

## **TRAUMA DRAMA: AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR VIOLENCE EXPOSED YOUTH [5219]**

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### **Workshop Summary**

Urban Improv is an interactive theater and educational youth violence prevention program serving Boston Public School students. This program utilizes drama improvisation as a means of preparing children for potentially violent conflict situations and providing alternative solutions.

According to research, Urban Improv has helped to prevent increased or new-onset aggressive behaviors in 4<sup>th</sup> graders while increasing their prosocial behaviors and classroom engagement. However, it appears to be less effective with youth with prior exposure to violent traumatic events, such as community violence, intra-familial violence, and assault because these children are significantly more likely to either engage in or become victims of violent acts in the future. Therefore, to reach those children in the Boston Public Schools system who are at highest risk of youth violence outcomes due to prior trauma and violence exposure, the Trauma Drama (TD) intervention program was developed. This tertiary prevention/intervention component targets young adolescents with histories of prior exposure to violence and trauma.

The manual for the TD curriculum was developed over the past year by a team of Urban Improv actors, educators, and psychologists. A clinically informed theater-based program for traumatized youth, it that aims to reduce their risk of perpetrating and/or becoming victims of violence. The TD curriculum is based on the existing Urban Improv protocol incorporated into a phase-oriented child trauma treatment framework emphasizing safety, stabilization, skill acquisition, and community building. The TD protocol includes stress management, cooperative play, and action-oriented therapeutic techniques for traumatized children.

This year, a pilot evaluation of the TD component was conducted with a group of students at a specialized day school for children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities (COMPASS). The program was piloted across a twice-weekly, 30-session period between January and May 2004 in roughly 75-minute sessions. All of the students who participated in the TD pilot had been exposed to at least one high magnitude stressor, such as community violence, domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect. Many students had experienced multiple traumas over their lifetimes. The student population was an ethnically diverse, multiracial sample, and nearly all of the students, who were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, resided in high-crime neighborhoods and communities.

This workshop will focus on the process whereby an interdisciplinary team developed the TD curriculum and reviewed the general program protocol. Primarily interactive and experiential, the workshop is designed to walk participants through representative phases of the intervention program and to use the experiential portions to teach participants about the phase-based treatment of trauma and the goals of violence prevention.

The workshop will also include discussion of issues regarding interdisciplinary collaboration, developmental and cultural considerations, and group dynamics.

## **Workshop Goals**

Participants will be introduced, through interactive, experiential activities, to Trauma Drama, a clinically informed theater-based program for traumatized youth that aims to reduce their risk of perpetrating and/or becoming victims of violence. The curriculum is based on the existing Urban Improv protocol incorporated with a phase-oriented child trauma treatment framework emphasizing safety, stabilization, skill acquisition, and community building. The presentation will be an interactive, experiential workshop designed to walk participants through representative phases of the intervention program.

## **Workshop Objectives**

1. To present and describe the process of developing the program and its four phases.
2. To allow participants to actively participate in representative activities and scenes from each of the four phases of the program.
3. To discuss how the program model and program activities can be incorporated into participants' work with children, adolescents, or adults in individual, group, school, or residential settings.

## **Workshop Activities**

1. 20-minute presentation by Dr. Spinazzola on the development of the curriculum and its components
2. 10-minute question and answer period
3. 20-minute experiential component to practice representative activities from the Safety and Skills Building phase of the program
4. 50-minute experiential component to practice representative activities from the Youth Violence phase of the program (including an Opening Circle activity, a Youth Violence scene, and two therapeutic exercises)
5. 50-minute experiential component to practice representative activities from the Trauma Processing phase of the program (including a Trauma Processing scene, two therapeutic exercises, and a Closing Circle activity)
6. Availability of the presenters to answer questions after the workshop

## **Assessment**

There will be four indicators of success for this workshop. These four indicators will be measured through observation and discussion with workshop participants and through formal and/or informal feedback that they may provide. At the end of the workshop, all participants will be asked to complete a rating form assessing several indices of their satisfaction with the workshop (see attached TD workshop rating form).

1. Participants will demonstrate an understanding of the program and have an opportunity to ask questions of the presenters that will enhance their understanding of and ability to utilize the curriculum.
2. Participants will be inspired to utilize the curriculum, or selected components, in their clinics, schools, or residential programs.
3. Participants will demonstrate a high level of engagement and active participation in the experiential training components of the workshop.
4. Participants—by experiencing the program components first hand—will sense the advantages of using a phase-oriented action-based program for trauma intervention and violence prevention.

## **Resources**

For more information on training in this intervention, contact The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute at [www.traumacenter.org](http://www.traumacenter.org) or send an e-mail Dr. Spinazzola at [jspinazzola@traumacenter.org](mailto:jspinazzola@traumacenter.org).

For more information about Urban Improv, contact Urban Improv at [www.urbanimprov.org](http://www.urbanimprov.org), or send an e-mail [info@urbanimprov.org](mailto:info@urbanimprov.org).

## **References**

- Kinniburgh, K., Blaustein, M., Spinazzola, J., and van der Kolk, B. (2005). Attachment, self-regulation, and competency: A specific intervention framework targets children with complex trauma. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5), 424-430.
- Kisiel, C., Blaustein, M., Spinazzola, J., Swift Schmidt, C., Zucker, M., and van der Kolk, B. Evaluation of a Theater-Based Youth Violence Prevention Program for Elementary School Children. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Spinazzola, J., Alley, A., Blaustein, M., Dewey, T., Jones, R., Perkins, M., Soloway, F., and Smith, K. (2005). Trauma Drama: Urban Improv-intensive protocol for middle school-aged children exposed to trauma and violence. Unpublished Manuscript, The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute.

## THE TRAUMA CENTER AT JUSTICE RESOURCE INSTITUTE

### Evaluation Form

Trainer: Joseph Spinazzola, Ph.D.  
Site: Persistently Safe Schools 2005

**Training Topic: Trauma Drama: An Intervention Program for Violence Exposed Youth**

**Please rate the overall training by circling a number for each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>		<b>Somewhat Agree</b>		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
I was satisfied with the quality of the workshop.	1	2	3	4	5
I found the training useful to my work.	1	2	3	4	5
I will be able to incorporate material from the workshop into my work.	1	2	3	4	5
The presenter had adequate knowledge of the topics covered.	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation of the material was understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
My questions/needs were addressed.	1	2	3	4	5
The opportunity to actively participate in and practice curriculum components was helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
The handouts provided were helpful.	1	2	3	4	5

**Comments:**