



Transforming the Role of Food in Wellness & Dietary Behavior Change: A Trauma-Informed Approach

What are Trauma-Informed Nutrition Programs?

Trauma-informed nutrition programs (TIN) seek to create robust program participation, broaden acceptance of healthy values, build resilience and promote long term change by prioritizing trust, interpersonal connections, and empowering, emotionally positive experiences that inspire authentic behavior change.

Why Trauma-Informed Food and Nutrition Programs?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACES), poverty, abuse, violence, addiction, housing status, and food insecurity heavily impact individuals' resources, choices, behaviors, priorities, and health status. The real needs of participants who experience trauma are not met when their lives are not understood and incorporated into nutrition programs. Participants may feel disinterested, alienated, frustrated or harmed by traditional public health approaches that do not support their dignity and may perpetuate shame.

What is a Trauma-Informed Nutrition Program?

A trauma-informed nutrition program:

- Conducts positive, community-building, and learner-centered programs to build healthy relationships to food and inspire nourishment of oneself and others. Program focus is the perspective and experience of participants.
- Recognizes that well-intentioned nutrition interventions can be disempowering and counterproductive to meaningful engagement and the adoption of healthful behaviors. Strategies to mitigate potential harm are employed.
- Applies the science of trauma to understanding the role of food in our lives, how we decide what to eat, and the relationship between trauma and physical health. This understanding is emphasized by program content.

Best Practices of a Trauma-Informed Nutrition Program

Participants in a trauma-informed program experience:

- Culturally-competent programming and activities that recognize the emotional and psychological dimensions of food, provided by staff

well-trained in trauma-informed services.

- Nutrition messages and approaches aligned with their stage of readiness, priorities and capacities
- A program environment that supports stress de-escalation, healthy choices and wellness practices with consistent modelling, policy and messaging
- Opportunities to exercise voice, choice and self-determination
- Acknowledgment of anxieties, fears, and past experiences
- Consideration for the cultural, socio-economic, historical, age, and gender-related factors that affect their health and relationship to food
- Community-building activities such as story sharing, group cooking, or group meals that build relationships, interpersonal skills, and joy
- Cultivation of mutual self-help and leadership skills
- Exploration of individual needs, values, interests, strengths, barriers and goals
- Opportunity to develop skills that support autonomy and self-efficacy such as: cooking, shopping, decision-making, planning, and resource seeking
- Development of coping skills to address barriers to good nourishment, health, and wellness
- Mindfulness strategies that build self awareness and create meaning around food choices, eating behaviors, and stress reduction

Current Projects and Opportunities

- **Feeding Potrero.** Leah's Pantry works with Community Health Leaders to provide delicious, healthy, scratch-cooked dinners for community members who participate in the Healthy Generations program two nights per week.
- **Organizational Trainings.** Leah's Pantry integrates these concepts and introduces these ideas during all training programs for social services and hunger relief organizations.
- **Partnering with community groups.** We are seeing partnerships with programs who have an active, committed groups of resident/community leaders who are interested in co-creating trauma informed nutrition and cooking programs in their community.