

Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment

What Child-Serving Organizations Need to Know

The NCTSN TIOA is a no-cost, practical, validated measure for assessing organizational trauma-informed practices, identifying strengths and opportunities to grow, and creating actionable plans for improvement.

What Makes Trauma-Informed Care Challenging to Implement

Over two-thirds of children experience at least one traumatic event by age 16.¹ Yet many providers — across healthcare, child welfare, juvenile justice, and education — express uncertainty about how to operationalize trauma-informed care (TIC) in everyday practice. Good intentions are not enough. Real change requires shifting the entire organization: hiring practices, supervision, physical environments, and policy — not just clinical training.

While TIC refers to the overarching organizational approach, trauma-informed practices (TIP) are the specific behaviors, actions, and procedures that operationalize TIC principles in day-to-day practice. Organizations can assess and strengthen these practices to advance TIC.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment (NCTSN TIOA)

Since 2000, the NCTSN has been at the forefront of improving care for children and families affected by trauma. Drawing on that expertise, the NCTSN developed the Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment (TIOA) — an assessment measure rooted in implementation science that focuses on TIP rather than values or attitudes. Research shows that organizations are more likely to sustain change when they focus on specific practices, and the TIOA was designed with this in mind.²

The TIOA helps organizations move beyond training alone to examine the systems that shape trauma-informed care — including supervision, policies, and staff support. It was developed through a rigorous item selection process with input from trauma-informed care experts, direct service providers, administrators, trainers, and people with lived expertise.



What the Data Shows

Published in *Child Maltreatment* (Purbeck et al., 2025),³ the development and validation study involved 1,224 staff members across 23 child-serving organizations. Key findings include:

1 Excellent internal consistency across all nine domains (Cronbach's alpha >0.93) and moderate to good test-retest reliability — confirming the TIOA reliably measures what it is designed to measure and produces consistent results.

2 Usability across child-serving settings including outpatient mental health, healthcare, residential treatment, social services, and juvenile justice — with few differences across staff roles or racial/ethnic groups, supporting organization-wide administration.

Participating organizations reported that the TIOA helped translate abstract TIC principles into actionable practices, created a shared language across departments, and guided meaningful change.

What Your Organization Will Be Measuring

The TIOA provides a comprehensive assessment of 87 practices across nine domains of trauma-informed care defined by the NCTSN's framework for trauma-informed child and family service systems.⁴ It uniquely incorporates practices related to culture, race, and trauma, as well as partnership with youth and families.

1

Trauma Screening

5

Addressing Parent/
Caregiver Trauma

2

Assessment, Care
Planning and Treatment

6

Continuity of Care and
Cross-System Collaboration

3

Workforce Development

7

Addressing, Reducing and Treating
Secondary Traumatic Stress

4

Strengthening Resilience
and Protective Factors

8

Partnering with Youth
and Families

9

Addressing the Intersection
of Culture, Race and Trauma

How to Use the TIOA

Staff rate each of the 87 items on a 1–5 scale (Never to Always). Domain scores are calculated to identify patterns of strength and opportunity for practice improvement. The TIOA is designed to be administered organization-wide — not just by clinical staff — and re-administered after practice changes to track progress.

How the TIOA Benefits Your Organization

- Identify strengths to build on and opportunities to grow
- Create a roadmap for sustainable organizational change
- Establish a shared language around TIP across your team and community
- Track progress over time with a validated, repeatable measure
- Generate actionable, organization-level recommendations

Get Started

The TIOA is most effective when paired with a structured implementation process that includes leadership engagement, staff participation, and action planning.

1. Reflect:

What does your organization currently do to assess trauma-informed practices? Who is involved in that process?

2. Learn:

Review the [NCTSN TIOA website](#) to explore pathways for implementation and hear from organizations that have used the assessment.

Access the [TIOA and implementation support materials on the NCTSN Learning Center](#) at no cost.

3. Assess fit:

Use the NCTSN TIOA Readiness and Fit Worksheet (part of the implementation supports) to assess fit (e.g., Does your organization's leadership team demonstrate their commitment to supporting the effort required for engaging in the TIOA process? Is your organization committed to implementing changes resulting from the TIOA?)

4. Connect:

Contact TIOA@nctsn.org for consultation.

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- 1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2016). Understanding child trauma (SMA16-4923): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from. https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma16-4923_0.pdf
 - 2 Aarons, G. A., Hurlburt, M., & Horwitz, S. M. (2011). Advancing a conceptual model of evidence-based practice implementation in public service sectors. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 38(1), 4–23.
 - 3 Purbeck C. A., Liang L. J., Glazkova L., Agosti J., Liu J. H., Halladay Goldman J. (2025). Development and performance of the national child traumatic stress network trauma-informed organizational assessment. *Child Maltreatment*, Article 10775595251399911. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595251399911>
 - 4 National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2016). Creating trauma-informed systems. Retrieved March 24, 2026, from. <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/creating-trauma-informed-systems>

Suggested Citation:

Glazkova, L., Purbeck, C. (2026). TIOA Data At-A-Glance: What Child-Serving Organizations Need to Know. Los Angeles, CA and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.