

# Discussion Questions: Trauma-Informed Living

Use the questions to guide in-class discussion, or post them to the Collaboration Corner.

## Unit 1: Personal Wellness

### Personal Safety

#### Bodily Safety

1. Do you think bodily safety is emphasized enough in sports? Why or why not?
2. Who is ultimately in charge of your bodily safety? Who needs to advocate for it, even if no one else is?
3. What does it mean to “listen to your body”? How does it send us signals when it’s feeling too pushed, unsafe, or uncomfortable?

#### Emotional Safety

1. What is your definition of the most peaceful place on earth? What are the sensory details of being in that place, such as what you hear, see, smell, feel, taste, etc.?
2. What does emotional safety mean to you?
3. Why is it important to confide in others when we need to protect our emotional health?

#### Relational Safety

1. What should you do if you find yourself in a relationship that might not be healthy for you?
2. Have you ever been in an unhealthy relationship? What were some telltale signs or gut feelings you had that told you there was probably something wrong?
3. How can we be there for friends or loved ones if we think they might be in an unhealthy relationship, without overstepping our boundaries?

#### Parental or Caregiver Safety

1. How can you support a friend or peer that you feel is in danger at home?
2. What types of situations should you report to a school counselor if you feel you are unsafe with a parent or caregiver?
3. Why is it important to seek resources if your family or home is engaging in a lot of conflict? Does it mean you will automatically be removed from the home?

#### Sexual Safety

1. How can you find more information or get access to resources for practicing sexual safety?
2. Why is it important to spread awareness about sexual safety?
3. Why is being pressured into saying “yes,” but still using the word “yes,” NOT actually giving consent?

### Recognizing Potential Barriers

#### ADHD

1. What are some of the positives of having ADHD? How can someone with ADHD use it to their advantage?
2. Why do you think ADHD is one of the most commonly misdiagnosed disorders? What are the dangers of this for both the misdiagnosed person and society as a whole?
3. How can people with ADHD manage its effects, such as the inability to relax or focus?

#### Panic Attacks

1. What are the signs and symptoms of having a panic attack?
2. Do you or someone you know experience panic attacks? What are ways you’ve noticed yourself or others deal with these experiences?

3. Why is it so beneficial to reach out to someone for help while you're having a panic attack, rather than just letting yourself experience it?

#### Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

1. What is the difference between OCD and anxiety?
2. What is the difference between having OCD and simply liking a clean, orderly space?
3. In the video, Elijah said that OCD "is not something you have to understand to respect." Why is this so important when interacting with someone who has OCD?

#### Sleep Problems & Insomnia

1. Do you think you spend too much time on social media or watching tv before you go to sleep? How do you think those things affect your current sleep schedule?
2. What things help you fall asleep? Do you only do them when you have trouble sleeping, or are you cognizant of these patterns on a daily basis?
3. Who can you talk to if you're having trouble sleeping? When might it be time to talk to a doctor or seek professional help if at-home techniques aren't working?

#### Internet Addiction

1. Why do you think it's so easy to get caught up on the Internet and with our social media presence?
2. Do you think social media and the Internet is making us more or less connected with one another, and in a positive or negative way?
3. How can you be more mindful of how present you are with others around you and how much you are connecting with them without being distracted by your phone?

#### Self-Esteem

##### Body Image & Eating Disorders

1. Do you think we see ourselves differently than others see us? Why?
2. What are three self-affirmation words that you can tell yourself every day to boost your self-esteem?
3. How can social media falsely affect the way we see ourselves compared to others?

##### It's All About Perspective

1. What is something you're self-conscious about that you felt like everyone else was noticing too? Were they actually?
2. How can we balance out those negative thoughts about ourselves when they arise?
3. How can we talk to others to gain a better perspective about ourselves?

##### Emotional Eating

1. What are your eating habits like? Do you plan out what you're going to eat before you eat it?
2. Why do you think it's sometimes easy for people to turn to food during emotional situations?
3. What are some things you can do to make your eating schedule more regular or have a healthier relationship with food?

##### Ethical Issues

1. How does self-esteem influence ethical decision-making?
2. What are three things that you believe to be true about yourself? How do you think those things affect the way you make decisions?
3. How can you give positive affirmations to others when you think they are acting out of insecurity?

##### How to Be Self-Confident

1. How might improving self-confidence look different for everyone?
2. What are your biggest passions? How can you do more of them?
3. What are three positive affirmations you have about yourself?

### Helplessness to Hopefulness

#### Reaching Out to Others

1. How can reaching out to others make us hopeful?
2. What are your unique personal characteristics? Do the people around you and activities you engage in help bring those characteristics out?
3. What is one thing you do or have done that was to bring out a positive attribute you have (i.e., joining a club, seeking out others that share the same interest, etc.)?

#### Being Honest with Reality

1. What is your reality like right now? Have you fully accepted it yet? If not, why?
2. How can you accept your past or present so that you can deal with the emotions involved and find hope?
3. Do you tend to avoid reality or deal with it in the moment? Who can you confide in to help you come to terms with your circumstances in a healthy way?

#### Rejection to Restoration

1. When have you felt rejected? Why do you feel things happened the way they did in that situation?
2. Do you think we will face rejection more or less as we get older? How can learning how to deal with rejection right now set us up for more success later?
3. You are the only person that knows the true you – everyone else's idea of you is based only on snapshots that they have been shown. How can others' perceptions of us be incomplete or false and lead to rejection? Is this a true reflection of ourselves?

#### Finding the Source of Helplessness

1. How can letting go of our need to be in control of situations actually lead to hopefulness? What are examples of situations that we are not able to control, no matter how hard we try?
2. When have you felt helpless? How did you deal with the situation and what did you learn about yourself?
3. How can the feeling of helplessness be an opportunity to look more deeply within ourselves and become stronger?

#### Changing Our Negative Thinking

1. Are you mindful of how often you have positive and negative thoughts? How can you practice stopping negative thoughts as they happen and change them into positive ones?
2. Do you think your thoughts tend to be positive or negative? What things usually lead to negative thoughts?
3. Who is the most positive person you know? How do they handle challenges?

## Unit 2: Living with Trauma

### Social-Emotional Trauma

#### Trauma and PTSD

1. Why do you think it's important to revisit any old scars that went unhealed or untreated as we get older?
2. What can happen if you are not given the appropriate amount of time to grieve after something traumatic happens?
3. Why is it important that we talk to someone we trust when going through the process of revisiting old scars and healing past emotional trauma?

#### Breaking Through Social Stereotypes

1. Why is focusing on your inner and personal perception of yourself the only way to break through social stereotypes?
2. How do your skill sets, work ethic, and passions increase your self-esteem?
3. What is a social stereotype that others have or have had about you? Have you broken it yet, or do you still need to do inner work on it? How did/might that inner work look?

#### Trauma and Success

1. Have you ever had an adult act as your mentor or role model? What about that person made you look up to them so much? How did this relationship help you learn and grow?
2. Trauma and negative experiences can impact our success on all levels – if we choose to let it. How can you or someone choose to work against the negative effects of trauma and use it as fuel to motivation?
3. Have you ever been vulnerable in opening up about something with an adult? How did it feel, or how would it feel? How can we get past the initial discomfort of being vulnerable to develop a supportive, meaningful relationship?

#### ACEs Scores & Graduation

1. What does "ACE" stand for? Have you ever thought about what counts as an ACE score?
2. What does "resiliency" mean? How does the way we handle negative experiences relate to how we can embody the spirit of resiliency in all other areas of our lives down the road?
3. Does knowing what ACE scores are and the ways it can impact an individual change the way you see others? Is there anyone you had preconceived judgments about, that could be explained by dealing with the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences?

#### Experiencing Loss

1. Is death the only experience that constitutes as "loss," in terms of emotional trauma? Why is it important that we don't allow ourselves to minimize other types of loss in comparison to death?
2. How can you be there for someone that is experiencing a loss, whether it be involving death, divorce, incarceration, or the loss of a relationship? Is it more important to just listen or to try to heal in these situations?
3. Have you ever tried writing down how you're feeling? How can you learn about your emotions by reading them back to yourself?

### Real-Life Childhood Trauma

#### Protecting Our Family

1. If a friend comes to you about experiencing family abuse, why is it important that you reach out to someone, even if you are asked not to? How can you support your friend in a way that still leads to getting help, but also respects their feelings?
2. What are the long-term mental consequences of bottling up experiences with family abuse? How is reaching out to someone for support almost the only option for recovery?
3. Should we be ashamed of the things we endure as a result of other people's actions? How can we detach the stigma for ourselves and others so that it is no longer a barrier for receiving help?

### Unjust Criminal Charges

1. Do you know anyone that may have been wrongfully accused of a crime? Do you know someone that knew someone that may have been wrongfully accused of a crime?
2. Why is it important to be thoughtful about how you respond and cope with situations that are outside of your control, such as legal action?
3. How can anger and resentment towards a person or situation impair our ability to handle it appropriately?

### Trauma That Leads to Pain & Suicidal Thoughts

1. What is the first warning sign that we can recognize in ourselves that indicate our need to talk to a trusted adult or a professional about the way we're feeling?
2. What are warning signs in others that indicate that they may need emotional support or guidance towards professional help?
3. Why is isolation so detrimental to mental health when dealing with problems or hardships?

### Neglect and Abandonment

1. What are some different examples of situations that constitute neglect and abandonment? Are some easier to recognize than others?
2. Is experiencing neglect or abandonment something to be ashamed about? How can we make sure our feelings of guilt or embarrassment don't get in the way of getting the help we need?
3. If we are not getting the love or support that we need from a loved one, how can reaching out help us receive it from someone else, such as another family member or friend's parent? Is there anything wrong in letting others take on that role for you?

### Natural or Uncontrollable Disasters

1. Have you ever experienced a natural or uncontrollable disaster that impacted you long-term? What was it, and how did it affect you?
2. Why should you still reach out to others if a negative event is still affecting you, even if it's something that doesn't seem very serious or that everyone else went through, too?
3. How might dealing with situations that are completely outside of our control be different from coping with the consequences of our own decisions? How are the feelings we have in each situation similar and different?

## Dealing with Depression

### What is Depression?

1. Do you think depression is commonly misunderstood? How do you think most people around you understand it?
2. What are some signs of depression in yourself and in others?
3. How might holidays be particularly hard for those suffering from depression?

### How Common is Depression?

1. Why do you think females have higher rates of depression than men? Do you agree with the idea in the video, that females are more likely to vocalize and find help with their emotions?
2. How common do you think depression is from your perspective?
3. Do you think those your age would be comfortable reaching out for help with their depression? Why or why not?

### Depressed Friends

1. What are some physical signs of a depressed friend or loved one? What are some verbal signs?
2. How can reaching out and directly asking someone about how they're doing let that person know that you care? Do you think it is reassuring to know that they are being noticed, even in a way they may not be proud of?

3. Why is it more helpful to reach out to an adult or professional if a loved one is depressed, rather than personally trying to fix their problems?

#### How to Recognize Depression

1. Do you think symptoms of depression differ based on the person?
2. Do you think depression can go unnoticed in the person suffering from it, until it becomes a “dark cloud?” How can we support others in this stage, keeping in mind that their feelings are likely beyond their control?
3. How does your attitude and behavior tend to differ when you are feeling down versus when you are happy?

#### Causes of Depression

1. Who gets to decide if your cause of depression or sadness is valid?
2. How can you refrain from judging another person’s reason for sadness? Do we really ever know the complete picture of what a person is going through?
3. What are some different causes of depression you’ve seen in others? How might different factors affect people differently?

#### Overcoming Anxiety

##### How to Deal with and Overcome Anxiety

1. What is the difference between occasional and significant anxiety, according to the video?
2. How does anxiety show up in your life?
3. Even if you don’t experience anxiety right now, how could you see your knowing about symptoms and remedies helping you in the future?

##### How to Feel Better

1. What helps you calm down, get focused, or in tune with yourself?
2. Close your eyes and think about your “happy place.” Then, share what that looks like, smells like, sounds like, and feels like in your mind.
3. Why is it important to focus on something you can immediately control when feeling anxious? Does anxiety stem from feeling “out of control?”

##### Who Should I Tell and Not Tell?

1. Who are some school employees available at your school to talk to if you are having trouble with anxiety?
2. If talking to your friends or family about your anxiety doesn’t work, who should you turn to?
3. Would you be willing to seek help from a professional if you are unsure of how to deal with your anxiety? Why or why not?

##### How to Get Help

1. Have you ever talked to someone about your feelings of anxiety or hardship? What happened when you did?
2. If you reach out to someone and don’t get much help out of it, should you keep looking for others to confide in? Or should you just give up and deal with it? Why?
3. Who are two people in your life that you would feel comfortable talking to about your feelings of anxiety? Why?

##### Prevention

1. What does self-care mean to you? How do you practice self-care?
2. Are you aware of how different things affect you and trigger anxious feelings? How can you create a plan for you to handle those things when they happen?
3. When can you take five minutes in your daily schedule to recoup and refocus?

**Unit 3: Mental Health Awareness & Assistance**Prevention of Mental Health DisordersMaintaining a Routine Schedule

1. Do you have a routine schedule? What is it like on a normal day-to-day basis?
2. How does a change in schedule affect you? Do you agree that it can throw off your thinking and energy patterns?
3. How can you be better at maintaining a routine schedule and organizing day?

Paying Attention to Warning Signs

1. Why is it important to pay attention to changes in behavior, rather than specific behaviors, when it comes to being able to identify warning signs in others?
2. How do you tend to react when you feel down, disappointed, or in an unhappy mood?
3. What things have you been able to notice in others when they are feeling down? Is there anything you specifically look for or pick up on that wasn't mentioned in the video?

Relationship Boundaries

1. What are some boundaries that you need to have in your relationships?
2. How do you communicate your boundaries or things that you don't appreciate to others?
3. How can you set boundaries in your relationships without offending or hurting the other person?

Resisting Isolation

1. What did Aniah mean in the video when she said, "You isolate yourself mentally before you isolate yourself physically?"
2. Why can being alone in your mind be a bad thing?
3. Isolating yourself is not always a bad thing when you are processing your emotions. How can you make sure you are aware of the extent to which you are isolating yourself before it gets unhealthy?

Communicating Stress in the Moment

1. How can stress show up in the body physically? Why is it important to pay attention to these signs, too?
2. What does it mean to "communicate stress in the moment?"
3. How does stress make you feel? Does it make you want to shut down and stop everything, or go on hyperdrive and act quickly?

Reducing the Stigma of Mental HealthFeeling Sad About What We Feel

1. How can we let our mistakes or flaws roll off of us, rather than make us feel bad about ourselves?
2. Why is it important to sometimes think about yourself from another's point of view? Do you think we tend to take ourselves more seriously than we should or hold ourselves to higher standards than we would hold others?
3. What is something you've blamed yourself for and need to release from your conscience? If there isn't anything right now, when have you experienced this in the past?

Feeling Ashamed for Being Depressed

1. Do you agree that "highs don't come without the lows," like Angel said in the video?
2. When have you experienced great things after feeling "low?" What did that feel like when they finally came?
3. How can you remain hopeful during hard times, knowing that better days WILL and ARE on their way?

It's Ok to Talk About It

1. Do you think mental health is talked about enough?
2. Do you think by not talking about mental health as a normal thing that affects everyone, we're actually worsening our mental health problems? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree that if others truly feel like we are letting them down, they probably have too high of standards for us? Explain.

Protecting Those with Mental Health Illnesses

1. How can one person standing up for another, respecting someone's differences, or starting a conversation with someone new start a ripple effect in a social environment?
2. What does it mean to have an open mind? How do we protect others, just by being open minded to who they are and what they like?
3. How can one person standing up for someone, respecting someone's differences, or starting a conversation with someone new start a ripple effect in a social environment?

Minimizing the Importance of Issue

1. Has anyone ever minimized what you were going through, either emotionally or physically?
2. Why is it important to not compare how you think you would handle a situation with how someone else is handling a situation?
3. How can you remain true to yourself and your situation, regardless of whether others understand it the same way you do?

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health DisordersLong-Lasting Sadness

1. How have changes and different life stages affected you? Do you expect yourself to naturally adapt and transition without feelings of confusion, anxiety, sadness, or uncertainty?
2. Why is it important to give attention to the small things you feel but may not seem significant in the moment, rather than disregarding it and letting it sit inside you?
3. Do you think multiple small, seemingly insignificant things together have the power to create long-lasting sadness? Why or why not?

Being Irritable or Easily Frustrated

1. Can you think of a common theme behind times when you tend to be more easily irritable or frustrated? Is there usually something present within you, unrelated to the thing or person that is making you feel that way?
2. Do you tend to react to irritability and frustration, or refrain from acting before taking a step back to breathe and be calm?
3. What are common things that tend to irritate you? What things tend to make you happy? What things tend to make you angry?

Social Withdrawal

1. When you notice changes in your friends' behaviors, do you tend to let them be or try to reach out? Why?
2. Do you appreciate when others reach out to you when it is noticeable that you are going through a hard time or have a lot on your mind? What would you want them to say?
3. How can you still be there for people that may not be a close friend? How can we still support our acquaintances respectfully?

Excessive Fear, Worry or Anxiety

1. Do you have any specific fears or worries? Would you say they are excessive or controlled?

2. Do you know where your fears came from?
3. In the video, Aniah says, "If you're afraid of doing something, do it afraid." What does this mean to you? How do you personally relate to the quote?

#### Dramatic Changes in Eating or Sleeping Habits

1. What are your current habits? Do they frequently change or are they consistent?
2. How does a change in your habits affect you?
3. When you're bothered or upset, do you think about how you will feel about the issue in three weeks? A month? How can doing this help?

#### Warning Signs

##### Depression Warning Signs

1. If you see someone else showing warning signs of depression, how can you appropriately support them?
2. Why do you think it's hard for a person that is depressed to take action for their own mental health? Is it because they just don't care?
3. How do you think socialization and relationship support systems play a role in depression? Is that always enough? What else matters?

##### Anxiety Warning Signs

1. Do you think anxiety is often misunderstood in society? Why or why not?
2. What is the difference between common, mild cases of anxiety and cases that indicate warning signs of something more serious and needing help?
3. How can you support others suffering from anxiety, even if you can't fully understand it yourself?

##### Manipulation & Abuse Warning Signs

1. Describe how you think the definition of a loving, healthy, respectful relationship looks and feels.
2. What are some signs of a controlling or possessive relationship?
3. "Hold loosely but love hard." What does that quote mean to you? Is it possible to love deeply and fully, while still respecting the person's individuality and independence?

##### Hopelessness Warning Signs

1. Can you think of ANY situations where a person might truly be hopeless?
2. Is it usually easier to see hope in a situation from an outside perspective than one of your own situations? Why or why not do you think that is?
3. How can the support of another person help you do the things that you know can give you hope, but require more energy than you're willing or capable of giving at the time?

##### Suicide Warning Signs

1. How can suicidal warning signs sometimes be misunderstood by others?
2. If you think someone is showing warning signs of suicide, how should you approach the situation?
3. What should you do if you find out a friend is experiencing suicidal thoughts, but doesn't want anyone to know? What is most important in the situation?

## Unit 4: Suicide Prevention

### Suicide Prevention

#### Talking about Suicide

1. Why is it important to remember that in almost all situations, life experiences and the emotions attached to them are only temporary?
2. Have you ever felt like you were never going to recover from a situation, and then you did? What have you learned from adversity?
3. How might a trusted ally be able to help you deal with suicidal thoughts or feelings of depression in a way that you might be able to cope with them successfully on your own?

#### What to Do If Your Friend Is Talking about Suicide

1. Is it your job to tell someone how they should feel or what they should do if they are feeling suicidal or depressed? What is your role in that situation?
2. What would you suggest to a friend who is suicidal? Should you keep their situation a secret if doing so could be a legitimate threat to their safety?
3. What does it mean to “validate someone’s experience”? How can you do this without validating their idea to harm themselves? What’s the difference?

#### Building Community and Support to Reduce Risk

1. Do you feel like your community currently does enough to reduce the risk of suicide? In your opinion, how could it be improved?
2. Why is important to be proactive in reducing the risk of suicide? What does that mean?
3. How can each individual person make a difference in reducing the risk of suicide in their community?

#### Finding Help Online & In Your Community

1. Have you ever used the Internet to research how to cope with hardships?
2. Where else could you find help in your community if you needed it?
3. How can you help release the stigma of using online and community resources for mental health?

#### Reducing the Stigma and Shame of Suicide

1. How can you be understanding of another’s situation, even if you have never gone through it yourself or feel like you would handle it differently?
2. What does it mean to “normalize the conversation”? How might we all do that?
3. In your opinion, should we get “checkups” for mental health? Why or why not?

### Identifying Suicide Risks and Protective Factors

#### Mental Health & Substance Abuse

1. Where do you think addiction comes from?
2. How do mental health and substance use affect each other?
3. Do you think substance use is a way to suppress emotions? Do you think it actually works that way?

#### Evaluate Your Circle

1. How do the people we surround ourselves with affect us?
2. How can negative influences impact you more than you even realize?
3. What qualities do you look for and value in the people you choose to be in your circle?

#### Thinking Objectively about Our Feelings

1. What does it mean to think “objectively?”
2. What is the difference between “subjective” and “objective?”
3. How can we control our responses to our thoughts, even though we usually can’t control our thoughts themselves?

“Just Take it Easy, Man”

1. What does it mean to have an “easy-going” personality?
2. Is it always easy to be easy going? How can we work on this?
3. Who is the most easy-going person you know? How do they tend to react to situations?

Self-Care is Not Selfish

1. How do you practice self-care?
2. Do you think we prioritize self-care enough? How or how not?
3. How is mental health like planting a flower in terms of taking care of it?

There's No Shame in Asking for HelpEmbracing Vulnerability

1. What does it mean to be vulnerable?
2. Is it easy to ask for help? How can you become more okay with being vulnerable?
3. Why does it matter who you open up to and be vulnerable with?

Leaning on Others

1. What is the difference between leaning on others and leaning on others too much?
2. How can older people be better at giving you guidance and advice than people your age?
3. Who are you most likely to go to for help with a situation you are having?

Letting Others Lean on You

1. Why is it important to make sure you understand the full complexity of a person's situation before you can help support him or her?
2. How do you let others lean on you?
3. Do you feel like others lean on you often or would be comfortable doing so? How can you reach out and show your support for your loved ones even more?

Communication Techniques

1. How can you take the first step for someone else seeking or needing help?
2. Why is it important to make sure someone is comfortable with the help you'd like to give them? What does it mean to "meet someone where they're at?"
3. How can you communicate that you need help to someone you trust?

Change the Conversation

1. How does compassion play into changing the conversation about mental health and wellness?
2. How can you be an advocate for support instead of shame?
3. Where does shame come from?

Finding Available Community Suicide Prevention ResourcesLocal Crisis Centers

1. What are some available local crisis centers around us?
2. How can you find available local crisis centers?
3. Why do you think it is so scary to take the first step in getting help?

Hotlines

1. How does the ability to get help without being face-to-face help those not ready to talk in person?
2. What are some benefits of available hotlines?
3. How can hotlines be an extra resource for yourself or someone else?

Friends & Family

1. Where do you think the fear of being honest about your struggles comes from?
2. Do you think your loved ones have your best interest in mind? How can you find at least one person that supports you?
3. How often do you have personal conversations with your loved ones?

School Resources

1. Which teacher do you feel like you are personally close with?
2. Who can you go to in your school for mental health support?
3. Would you feel comfortable reaching out to school employees for help if you needed it? Why or why not?

Seeking Therapy

1. What are some stigmas around seeking therapy, in your opinion?
2. Should you expect to always have a good experience with a therapist? How does it relate to personal taste?
3. Do you think that we all could use some improvement in at least one area?