unaware that their behavior is abusive, as they’ve adopted their parenting or relational techniques from their own dysfunctional parents or family. The behavior includes accusations, blaming, and monitoring of the child’s activities and behaviors. Emotionally abusive parents constantly criticize their child’s talking, dressing, communications with others, and coping mechanisms, using this criticism as a form of control. These parents use sarcasm, name-calling, and verbal assaults to dominate children. Emotionally abusive parents withhold affection as punishment, refuse to communicate with the child at all, and isolate the child from family and friends who support them. Finally, they refuse to acknowledge their part in the family dynamic and rarely take responsibility for their actions or apologize. Physical abuse happens when a parent or caregiver inflicts a physical injury on the child or adolescent’s body. These injuries can be marks, cuts, bruises, welts, muscle sprains, broken or burnt skin, broken bones, and other bodily indicators.

The survivors of child abuse don’t trust authority figures, for many reasons. Even though they may not recognize parental negligence or abuse,
experiencing it affects a child’s ability to trust anyone. They have learned that authority is punitive and takes things away. “Authority figures” in the form of law enforcement officers and social workers acting on behalf of the state remove children from their parents when there’s an altercation or a report of abuse or neglect. The bank or creditors take belongings away from homes when parents default on loans, thus leaving their parents afraid, anxious, and angry. Trauma survivors have zero positive interactions with authority. The model they have observed vis-à-vis their parent’s interactions has left them with the belief that authority takes and punishes, but never gives or soothes.

The survivors of child abuse sometimes become aggressive or display other behavioral problems. Usually they suffer high anxiety and are always on the alert, reading the signs for when the parent or caregiver is likely to strike out at them again. Abused children often suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and allied emotional reactions. Children growing up in physically abusive environments become hypervigilant to anger so that they can quickly identify and absent themselves from the violent parent.

Children who are sexually abused experience unwanted sexual activity with adults or older children who use force, make threats, and otherwise take advantage of them. Some child sexual trauma survivors experience disassociation, which deals with memory. The memory of the abuse is not lost, but its recovery is impossible or spotty. Thus, children, adolescents, and adults with these experiences exhibit memory disturbances, which may affect them in many situations, including studying, reading, knowledge-building, and information-seeking. The survivors of child abuse also experience low self-esteem. Children who survive emotional, physical, or sexual abuse internalize their injuries and deploy self-criticism because they believe that something is inherently wrong with them and they asked for or deserved the abuse. People may believe that physical abuse is worse than emotional abuse, but the brain regions relaying information about emotional pain and physical pain are the same; emotional abuse is experienced at the same level as physical pain by our nervous system.

HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES

Household challenges include situations in which the child’s mother was treated violently, or in which any of the following occurred in the family: substance abuse, mental illness, separation and/or divorce, or incarceration of a household member. Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence (IPV), reflects destructive patterns of behaviors in which one partner maintains power and control over another. This dynamic involves physical or sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse, and economic dispossession. Children easily become pawns in the IPV pattern. Figure 1.2 shows how at the center of physical and sexual violence in a household there is a
need for power and control. Power when used and manipulated in this fashion affects children's self-esteem and can cause anxiety, depression, and, in extreme cases, PTSD. Children believe that what they experience within the family is normal. Without exposure to healthy family models, children who are manipulated and coerced may likely continue these patterns in their intimate relationships and families when they become adults.

Tobacco, alcohol, and both prescription and illegal drugs are substances that parents and caregivers abuse within a family setting. Prenatal exposure to these substances can greatly affect children and is associated with miscarriage, stillbirth, and sudden infant death syndrome. Exposure may cause low birth weight and physical deformities, cognitive impairment, conduct disorders, depression, or mental retardation. Furthermore, substance abuse within the family can lead to IPV, divorce, exposure to crime, and poverty. Children's experience of substance abuse within their family may predispose them to abuse substances as adolescents and adults.
Likewise, when a parent or caregiver experiences mental illness, it affects children and their development. A parent with untreated bipolar disorder cannot recognize how their disease affects their children as it seeps into their behavior and takes root in their psychology. Mental illness can affect a person’s ability to parent and may create impaired parenting and family discord. Untreated mental illness is strongly associated with general family dissonance, marital problems, and a chaotic home environment, all of which can damage childhood emotional development. Children thrive in safe, stable environments and rely, for the most part, on the parent behaving dependably and creating an atmosphere of calm and security. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five adults (43.8 million, or 18.5 percent) in the United States experiences mental illness each year. Their data reveals that 1.1 percent of adults live with schizophrenia, 2.6 percent live with bipolar disorder, 4 percent have experienced PTSD, 6.9 percent have had a major depressive episode, and 18.1 percent have experienced any of various anxiety disorders.

Researchers identify the aforementioned mental illnesses as serious mental illnesses (SMI). Children with SMI parents have a child psychiatric diagnosis of 30 to 50 percent. Children growing up in homes affected by mental illness feel lonely, vulnerable, helpless, and invisible. They experience their family environment as terrifying and impossible to adjust to. Information about their parents’ mental illness may be withheld or considered shameful, which fuels their stress and anxiety. Children with mentally ill parents sometimes become the caregiver, are “parentified,” and are robbed of the carefree atmosphere that childhood should provide within families. Moreover, when all of the family’s focus and resources are spent on the mentally ill adult, the children’s needs can be overlooked or dismissed. Untreated mental illness affects children in that they display impaired social functioning, exhibit poor academic performance, experience mood disturbances, and have poor emotional regulation. They experience anger, anxiety, and guilt while also feeling socially isolated due to shame and stigma. Their risk of drug use and poor social relationships increases.

Dissolution of the family unit due to parental separation, estrangement, or divorce can have long-term effects on children’s psychology and make it more difficult for them to form healthy attachments in adulthood. These events also tend to introduce great financial change in children’s lives. Generally a divorce increases a child’s dependence on their parents and other family members and caregivers, but it works in the opposite way with adolescents: it accelerates their independence. Learning to transition between one or more households with different values, beliefs, and rules presents challenges, but on the upside, this increases the child’s adaptability to varied environments. Short-term reactions include considerable anxiety, as the child’s world is destroyed and rebuilt in a fashion that they have no control over. Worrying about where parents are going, when the child will see them again, and greater existential questions such as “If my parents don’t love each other anymore,
does this mean they won’t love me someday?” generates constant stress and anxiety. Small children may regress into seeking more attention from parents, bedwetting, or returning to negative behaviors. Adolescents can become angry, defiant, and rebel against parental authority.

Child risk factors for parental incarceration include child criminal involvement, physical problems and antisocial behavior, poor educational attainment, impaired economic well-being, and diminished parent-child attachment and contact while the parent is incarcerated. As the majority of incarcerated Americans are men, most research on the childhood effects of this life experience deal with the imprisonment of fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, uncles, and male cousins. However, maternal incarceration has grown rapidly in recent years, and the number of children with a mother in prison increased 131 percent from 1991 to 2007, according to Glaze and Maruschak (2008). As the world’s leader in incarceration, the United States saw a dramatic growth of 500 percent in the size of the prison population over the last forty years.

The U.S. criminal justice system is plagued by racial disparities and drug sentencing disparities. Almost 60 percent of the people in prison are people of color. Black and Hispanic men, who comprise a small percentage of the national population, are incarcerated at higher rates than white men. Incarceration poses difficulties for maintaining intimate and family relationships. Families find that making regular visits, phone calls, and sending letters and packages to their loved ones in prison can be difficult and costly. The financial burdens created by the incarcerated parent’s inability to contribute to the family’s budget exacerbate this situation. Families suffer economic insecurity and may deal with the hardship by using public assistance. Families feel emotional strain because they cannot connect with their incarcerated member’s daily life and experiences. Maternal stress may affect a mother’s ability to offer secure parent-child relationships.

Most mothers and fathers self-report that their children perform worse and experience learning difficulties after their father’s incarceration. Foster and Hagan’s research (2015) corroborates this anecdotal data. They discovered that parental incarceration decreases the educational attainment of children and contributes to their long-term social exclusion. Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) suggest that the children of incarcerated parents experienced turmoil and upset prior to the parents’ imprisonment, thus they are at risk for a variety of adverse behavioral outcomes. Also, they suggested that studies show parental incarceration is associated with a higher risk of children’s antisocial behavior, but not for mental health problems, drug use, or poor educational performance. Gottlieb’s research (2016) suggests that children who experience household incarceration in early adolescence are at greater risk of having a premarital first birth, particularly when the father or an extended family member is incarcerated. Nonmarital childbearing, particularly coupled with growing up in a single-parent household, suggests that children have low educational attainment, low economic security, and decreased physical
and psychological well-being. Children with incarcerated parents experience a unique anxiety related to the cycles of jail time. Uncertainty about their parent’s absence and return can potentially cause more stress than if the parent was serving a long-term prison sentence.

Wildeman (2013) researched the consequences of mass imprisonment on childhood inequality and found that the U.S. prison boom was a key driver of the growing racial disparities in child homelessness, thus increasing black-white inequality in this risk by 65 percent since the 1970s. Finally, gender plays a role in how a child feels the effects of parental incarceration. Girls and boys are socialized to process experiences in different ways. Girls internalize, while boys externalize. Externalizing includes aggression and acting out. Internalizing means that the child’s feelings are displayed via sadness, sympathy, and anxiety. Brewer-Smith, Pohlig, and Bucurescu (2016) collated data from adult female prison inmates who had incarcerated parents during childhood. Their regression analyses of data revealed that for women, having incarcerated adult family members was related to greater frequency and severity of childhood abuse and a higher incidence of neurological deficits in adulthood, especially related to traumatic brain injuries, compared to those without incarcerated adult family members.

NEGLECT

Child neglect, both emotional and physical, comprises the majority of maltreatment reported to child protective services. The majority of American children enter the foster care system due to neglect. Homelessness and household insecurity are components of neglect. Having an incarcerated parent increases the likelihood of children entering foster care. In its most severe forms, emotional neglect can cause major physical and cognitive developmental delays. Its effect on the brain is irreversible. The prefrontal cortex fails to mature, which reduces the child’s capacity for executive functioning—focus, sustained attention, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Neglectful parenting is also associated with mental illness and addiction. Poverty and social isolation are also associated with neglect. Emotional neglect occurs when parents fail to respond to a child’s emotional needs. Parents’ failure to validate their child’s feelings results in the child feeling deeply alone and isolated. The children believe that the emotional neglect is their fault, they caused it, because they are too needy, too sensitive, or selfish. Neglect also involves parents not meeting their children’s emotional needs. If a child asks for help, they are rebuffed and chided for being too sensitive or needy. Once conditioned to being shut down, emotionally neglected children never ask for help from a parent, caregiver, or anyone else because they have been taught that their needs are inconsequential. The types of parents who tend to emotionally neglect their children are authoritarian, narcissistic, perfectionist, or...
absent. They shame and humiliate their children. The emotional neglect of children results in lack of confidence, difficulty dealing with criticism, panic, and profound loneliness. Since the children are trained to have no needs or voice any emotional needs, they shut down, become emotionally numb, and experience difficulties feeling, identifying, managing, and communicating their emotions because the parents disavowed their expression of emotions they felt discomfited by.

Sometimes emotionally neglected children turn toward perfectionism as a means of being self-sufficient, unburdensome, and difficult to criticize for their failings. They can become oversensitive to rejection by taking everything personally. They also lack clarity about boundaries and expectations. All of these experiences can increase the risk of anxiety and depression, and deficits in emotion perception and emotional regulation. The children may be desensitized, have less empathy, and respond poorly to the emotional expressions of friends and family members. Emotional neglect by a parent arrests brain development. It makes attaching to others and having lasting, healthy adult relationships difficult because trusting others is challenging. Emotionally neglected children can have difficulties recognizing the facial expressions of others that show different emotions, thus diminishing their capacity for empathy, understanding, and connections with others. All of these outcomes of neglect can affect academic performance and intelligence.

Physical neglect refers to whether the child’s basic and age-appropriate needs for food, clothing, shelter, and medical care are met by the parents. Physically neglected children may not be enrolled in school, or the parents may not monitor the child’s attendance. Children are left alone at home for lengthy periods of time that exceed what is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Identifying physically neglected children can be easy. They are inappropriately dressed for the weather, appear dirty, smell unwashed, appear malnourished, and may display skin rashes, skin disorders, or bites from bedbugs and other vermin. Their behavior includes meager social skills, food stealing and hoarding, disinterest in basic hygiene, and poor school performance and attendance—including falling asleep in class. The children may show a severe lack of attachment to parents or other adults, and yet they can also be clingy and demand excessive attention and affection. Like other forms of abuse and neglect, physical neglect affects the physical, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral development of children. Developmental delays are customary and expected. Lack of boundaries is common because abused children find the limits set by adults and caregivers to be unfamiliar. The physical consequences of neglect can range from minor cuts and bruises to brain damage and death. The psychological outcomes can range from chronic low self-esteem to severe dissociative states. The cognitive effects also range from attention disorders to neurocognitive disorders. Behaviorally, physically neglected children may experience alienation from their peers or may exhibit disturbingly violent actions. All of these difficulties affect individual children and society as a whole.
Trauma and abuse stunt neurological development, leaving many children, and adult learners, emotionally functioning at levels well below their chronological ages. Figure 1.3 summarizes the many forms that adverse childhood experiences can take. Grownups can help children process adverse experiences that trigger feelings of loss and unworthiness. Those who provide unconditional love lay a groundwork for children to gain the skills for greater resilience.

FIGURE 1.3
Types of ACEs

The ACE study looked at three categories of adverse experiences: childhood abuse, which included emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; neglect, including both physical and emotional neglect; and household challenges, which included growing up in a household where there was substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of a mother or stepmother, parental separation/divorce, or had an incarcerated household member. Respondents were given an ACE score between 0 and 10 based on how many of the 10 types of adverse experiences they reported experiencing.
Index

A
abuse
ACEs, types of, 13
ACEs score, 14–15
adverse childhood experiences, 4–6
household challenges, 7–11
neglect, 11–13
overview of, 6–7
academic libraries
empowerment of patrons, 90
naming of services/divisions, 87–88
peer support in, 75–77
public trust in, 72
racial climate of, 101
as sanctuaries, 123–124, 130
voice of patrons at, 92
accessibility
disability informed services, 22
of library spaces/services, 92
ACEs
See adverse childhood experiences
ACRL
See Association of College and Research Libraries
action plan, 147–149
active listening
by peer supporter, 79–80
for psychologically safe workplace, 55
addiction, 64–65
administrators
empowerment of patrons and, 90–91
gender issues and, 102, 104–105
honesty/discretion and, 65–66
leadership for psychologically safe workplace, 55–56
microaggressions and, 110
moral safety and, 59–60
organizational culture and, 63–64
readiness for trauma-informed services, 119–120, 121
self-care plan and, 141–142
trauma-informed care plan and, 146, 147–148
trust, baseline of, 66–67
adolescents
divorce of parents and, 9–10
gender issues, LGBTQ youth, 103–105
library as sanctuary and, 123–124
parental incarceration and, 10–11
peer support in youth services, 73–75
teen advisory groups, 72
Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire, 151–153
adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) abuse, 6–7
Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire, 151–153
diagram of, 5
household challenges, 7–11
of library patrons, staff behavior and, 25–26
adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)  
  (cont’d)  
  neglect, 11–13  
overview of, 4–6  
psychological safety of patrons  
and, 50  
pyramid of, 14  
Rebecca Tolley’s awareness of, vii–ix  
score, 14–15  
trauma, 3–4  
trauma-informed customer service  
and, 29  
types of, 13  
AEDs  
See automated external defibrillators  
AFL-CIO, 132  
African Americans  
historical issues, 100–102  
historical trauma of, 106  
microaggressions and, 107–110  
age, 18  
agreements, 137–139  
AIAN  
See American Indians and Alaska Natives  
air purifiers, 39  
air quality, indoor, 37–39  
ALA  
See American Library Association  
Alabi, Jaena, 107–108  
allergic reactions, 39  
Alwan, Ahmed, 108  
American Academy of Pediatrics, 12  
American Civil War, 19, 100  
American Indians and Alaska Natives  
(AIAN), 106  
American Institute of Research, 116  
American Libraries, 126  
American Library Association (ALA)  
on library as sanctuary, 126  
Library Bill of Rights, 26  
Library Code of Ethics, 27, 28–30,  
59, 71  
on PATRIOT Act, 129  
Policy 61, Library Services to the  
Poor, 24  
“Resolution for the Adoption of  
Sustainability as a Core Value of  
Librarianship,” 39  
American Psychiatric Association, 20  
Americans with Disabilities Act, 22, 92  
Anderson, Amelia, 92  
Anderson, Elijah, 101  
Andrews, Nicola, 52, 99  
Anglin, D., 41  
anxiety  
  ACEs and, 6  
of adult students in academic  
libraries, 76  
divorce of parents and, 9–10  
emotional neglect and, 12  
library anxiety, 61  
of survivors of child abuse, 7  
appendix, 151–153  
archives, 101  
The Art of Asking, or How I Learned to  
Stop Worrying and Let People Help  
(Moniz), 143–144  
“The Art of Asking” (Palmer), 143  
Arthur Project, 75  
asbestos, 38–39  
assessment, of organizational readiness,  
113–121  
Association of College and Research  
Libraries (ACRL), 20, 29–30  
Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to  
Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones  
(Clear), 140  
authority figures  
cultural humility and, 99  
gender issues and, 102, 105  
roles born of trauma and, 133–134  
survivors of child abuse and, 6–7  
teachers as, 87  
atomized external defibrillators  
(AEDs), 49  
B  
Baldwin, James, 103  
“Banana” rule, 138  
barriers  
to adoption of trauma-informed  
practices, 114  
to collaboration, 84  
to customer service, 33–34  
free speech, conflict in, 41–43  
for people with disabilities, 92
to serving LGBTQ teens/adults, 103
visual examination of library for, 36
Bath, H., 21, 40
bathrooms, 49–50
Beard’s Practical Treatise on Nervous
Exhaustion (Neurasthenia), 19
Becoming a Reflective Librarian and Teacher:
Strategies for Mindful Academic
Practice (Reale), 139
behavior
ACEs score and, 14–15
customer service in libraries, 30–31
of neglected children, 11–13
parental incarceration and, 10–11
physical safety and, 48
psychological safety and, 50
of survivors of child abuse, 7
trauma-informed customer service
and, 29
beliefs, 140
belonging, 76
Berila, Beth, 103–104
Beverly Hills (CA) Public Library, 125
bias
of archives, 101
cultural issues and, 98, 99
of libraries, 97
Library Code of Ethics and, 27, 28
against “problem patrons,” 29
self-examination of, 69
bipolar disorder, 9
Black Lives Matter, 42
Bloom, S. L.
on physical safety, 48
on Sanctuary Model, 126–128
body language, 68
book covers, 32–33
boundaries, 12
brain
abuse and, 7
ACEs and, 5–6, 15
neglect of children and, 12–13
break rooms, 142
Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness,
Survival, and My Journey from
Homeless to Harvard (Murray), 75
breaks, 142
Brewer-Smith, K., 11
British Library, 39
Brooklyn Public Library (NY), 39
Brown, Brené, 22
Brown, Michael, 129
Brown, Vivian, 24–25, 140
BrowZine, 63
Bucurescu, G., 11
budgets, 62
building maintenance, 36, 40
bullying
library as sanctuary and, 123,
124, 125
peer support system for, 79
psychological safety and, 55
social safety and, 56–58
Burstow, B., 20
Bush, Ashley Davis, 139, 140–141
Bush, George W., 129
C
“Can’t Touch This” rule, 138
caregiver, 9
caretaker, 133
Carlos, A., 76
Carpenter, Carol Hastings, 124
Cart, Michael, 124–126
cell phone, 143
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC), 4, 15
Cerulo, Erica, 81
derchange
library customer service and, viii
organizational readiness for,
assessment of, 113–121
Chattanooga (TN) Public Library, 74
check ins, 81, 144
chemicals, 38–39
childhood trauma, vii–ix
See also adverse childhood experiences
children
abuse of, 6–7
ACEs score, 14–15
adverse childhood experiences, 4–6
care for traumatized individuals, 23
household challenges, 7–11
library as day care for unattended
children, 125
neglect, 11–13
children (cont’d)
  safe environments for, 41
  trauma and, 3–4
  trauma-informed library environment and, 41
child-serving systems, 23
Chodron, Pema, 86
choice
  library program procedures, questions about, 118
  library service changes, 89–90
  of library staff, gender issues and, 102
  of patrons, 93–95
circulation, 31
City College of San Francisco, 130
civil rights, 100–101
Civil Rights Act of 1964, 100
Civil War, American, 19, 100
clapping, 138–139
Clear, James, 140, 141
Clemson University, viii
clients, 86
clown role, 134
coaches, 80
coaching, 148–149
collaboration
  language/naming and, 86–88
  library program procedures, questions about, 118–119
  of library workers/patrons, 95
  overview of, 83–85
  for peer support in youth services, 74
  for Sanctuary Model adoption, 127
collection
  knowledge, organizing, 69–71
  safety of, 47–48
college campuses
  physical safety of, 48
  as sanctuaries, 130
Colonna, Jerry, 57, 137
Columbia University, 88
communication
  agreements for meetings, 137–139
  choice of patrons about, 93
community, 71–72
  See also patrons
compassion, 139
compassion fatigue, 133
confidentiality
  in trusting/transparent library, 65
  “Vegas” rule for, 138
  See also privacy
conflict, 56
connection, 21
considerable group trauma, 106
consistency, 50–51
Conteh, M., 75–76
continuity, 50–51
control, 7–8
coronavirus, 50
cost, of child maltreatment, 15
Cottrell, Megan, 130
COVID-19, 50
Covington, Stephanie, 33–34
cultural awareness, 29–30
cultural beliefs, 18
cultural change, 114
cultural competence skills, 76
cultural humility, 99
cultural issues
  historical trauma, 105–107
  overview of, 98–99
  questions about, 97–98
cultural safety, 51
curse words, 139
customer experience (CX), 134–135
customer service
  choice of patrons, 93–95
  cultural issues, 98–99
  empathy for adults with high ACEs, 14–15
  employee experience and, 134–135
  empowerment of patrons, 89–91
  evaluation of, 33–34
  gender issues and, 102–105
  historical issues, 99–102
  honesty/discretion and, 65–66
  interacting with patrons, 67–68
  labels, service without, 23–24
  Library Code of Ethics on, 28–30
  microaggressions and, 107–110
  moral safety, 58–60
  organizational culture and, 63–65
  outcomes with trauma-informed care, 24–25
  psychological safety of patrons, 51–53
  social safety and, 56–58
social workers at libraries, 27–28
staff behavior for trauma-informed care, 25–26
trauma-informed approach to, 30–31
trauma-informed care plan and, 145–150
trauma-informed transformation of, 21–23
user-centered libraries, 32–33
customers, 86
CX (customer experience), 134–135

D
Dapper Dan: Made in Harlem (Day), 69
data, 149
Day, Daniel, 69, 102
Dean, Natalie, 50
decision-making
patron involvement in, 90
shared, 83
Delizonna, L., 53
DePaul University, 130
depression
ACEs and, 6
emotional neglect and, 12
percentage of adults living with, 9
Dewey, Melvil, 102
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III (DSM-III) (American Psychiatric Association), 20
“The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar” (Franklin), 101
disabilities, people with
accessibility of library, 92
disability informed services, 22
disassociation, 7
disaster planning, 146
disaster response team, 146
discretion, 65–66
Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries, ACRL, 20,
29–30
divorce, 9–10
Doan, Joy, 108
domestic violence
children involved in, 7–8
cultural beliefs and, 18
PTSD in survivors of, 20
"Don't Yuck My Yum" rule, 138
Douglas, J., 132
Dowd, Frances A., 125
drugs
parental incarceration and, 10
physical safety in library and, 49–50
DuBois, W. E. B., 100

E
EAPs (employee assistance programs), 77
East Tennessee State University (ETSU), 43
East Tennessee State University (ETSU’s student newspaper), 43
East Tennessee State University (ETSU) ACEs/TIC, faculty grounded in, vii–viii
free speech zone at, 41–43
LGBTQ students and, 104
safety training, 49
economic toll, 15
Edmondson, Amy, 48, 53
education, 30–31
See also professional development; training
“ELMO” rule, 138
e-mail
distribution lists, for peer support, 80–81
limiting for self-care, 143
emotional abuse, 6
emotional intelligence
emotional labor of library workers, 132–133
gender issues and, 105
Sanctuary Model and, 127
in socially safe environment, 58
emotional labor, 132–133
emotional neglect, 11–12
emotional trust, 64
emotions
emotional management, 21
Sanctuary Model and, 128
secondary trauma of library staff and, 134
empathy
for adults with high ACEs, 15
awareness of ACEs/childhood trauma and, viii
cultural awareness and, 29–30
cultural humility, 99
for cultural issues, 98
library as sanctuary and, 124
alastore.ala.org
empathy (cont’d)
    self-care for, 139
    staff behavior for trauma-informed care, 26
    sympathy vs., 22
    trauma-informed framework for building, vii
employee assistance programs (EAPs), 77
employee experience (EX), 134–135
empowerment
    choice for, 95
    library program procedures, questions about, 119
    of library staff, gender issues and, 102
    of patrons, 89–91
“empty vessel” model, 87
Enoch Pratt Free Library, 129–130
environment
    See space; trauma-informed library environment
environmental microaggressions, 107
epistemology, 69, 70
Epstein, Mark, 3
equity, 28
ESFT Model, 98
essential oils, 37, 142
Ettarh, Fobazi, 50, 71
ETSU
    See East Tennessee State University
EX (employee experience), 134–135
externalizing, 11

F
Facebook group, 81
faculty
    at ETSU, 42, 43, 104
    library as sanctuary and, 123–124
    microaggressions towards library faculty, 108
    physical safety and, 48
    psychological safety and, 55
failures, 148
“fake news,” 70, 71
Fallot, R. D., 22, 116–117
family
    dissolution of family unit, effect on children, 9–10
    household challenges, 7–11
    neglect, 11–13
    roles born of trauma, 133–134
    See also parents
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 65
Farmer, Ashley, 101
Farrington, D., 10
fathers, 10–11
    See also parents
Feagin, J., 101
The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth (Edmondson), 53
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 129
feedback
    sharing, importance of, 55–56
    for trauma-informed care plan, 146
female friend, 81
feminists, 20
Ferguson (MO) Public Library, 129
Ferguson, Plessy v., 100
Ferrell, S., 23–24
Fifarek, Amy, 62
fines, library, 41
First Amendment, 129
Flocos, S., 41
Forbes.com, 80
forest bathing (shinrin-yoku), 143
formal services policy, 119
Foster, H., 10
foster care system, 11
Freire, Paulo, 68
four Rs
    development of, 17
    overview of, 18–19
Fox, Melodie J., 69
fragrances, 37
Franklin, John Hope, 101
free speech, 41–43
Freedom Libraries, 101
Freeze, Christopher, 57
Freire, Paulo, 87
“frequent flyers,” 87
Freud, Sigmund, 19
Friendliness Factor, 33
furniture
    interior design of library, 38
    patron choices about, 93
future, vision for, 128
gaslighting, 105, 107, 109
GASP (Graphics, Ambiance, Style, and Presentation) process, 36
gender issues
  microaggressions and, 108
  overview of, 102–105
  parental incarceration and, 11
  questions about, 97–98
Glaze, L. E., 10
Glencoe Public Library (IL), 39
Glenn, John, 101
goals
  collaboration and, 84
  mutuality and, 85
  trauma-informed care plan and, 146–147, 148
gossip, 65
Gottlieb, A., 10
government, U.S., 70–71
Graphics, Ambiance, Style, and Presentation (GASP) process, 36
Gray, Freddy, 129–130
Greenwald, R., 21
grief, 106–107
guests, 86
Guilford College, 88
Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990, 48
guns, 48

H
habits, 140–141
Hagan, J., 10
handguns, 48
Hardy, Elissa, 28
Harris, M., 22, 116–117
Harris-Perry, M., 75–76
Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, ix
Hayden, Carla, 130
healing, 21
health interventions, 79
hearing, 37, 38
Hedemark, A., 68
help, asking for, 143–144
helpers
  compassion fatigue of, 133
  library workers as, 131
helping professions, 131
Herway, Jake, 56
*Hidden Figures* (film), 100–101
Highlander Research Center, viii
Hill, Heather, 92
Hillman Library, Pittsburgh (PA), 39
hippocampus, 6
historical issues
  historical trauma, 105–107
  overview of, 99–102
  questions about, 97–98
historical trauma, 105–107
Holocaust survivors, 105, 106
Holt-Lunstad, J., 135
Holtschnieder, Dennis H., 130
*Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story* (film), 75
homelessness
  as component of neglect, 11
  library as sanctuary and, 125
  library service without labels, 23–24
  Liz Murray on, 75
  trauma-informed care and libraries, 27–28, 29
honesty, 65–66
Hoover, Herbert, 143
household challenges
  ACEs, types of, 13
  overview of, 7–11
household insecurity, 11
how-to manual, 116
human resources practices, 120–121
Hunsaker, A., 135

I
“I” of the Tiger” rule, 138
identity, 108
ILS (integrated library system), 95
Imain, N., 101
immigrants, undocumented, 129–130
Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), 129, 130
incarceration, of parents, 10–11
Inclusive Excellence Toolkit (Trevino, Walker, & Leyba), 110
Indigenous peoples
  historical trauma, recognizing/addressing, 105–107
  library knowledge organization and, 69–70
individual actions, for peer support, 80–81
individualism, 143
indoor air quality, 37–39
instruction, 87–88
integrated library system (ILS), 95
intelligence
See emotional intelligence
interior design
transformation of, 36
trauma-informed library environment, 37
internalizing, 11
intimate partner violence (IPV), 7–8

J
Jackson, Ross, 42
Jews, 105, 106
Johnson, Andrew, 102
Jordan, M. W., 31, 33, 34

K
Kaiser-Permanente, 4
Keer, G., 76
knowledge, 69–71
Kwan, Lisa, 84

L
labels
language/naming, 86–88
library service without, 23–24
Lambert, Sylvia Leigh, 126
language
collaboration/mutuality and, 86–88
hurtful, 138
“Sentence Enhancers” rule, 139
latchkey children, 125
leadership
collaboration and, 84
cultural change, resistance to, 80
gender issues and, 102, 105
for psychologically safe workplace, 55
for trauma-informed care, viii
learning, 87–88
Lepore, Jill, 72
Leyba, Johanna, 110
LGBTQ people, 103–105
liars, 68
librarians
children, safe environments for, 41
choice of patrons, 93–95
collaboration, 83–85
collaboration/mutuality and, 83–88
cultural issues and, 98–99
customer service, trauma-informed approach to, 30–31
gender issues and, 102–105
historical issues, 99–105
honesty/discretion, 65–66
labels, service without, 23–24
library as sanctuary and, 123–130
mentor programs for, 80
microaggressions and, 107–110
moral safety, 58–60
organizational readiness, assessment of, 113–121
organizing knowledge, 69–71
outcomes with trauma-informed care, 24–25
patrons, interacting with, 67–68
peer support, 73–81
peer support in academic libraries, 75–77
peer support in library organizations, 77–79
peer support in youth services, 73–75
peer support, individual actions for, 80–81
peer supporters, 79–80
physical safety of library, 47–50
psychological safety of library workers, 53–56
psychological safety of patrons and, 51–53
public trust in, 71–72
self-care, plan for, 141–144
self-care for, 139–141
social safety and, 56–58
social workers, collaboration with, 27–28
staff appearance, 40
staff behavior for trauma-informed care, 25–26
three pillars of trauma-informed care and, 21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Items</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trauma-informed transformation of library services</td>
<td>21–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>user-centered libraries</td>
<td>32–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voice of patrons and</td>
<td>91–92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libraries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice of patrons</td>
<td>93–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration in</td>
<td>83–85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer service, evaluation of</td>
<td>33–34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer service, trauma-informed approach to</td>
<td>30–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowerment of patrons</td>
<td>89–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender issues and</td>
<td>102–105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>historical issues</td>
<td>99–102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge, organizing</td>
<td>69–71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labels, service without</td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Code of Ethics</td>
<td>28–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>microaggressions in</td>
<td>107–110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moral safety in</td>
<td>58–60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutuality in</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational readiness for change, assessment of</td>
<td>113–121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outcomes with trauma-informed care</td>
<td>24–25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer support in academic libraries</td>
<td>75–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer support in library organizations</td>
<td>77–79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical safety of</td>
<td>47–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planning for trauma-informed services</td>
<td>145–150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological safety of patrons</td>
<td>51–53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public trust</td>
<td>71–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>safe spaces for trauma survivors</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social safety and</td>
<td>56–58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff behavior for trauma-informed care</td>
<td>25–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency of</td>
<td>62–63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trauma-informed care and</td>
<td>18–19, 27–34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trauma-informed transformation of</td>
<td>21–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustworthiness/transparency and</td>
<td>61–62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>user-centered, switch to</td>
<td>32–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voice of patrons</td>
<td>91–92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library anxiety</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library as sanctuary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library as places of sanctuary in sanctuary cities</td>
<td>129–130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional literature on</td>
<td>124–126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary Model</td>
<td>126–128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school library as sanctuary</td>
<td>123–124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Bill of Rights (American Library Association)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library board members</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Code of Ethics (American Library Association)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moral safety and</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principals of</td>
<td>28–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trauma-informed care and</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust in librarians and</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library environment, trauma-informed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building maintenance</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children, special considerations for</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free speech, conflict in</td>
<td>41–43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indoor air quality</td>
<td>37–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interior design</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral spaces</td>
<td>40–41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Palm Beach Public Library</td>
<td>35–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senses, examination of library with</td>
<td>36–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library fines</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library organizations</td>
<td>77–79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowerment of patrons and</td>
<td>90–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readiness for change, assessment of</td>
<td>117–119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency for public trust</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency of</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice of patrons and</td>
<td>93–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration/mutuality and</td>
<td>83–88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural issues and</td>
<td>98–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer service, evaluation of</td>
<td>33–34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer service, trauma-informed approach to</td>
<td>30–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional labor of</td>
<td>132–133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employee experience</td>
<td>134–135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowerment of</td>
<td>90–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender issues and</td>
<td>102–105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as helpers</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>historical issues</td>
<td>99–102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

alastore.ala.org
library workers (cont’d)
  honesty/discretion, 65–66
  mentor programs for, 80
  microaggressions and, 107–110
  moral safety, 58–60
  organizational culture and, 63–65
  organizational readiness, assessment of, 113–121
  patrons, interacting with, 67–68
  peer support, 73–81
  physical safety of library, 47–50
  psychological safety of, 53–56
  psychological safety of patrons and, 51–53
  roles born of trauma, 133–134
  self-care, 139–141
  self-care, plan for, 141–144
  social safety and, 56–58
  staff appearance, 40
  staff behavior for trauma-informed care, 25–26
  toxic workplaces and, 135–137
  toxicity, antidotes to, 137–139
  trust, baseline of, 66–67
  voice of patrons and, 91–92
library workforce, trauma-informed
  emotional labor, 132–133
  employee experience, 134–135
  library workers as helpers, 131
  roles born of trauma, 133–134
  self-care, 139–141
  self-care, plan for, 141–144
  toxic workplaces, 135–137
  toxicity, antidotes to, 137–139
  traumatic records, 132
life expectancy, 14
life-threatening events, 4
lighting, 142, 143
Lincoln Alternative High School, Walla Walla (WA), 75
Lindberg, J., 68
Lipsky, Laura van Dernoot, 131
listening
  active, 55, 56
  for building trust, 72
  to colleagues, 144
  to patron, 67
  by peer supporter, 79–80
Lloyd, Annemaree, 68
loneliness, 135
Longchampa, 86
Lorde, Audre, 110
loss, 128
Louisville Free (KY) Public Library, 100
M
macro habits, 140
macro self-care, 139
maintenance, 36, 40
manipulator, 134
man-made disaster, 146
marginalized groups
  cultural issues for library service, 98–99
  microaggressions and, 107
  voice of, 91–92
Maruschak, L. M., 10
massage, 140, 142–143
maternal incarceration, 10
Mathieu, F., 133
Matteson, M. L., 132
Mazur, Claire, 81
McGee, N., 126
media, 70–71
meditation, 140
meetings
  agreements for, 137–139
  location of, 48–49
  psychological safety of library workers and, 55–56
  toxicity, approach for neutralizing, 136–137
Melilli, A., 135
members, 86
memory
  of abuse, 7
  hippocampus for, 6
  repressed memories, 4
  secondary trauma and, 134
  trauma, effects of, 18
mental illness, 9
mentor programs, 80
mentors, 75, 80
micro habits, 140
micro self-care, 139, 140–141
microaggressions, 101, 107–110
microexpressions, 68
“Mildly Delirious Libraries: Transforming Your Library from Top to Bottom” (Smith), 35–36
millennials, 94
Miller, S. S., 132
Millsap, K., 126
The Mindful Librarian: Connecting the Practice of Mindfulness to Librarianship (Moniz), 139, 143
mindfulness, 139, 141
minorities
   cultural issues for library service, 98–99
   historical trauma experienced by, 105–107
See also race/ethnicity
Mitola, R., 135
Mogilevsky, Miri, 144
money, 62
Moniz, Richard, 139
moral distress, 59
moral intelligence, 60
moral safety, 58–60
Morris, M., 75–76
mothers, 10–11
See also parents
Murray, J., 10
Murray, Liz, 75, 76
mutuality
   language/naming and, 86–88
   in libraries, 85
   organizational structure and, 83

N
naming, 86–88
Narcan, 50
National Alliance on Mental Illness, 9
National Center on Family Homelessness, 116
National Education Association, 103
natural disaster, 146
nature, 143
needles, 49–50
needs analysis, 78
neglect, 11–13
neutral sentences, 52–53
neutral spaces, 40–41
Nienow, M., 28
noise
   examination of library environment, 37, 38
   external noise-reduction, 41
   from preachers, 42
   normalization, of trauma, 20
“Not ‘Just My Problem to Handle’: Emerging Themes on Secondary Trauma and Archivists” (Sloan, Vanderfluit, & Douglas), 132

O
Oberlin University, 130
“One Diva, One Mic” rule, 138
organizational culture
   mentor programs and, 80
   peer support in library organizations and, 77–78
   Sanctuary Model for changing, 126–128
organizational documents, 145
organizational readiness
   groundwork for, 113–115
   self-assessment, 115–121
organizational structure, 83
organizations, library, 77–79
“otherness,” 76
“Ouch/Oops” rule, 138
Our Whole Lives: Lifespan Sexuality Trainer, 137
outcomes, 24–25
oversight committee, 146
Oxford University’s Bodleian Library, 39

P
Palmer, Amanda, 143–144
Paper Tigers (documentary), 75
parents
   abuse of children, 6–7
   household challenges, 7–11
   library as day care for unattended children, 125
   neglect, 11–13
   parental incarceration, child risk factors for, 10–11
   passive-aggressive strategy, 136
patrons
   choice of, 93–95
patrons (cont’d)
cultural issues, 98–99
customer service, evaluation of, 33–34
customer service, trauma-informed approach to, 30–31
emotional labor of library workers and, 132–133
empowerment of, 89–91
four Rs of trauma-informed care and, 18–19
gender issues and, 102–105
historical issues, 99–102
honesty/discretion and, 65–66
interacting with, 67–68
knowledge organization for, 69–71
labels, service without, 23–24
language used for naming, 86–87
library as sanctuary and, 123–130
Library Code of Ethics, TIC and, 28–30
library procedures and, 117–119
library use of term, 86
microaggressions and, 107–110
moral safety, 58–60
organizational culture and, 63–65
outcomes with trauma-informed care, 24–25
peer support from, 73
peer support in academic libraries, 75–77
peer support in youth services, 73–75
physical safety of library and, 47–50
psychological safety of, 51–53
social safety and, 56–58
staff behavior for trauma-informed care, 25–26
trauma-informed care plan and, 146
trauma-informed library workers and, 131–132
trauma-informed transformation of library services, 21–23
trustworthiness/transparency and, 61–62
user-centered libraries, 32–33
voice of, 91–92
Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire), 87
peer support
in academic libraries, 75–77
description of, 73
for empowerment, 91
environment of, 146
individual actions, 80–81
in library organizations, 77–79
mentor programs, 80
peer supporters, 79–80
self-care and, 139
for trauma-informed change, 114
in youth services, 73–75
peer-tutoring, 74
peppermint oil, 142
perfectionism, 12
perfumes, 37
personal boundaries, 25
Pew Research Center, 70, 71
PFLAG, 137–139
Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons, 100
physical abuse, 6
physical environment
building maintenance, 40
examination of with senses, 36–38
indoor air quality, 38–39
interior design of library, 38
of library, transformation of, 35–36
safe environments for children, 41
physical neglect, 12–13
physical safety, 47–50
physical violence, 7–8
Pierce, Chester M., 107
planning, for trauma-informed services
year one, 145–147
year three, 148–150
year two, 147–148
plants, 39
Plessy v. Ferguson, 100
Pohlig, R. T., 11
pop-up model, 74
post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
of abused children, 7
percentage of adults living with, 9
trauma-informed care, origins of, 19–20
triggers and, 4
power
organizational readiness for change and, 115
physical/sexual violence and, 7–8
shared, 83
social safety and, 57–58
power differential
minimizing, 52
traumatic experience and, 18
practical trust, 64
preachers, 42–43
prison libraries, 126
privacy
choices about, 94–95
formal services policy on, 119
library as sanctuary and, 129
of library patrons, 25
“Vegas” rule for, 138
“problem patron”
behavior, ingrained beliefs about, 30–31
labeling of, 23–24
as negative terminology, 29
problem with term, 87
voice of, 91
procedures
See library procedures
professional development
on microaggressions, 109
peer support in library organizations, 77
for trauma-informed care, 30
warmth training for reference desk, 147
Provence, M. A., 24
psychological safety
of library workers, 53–56
of patrons, 51–53
psychological trauma, 3–4
PTSD
See post-traumatic stress disorder
public libraries
historical issues, 99–102
public trust in, 71–72
as sanctuary, 124–126, 129–130
public trust, 71–72
Purvis, Robert, 100
Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools (Morris, Conteh, & Harris-Perry), 75–76

Q
Questionnaire, Adverse Childhood Experience, 151–153
questions
about cultural, historical, gender issues, 97–98
about cultural issues, 98
about historical issues, 100
about microaggressions, 109
about social safety, 57–58
about trust, 66–67
for assessment of organizational readiness for change, 114–115, 117–121
for evaluation of psychological safety of library workers, 53–54
for peer support needs analysis, 78
for psychological safety, 56
for self-assessment, 115

R
race/ethnicity
cultural issues for library service, 98–99
historical issues, 100–102
historical trauma and, 105–107
microaggressions and, 107–110
parental incarceration and, 10, 11
“Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians” (Alabi), 107–108
racism
historical issues for libraries and, 100–102
historical trauma and, 106, 107
microaggressions and, 107–110
readiness surveys/questionnaires, 116
Reale, Michelle, 139
realization, 18–19
Reboot: Leadership and the Art of Growing Up (Colonna), 57
recognition, 18–19
Reconstruction, 100
red flag, 104
Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), 30
reference interview, 85
reference service
service policy of, 31
warmth training, 147
regulars, 86–87
relationships
  Code of Ethics on, 28–29
collaboration and, 83–85
emotional labor of library workers, 132–133
interacting with patrons, 67–69
mutuality, 85
organizational culture and, 64–65
patron choice and, 94
peer support and, 81
psychological safety of patrons and, 51–53
social safety, 56–58
trauma-informed transformation of library services, 21–23
religious works, 70
repression, 4
rescuer/hero role, 133
“Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship” (ALA Council), 39
response, 18
re-traumatization
description of, 4
as one of four Rs of trauma-informed care, 18–19
trauma-informed care plan and, 146
Rettke, Tristan, 42
Richardson, S. A., 38
Robinson, Phoebe, 108–109
Rogers, Fred, 21
roles, 133–134
RUSA
  See Reference and User Services Association
S
Sachs, C., 41
safe spaces
  interior design of library for, 38
  for LGBTQ people at library, 103–104
  library as sanctuary, 123–126
  physical safety of library, 47–50
  for trauma survivors, 21
safe zone posters, 103
safety
  moral safety, 58–60
  physical safety, 47–50
as pillar of trauma-informed care, 21
psychological safety of library workers, 53–56
psychological safety of patrons, 51–53
safe spaces for trauma survivors, 21
Sanctuary Model and, 128
social safety, 56–58
trust and, 61
SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), 17, 18
San Francisco Public Library (CA), 27, 129
San Jose Public Library (CA), 27
sanctuary, historical context for term, 124
sanctuary, library as
  literature on, 124–126
  in sanctuary cities, 129–130
  Sanctuary Model, 126–128
  school library as sanctuary, 123–124
sanctuary cities, 129–130
sanctuary commitments, 128
Sanctuary Model, 126–128
Sanctuary Toolkit, 128
Sanders, Laura, 129
Santagata, Paul, 53
scapegoat role, 133–134
scarcity model, 62–63
schizophrenia, 9
school library, 123–124
  See also academic libraries
school shootings, 49
secondary trauma, 134
secrets, 64–65
security, 32–33
  See also safety
segregation, 100
Sekol, I., 10
SELF (Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future), 128
self-assessment
  of readiness for adoption of trauma-informed approach, 115–121
  of Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit, 116
Self-Assessment and Planning Protocol for trauma-informed services
  administrative support, 119–120
  formal services policy, 119
human resources practices, 120–121
overview of, 116–117
program procedures/settings,
117–119
staff training/education, 120
self-care
need for, 63
plan for, 141–144
for trauma-informed library workforce,
139–141
self-checkout, 93–94
self-esteem
of children, domestic violence and, 8
of survivors of child abuse, 7
self-reflection
of leaders, social safety and, 57–58
on traumatic events, 18
Selma (AL) Free Library, 101
senses, examination of library with, 36–38
"Sentence Enhancers" rule, 139
serious mental illnesses (SMI), 9
service desks
patron choice about, 93–94
teen volunteers staffing, 74
service policies, formal, 119
sexual abuse, 7
sexual harassment
gender issues, 102
library reporting process for, 105
sexual violence, 7–8
sexuality education, 137
“Share the Stage” rule, 138
Shaw, Dennis, 39
shell shock, 19
Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State
University, 41–43
shinrin-yoku (forest bathing), 143
Shore, Jules, 81
sight, 36–37
silverlining, 22
Simmons, R., 24
Simple Self-Care for Therapists (Bush), 139,
141
Sloan, K., 132
smell
examination of library environment,
37, 38
in neutral spaces, 40
SMI (serious mental illnesses), 9
Smith, Pam Sandlian, 35–36
“Snaps Not Claps” rule, 138–139
social isolation, 135
social media, 143
“social model,” 92
social safety, 56–58
social services, 126–128
social support networks, 79
social trust, 71–72
social workers, 27–28
soldier’s heart, 19
Soska, Tracy M., 28
sounds, 37, 38
Southeastern Women’s Studies
Association, viii
space
interior design of library, 38
neutral spaces, 40–41
patron choices about, 93
See also safe spaces; trauma-informed
library environment
speech, free, 41–43
staff
staff behavior, 25–26
staff training/education, 120
See also library workers
stereotypes
cultural awareness and, 29–30
of librarians, 48, 75–76, 132
moving past, 97
stigma, 20
strategic plan, 146–147
stress
brain’s response to ACEs, 5–6
self-care for, 140
self-care plan and, 143
toxic stress, 128
toxic workplaces and, 136
trauma and, 3–4
See also post-traumatic stress disorder
students
free speech at library and, 41–43
library as sanctuary and, 123–124
peer support in academic libraries,
75–77
peer support in youth services, 73–75
substance abuse, 8
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 17, 18
Sun, J., 15
support
See peer support survey
for peer support needs analysis, 78
readiness surveys, 116
sustainability, 39
sympathy
empathy vs., 22
library as sanctuary and, 124
symptoms
micro habits of self-care and, 140
of traumatic stress, 19–20

T
taste, 37
“Team Learning and Psychological Safety Survey” (Edmondson), 53
teams
collaboration in libraries, 83–85
safe team environment, 136
“techno-chauvinism,” 63
teen advisory groups, 72, 74
teen volunteers, 74
teenagers
See adolescents
therapy animals, 38
three Es, 17, 18
three pillars, of trauma-informed care, 18
360-degree feedback model, 56
TIC
See trauma-informed care
timeline, for trauma-informed care plan, 147
tobacco smoke, 38, 40
Tolley, Rebecca, 125
touching, 138
toxic stress, 128
toxic workplaces, 135–137
toxicity, antidotes to, 137–139
training
for cultural humility, 99
of library staff, yearly, 149–150
safety training for library staff, 49
staff training about trauma-informed practices, 114
staff training/education, assessment of, 120
of teen volunteers, 74
warmth training, 147, 149
transparency
honesty/discretion for, 65–66
library program procedures, questions about, 118
organizational culture and, 63–65
for public trust, 72
of trauma-informed libraries, 62–63
trust and, 61–62
trauma
abuse, 6–7
ACEs score, 14–15
adverse childhood experiences, 4–6
definition of, 3–4
emotional labor of library workers and, 132–133
four Rs of trauma-informed care, 18–19
historical trauma, 105–107
household challenges, 7–11
library workers and, 131–132
neglect, 11–13
roles born of, 133–134
three Es of trauma-informed care, 18
use of term, ix
trauma champions, 145–146
trauma theory
research requests about, vii–viii
as Sanctuary Model pillar, 128
trauma-informed care (TIC)
collaboration/mutuality, 83–88
cultural, historical, gender issues, 97–110
customer service, evaluation of, 33–34
customer service in libraries, 30–31
empowerment/voice/choice, 89–95
four Rs, 18–19
libraries and, 27–34
library as sanctuary, 123–130
Library Code of Ethics and, 28–30
organizational readiness for,
assessment of, 113–121
A trauma-informed framework, 14–15
trauma-informed library environment
building maintenance, 40
children, special considerations for, 41
free speech, conflict in, 41–43
indoor air quality, 37–39
interior design, 37
neutral spaces, 40–41
at Palm Beach Public Library, 35–36
senses, examination of library with, 36–38
Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit, 116
Trauma-Informed Self-Assessment Scale, 116–117
trauma-informed services, planning for
year one, 145–147
year three, 148–150
year two, 147–148
trauma-informed transformation, 21–23
trauma-informed workforce
See library workforce, trauma-informed
traumatic events, 18
traumatic records, 132
traumatic stress, ix
Trevino, Jesus, 110
triggers
ACEs score and, 14
brain’s response to ACEs and, 6
description of, 4
psychological safety of patrons and, 50, 51, 53
Trump, Donald
immoral acts of, 58–59
sanctuary cities and, 129, 130
trust
baseline of, 66–67
for collaboration, 85
customer service approach and, 50–51
emotional neglect and, 12
library program procedures, questions about, 118
peer support for, 73
for social safety, 56–57
survivors of child abuse and, 6–7
transparency and, 62–63
trustworthiness
baseline of trust, 66–67
elements of, 61
honesty/discretion, 65–66
organizational culture and, 63–65
organizing knowledge and, 69–71
patrons, interacting with, 67–68
public trust, 71–72
transparency and, 62–63
Twenge, J. M., 135
U
undocumented immigrants, 129–130
Unitarian Universalism Association, 137
United Church of Christ, 137
University of Pittsburgh, 88
University of Washington, 88
U.S. government, 70–71
USA PATRIOT Act, 129
users, 86
See also patrons
user’s guide, 116
V
Vanderfluit, J., 132
Varheim, Andreas, 71–72, 74
“Vegas” rule, 138
Vera, H., 101
vicarious traumatization (VT), 133
victim/lost child role, 134
Vietnam War, 20
visitors, 86
voice
  library service changes, 89–90
  of library staff, gender issues and, 102
  of patrons, 91–92

W
Walker, Thomas, 110
war veterans, 19–20
warmth training, 147, 149
weapons, 48
Weight Watchers, 77
Welteroth, Elaine, 107
West Palm Beach Public Library, 35–36
“white spaces,” 101
Whitmire, Ethlene, 101
Whole Person Librarianship: A Social
  Work Approach to Patron Services
  (Zettervall & Nienow), 28
Wildeman, C., 11
Winkelstein, Julie Ann, 103
Wiseman, T., 22
World Health Organization, 50
women, 132–133
  See also gender issues
work wife, 81
Work Wife: The Power of Female Friend- ship
  to Drive Successful Business (Cerulo
  & Mazur), 81
workplaces, toxic, 135–137
World War II, 19

Y
year one, 145–147
year three, 148–150
year two, 147–148
yellow flags, 104
Yohn, D. L., 31, 135
You Can’t Touch My Hair: And Other Things
  I Still Have to Explain (Robinson), 108
youth services, 73–75

Z
Zettervall, S., 28