

Mental Health Resources for Justice Courts

Judge Wayne Mack
Justice of the Peace
Montgomery County, Precinct

1

Funded By a Grant From the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals

© Copyright 2025. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without prior written permission of the Texas Justice Court Training Center unless copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address inquiries to: Permissions, Texas Justice Court Training Center, 1701 Directors Blvd, Suite 530, Austin, TX, 78744.

2

Course Objectives

- Identify mental health resources useful for Justice Courts
- Collaborate with stakeholders to leverage resources
- Apply communication strategies for parties with mental health challenges
- Utilize technology to access information/resources

3

Why This Matters

- Mental health touches nearly every aspect of Justice Court
- Impacts demeanor, case outcomes, and community trust
- Judges can set the tone for trauma-informed, effective proceedings

4

Overview of Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)

- Developed for trauma-impacted children/families
- Applied in courts, schools, law enforcement
- Core Principles:
 - Connecting – building trust & rapport
 - Empowering – meeting physical/physiological needs
 - Correcting – proactive, supportive correction

5

Trauma & the Courtroom (1)

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and lifelong impact
 - Anxiety
 - Avoidance
 - Anger
 - Confusion
 - Etc.

6

Trauma & the Courtroom (2)

- Trauma triggers in courtroom settings
 - Aggressive or confrontational tones from judge, attorneys or witnesses
 - Legal terminology
 - Recounting traumatic events in testimony questioning (abuse, violence, accident)
 - Overall nervous about being in court and not knowing what to expect
 - Evidence presentation (photos or videos)
 - Confined spaces
 - Security features such as pat down or metal detectors

7

Trauma & the Courtroom (3)

- Why understanding trauma reduces conflict and improves compliance
- Important for safety and fairness

8

Communication Strategies

- Use plain language & check understanding
- Avoid escalation language/gestures
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) principles (*see following slides*)

9

MHFA – ALGEE Action Plan

- A – Assess for risk of harm or crisis
- L – Listen non-judgmentally
- G – Give reassurance and information
- E – Encourage appropriate professional help
- E – Encourage self-help and support strategies

10

MHFA – Other Core Principles

- **Respect confidentiality** *(unless there is a risk of harm)*
- **Be culturally sensitive** *and aware of personal biases*
- **Know your limits**—*you're not a therapist, but a bridge to help*
- **Stay calm and supportive**, *even in crisis situations*

11

Scenario

- What if someone refuses to comply in court?
- How can you apply the communication strategies discussed to address the situation?

12

Resources for Judges & Staff

- Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs)
- Crisis lines, mobile crisis outreach teams
- Court liaison programs
- Continuing judicial education (MHFA, TBRI, Crisis Intervention)
- Others?

13

Resources for Parties/Public

- Referrals: counseling, clinics, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), peer support groups
- Brochures, flyers, etc. provided by the court (*see sample brochures on tables*)
- Technology tools: statewide hotlines, online directories (*see next slide*)
- Others?

14

Statewide Hotlines/Online Directories

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): [**https://afsp.org/**](https://afsp.org/)
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: [**https://988lifeline.org/**](https://988lifeline.org/)
- Veterans/Military Crisis Line: [**https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/**](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/)
- Texas Health and Human Services: [**https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use.org**](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use.org)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: [**https://www.samhsa.gov/**](https://www.samhsa.gov/)

15

Technology in the Courtroom

- Odyssey case notes + resource referral integration
- QR codes on citations & summons
- Mental health resources displayed in the courtroom
- Other examples?

16

Collaboration with Stakeholders

- Law enforcement
- Hospitals/ERs
- Schools
- Nonprofits (suicide prevention, NAMI, faith community)
- Others?

17

Case Examples

- Example of a case impacted positively by trauma-informed approach
- Before & After Scenario

18

Partner Share Activity

- Share with a partner a case example that happened in your court.
 - How did you handle it?
 - Is there anything you would do differently?

19

Partner Role Play Activity

Find a new partner and take turns being Partner #1 and Partner #2.

Setting the stage: An eviction case. The judge is explaining the procedures for the trial that is about to start and the defendant is interrupting and upset.

- Partner #1: You are the defendant. Imagine that you are anxious or angry and feel that this shouldn't be happening at all.
- Partner #2: You are the judge and you need to de-escalate the situation.

20

Resource Mapping Activity

- List your local mental health resources you know about
 - Gaps?
 - Underused programs?

21

Takeaways

- Judges are not clinicians, but can:
 - Recognize, Refer, Respond appropriately
 - Model respect & stability in proceedings
- Being trauma-informed enhances justice and efficiency

22

Call to Action

- “Better justice through better understanding”
- Encourage networking with LMHAs
- Commit to one new MH-informed practice in your court

23

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

— Theodore Roosevelt

24