

Promoting Mental Wellness Since 1933

"The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention...A loving silence often has more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words."

Rachel Naomi Remen



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

Being Trauma-Informed Equals Being Connected and Kind

Trauma-Informed. Adverse Childhood Experiences. Resilience. Epigenetics. Generational Trauma.

These are all words, phrases that are becoming more commonplace in our conversations about mental and behavioral health. But what does it mean to be a trauma-informed organization or community? The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines being trauma-informed with four R's. A trauma-informed organization:

- **Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;**
- **Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;**
- **Resists re-traumatization, and**
- **Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.**

MHA is embarking on a journey with nine other Mecklenburg County organizations, agencies and systems to become a more trauma-informed community. As I've learned more about being trauma-informed, two words resonate: **CONNECTED** and **KINDNESS**.

Author and researcher Brene' Brown states, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."

If we can find a way to **CONNECT** to those around us in a meaningful way, we can better understand where people are coming from and what they are bringing with them. If we were to pull our life experiences out of a suitcase, what would it look like? Would we be pulling out the love of our parents, or the trauma we experienced as a child? Would we unpack the comfort and stability that comes from living in a place that feels safe and secure, or would we unpack memories of being homeless, neglected, abused, afraid?

When we can truly **CONNECT** with someone, whether it is our staff, those we serve in our agency, our significant other, the person in front of us in the grocery line, or even ourselves, we can begin to make **KINDNESS** a natural part of our lives, a seamless outgrowth of our daily routine.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, a clinical professor of Family and Community Medicine, states, "The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention...A loving silence often has more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words."

Brene' Brown also explores this concept of being connected as it relates to empathy and connection. ([Empathy vs. Sympathy video](#)) Brown defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

MHA has "officially" begun this journey of learning what it means to be trauma-informed, but I think the agency has already traveled far...as one former program participant said of MHA and its staff, "They just love on you."

Love, Kindness, Connected. If we allow these words to guide our work and our lives, we'll create a better, more compassionate community, a community that acknowledges all the things we are carrying in our "suitcase," but doesn't allow those things to define our future.



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