

Activity # 1: Choosing a Correctional Career

How did you come to this profession? Was it a deliberate choice, the need for a job and paycheck, or accidental? Did you expect to stay?

Did you have any expectations about what it would be like to work in corrections?

Where did your expectations come from?

In what ways were you prepared or unprepared for the job?

What surprised you?

Can you remember how you felt on Day 1? Were you enthusiastic, prepared to make a difference and use your skills, anxious, or just needing to pay the bills? How do you feel differently about correctional work now compared to how you felt when you started?

Have circumstances changed over the course of your career? Do you feel differently about the work? How do you feel about staying in the corrections professional field?

Activity # 2: Exploring Your Personal History

As we discussed in Course 3: Effects of Trauma on the Lives of Justice-Involved Women, trauma can come from a wide variety of sources. Everyone is likely to experience some trauma in life, regardless of age, sex, income, education, or family of origin. Interpersonal violence is so prevalent in our society that most of us experience it in one form or another during the course of our lives. In fact, trauma is so common that it can be thought of as a universal experience.

People are naturally resilient, and most recover from the stresses and tragedies of life without severe lasting consequences. However, it is also possible that your experience of trauma can leave you vulnerable to stress reactions even years later. If something even reminds you of the traumatic event, you can be “triggered” and may reexperience some of the feelings you had during the original trauma.

Have you experienced any of these traumatic events? Place a check mark by any with a “yes” answer.

Yes	No	Traumatic Event
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Interpersonal violence, including child abuse, domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault, bullying, or being a victim or a witness of a violent crime: Can you remember how you felt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. War, terrorism, or natural disasters like losing your home due to a hurricane, tornado, earthquake, mudslide, forest fire, flooding, or draught: Can you remember how you felt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Social violence including home foreclosure, layoffs, budget issues, and what we see in our corrections population—poverty, racism, dislocation, or living in severely degraded environments: Can you remember how you felt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Historical trauma like being a member of a group that has experienced massive group trauma (examples include Native Americans, Holocaust survivors, Cambodian refugees, etc.): Can you remember how you felt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Life-threatening illness, accidents, or injuries—any event that destroys an individual’s sense of safety in the world can be traumatic, particularly if it occurs early in life or in a shocking manner. Can you remember how you felt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Do you think your experiences have had a lasting impact on you? Why or why not?

Activity # 3: Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences—Determining Your ACE Score

This activity is designed to help you determine your ACE score.

Events that occur in childhood have particular impact on us for several reasons. Children are dependent on adults for safety, and they often cannot understand what is happening and think it is their own fault. Also, their brains and nervous systems are still developing and can easily be affected by traumatic events. Early traumatic experiences may prime the system to be overly responsive to environmental stress, ultimately affecting multiple areas of mental and general health as well as social functioning.

The ACE study is a collaboration between Kaiser Permanente and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is conducted on people who were working and who had health insurance—people much like you. It is very likely that you and your coworkers had experiences like this in your childhood. These experiences can accumulate over time, and they can have a direct impact on your ability to do your job. The following exercise is for you alone—there is no need to share this information with anyone unless you choose to do so. However, many people find that knowing their own ACE score helps them better understand themselves and develop more effective self-care strategies.

Important Note: The topics addressed in the ACE questions shown below cover very personal and very private information. You are strongly encouraged to find a quiet location where you can reflect on your life experiences without being disturbed and without others looking over your shoulder to see what you are doing.

Below is a list of the 10 categories of potentially traumatic experiences that were included in the ACE study. Some of the categories show two or three questions that refer to experiences covered under the category. Think about your own life before the age of 18. If something from one of these categories happened to you, check the yes box for that category. Each yes answer equals 1 point. It does not matter if it happened once or a hundred times, you still get a 1 for that category. Your total ACE score can be anywhere from 0 to 10.

What Is Your ACE Score?

Prior to your 18 th birthday:	Yes	No
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often : a. Swear at you, insult you, or put you down? Or b. Humiliate you or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often : a. Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or b. Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever : a. Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or b. Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did you often or very often feel that: a. No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or b. Your family did not look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Did you often or very often feel that: a. You did not have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or b. Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Was your mother or stepmother: a. Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or b. Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or c. Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Did a household member go to prison?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Total number of Yes answers: _____. This is your ACE score.

Activity # 4: Understanding Your Personal History

What are some of the positive ways in which you have coped with stressors in your life?

How are you presently coping with life stressors?

Make a list of ways in which you can apply the same strengths and coping strategies in your day-to-day work in corrections.

Activity # 5: What Stresses You Out at Work?

Review the stressors listed below.

- Add any stressors that are not shown on the list.
- Place check marks beside the five things in your workplace that are most stressful for you.
- What could you do to reduce the level of stress you experience from these circumstances?

Remember that the key to self-care is not to avoid stress altogether, but to manage the stress in your life in such a way that you avoid the most negative consequences.

Most	Least	Correctional Facility Stressors	Most	Least	Community Agency Stressors
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leave personal belongings behind	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extreme caseload size
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Noise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Balancing work
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of natural light and fresh air	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shortage of program resources
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional and physical danger	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical danger in workplace, field
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Constant interruptions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrest/revocation decisions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Potential for life and death situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Being fair and impartial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shortage of internal resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Balancing needs of victims
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Closed environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Criminal justice system (defense attorneys, prosecutors, judges)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disturbing history and behaviors			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Low salaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Offenders
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shift work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The public
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Little positive feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Media
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff turnover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Your organizational policy and practice
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cramped working conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal liabilities in offender supervision
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure to bodily fluids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of input in decision making
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inadequate training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paperwork
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public disregard, no understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rehabilitation vs. enforcement roles
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bureaucracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Working with stakeholder agencies
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff entrenched in negative thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perceived as responsible for offender failure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Resisting organizational change			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Activity # 6: Working with a Female Population

What is it like to work with a female population?

What do you bring to the work that might be particularly helpful for the women offenders you work with?

What do you bring to the work that might be particularly challenging for you in working with women offenders?

Activity # 7: Self-Awareness

What sort of problems or people do you find it especially easy to empathize with?

What are some ways when caring about people who have been hurt affects you?

What are the first signs that you are being affected?

Are you usually able to recognize these signs before they affect your behavior in any major way?

Activity # 8: Early Warning Signs of Extreme Stress

List your early warning signs of extreme stress. Talk with the person you have enlisted to help you monitor your stress level. Identify what you perceive to be your early warning signs of stress, and ask what he or she notices when you start getting overwhelmed.

Your helper might see things that you are missing. Work out a way for them to communicate with you even when you are experiencing an intense state. For example, you might decide on a specific word or phrase that you agree ahead of time to always pay attention to.

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good to go • Adapting / flexible • Excellent at job <p><i>I am at the top of my game and adapt well to all pressures.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mild distress • Temporary symptoms • Still getting the job done <p><i>Stress is affecting me, but I can still get the job done 100%.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticeable symptoms • Personality change • Erratic functioning <p><i>I have changed so that I am not in total control of my behavior or reactions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe impairment • Extremely overwhelmed • Possible danger to self / others <p><i>This worsening condition requires full attention before getting back to work.</i></p>
Self Interventions —————>			
Facilitated Session —————>			
Professional Care —————>			
Rest Strongly Recommended —>			

Adapted from Maritime COSC Doctrine and COSFA Manual

Activity # 9: Identifying Triggers

Try to identify your own emotional hot buttons and recognize when they are being pushed.

Are there certain environmental conditions such as smells or types of lighting that bother you? If yes, make a list below.

How do you react when you think someone is not being truthful or seems to make demands on you?

At work, if someone feels unnecessarily controlling, do you back away, get angry, shut down, or avoid the person?

Are there things that people say or do that cause you to react intensely, even if you do not know why? If yes, list these things below.

Activity # 10: Identifying Your Own Self-Care Strategies

Identify some personal strategies that in your experience have worked well to help you overcome stressful or traumatic events or circumstances. Show how often you engage in each activity. Also identify some of your default behaviors—behaviors you tend to fall back to when you are under stress—that do not always work out well. Notice if your strategies and default behaviors fall primarily into one category or another (physical, emotional, etc.). If so, consider developing some new self-care strategies in the other domains.

Personal Strategies that Work Well	Default Behaviors that Do Not Always Work Well
<p>How can you increase your use of effective strategies when they are most needed?</p>	

Activity # 11: Creating a Trauma-Informed Organization

The five core values that characterize trauma-informed organizations identified by Falot and Harris are safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Below are a set of key questions you can use to determine how well your organization applies the five values of a trauma-informed organization to the staff who work there. For all “no” answers, identify what you can do to help improve your organization’s trauma-informed values. Use the space provided below and on the next page.

Core Value	Question	Yes	No
Safety	Do staff feel both physically and psychologically safe in their jobs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do supervisors and administrators actively work to avoid a culture of blame?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If something goes wrong, are you confident that the situation will be handled well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trustworthiness	Do staff trust their supervisors and administrators to be fair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Are policies and procedures implemented consistently, or does it seem like some groups or individuals get special treatment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Is information about the organization openly shared with all staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choice	Do supervisors and administrators attempt to give staff choices whenever possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If changes need to be made unexpectedly, is every attempt made to involve staff in the decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaboration	Do staff have an opportunity to participate in organizational planning and decision making?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Are they included on advisory boards, quality improvement committees, research planning groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Are staff valued for their experience and expertise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Does management actively seek out staff opinion on program issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Empowerment	Are staff encouraged to try new things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Are staff supported both psychologically and financially for engaging in self-improvement activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Are staff expected to grow both within the organization and to move on to other organizations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Activity # 11: Creating a Trauma-Informed Organization *(continued)*

Core Value	What You Can Do to Help Improve Your Organization
Safety	
Trustworthiness	
Choice	
Collaboration	
Empowerment	