

# TEXAS LAWYER

## Providing Youth Trauma Training for Police Review Boards

Trauma “refers to an overwhelming and intense experience that often involves significant loss or harm to a person’s physical, emotional, and/or or psychological safety. Without such rudimentary knowledge, police review board members are not able to see youth in their true, three-dimensional context.” What exactly would trauma-informed training look like for a police review board?

By **Daniel Pollack & Elisa Reiter** | November 02, 2020 at 05:00 PM



Daniel Pollack, attorney and professor at Yeshiva University’s School of Social Work in New York City, and Elisa Reiter, Board Certified in Family Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Courtesy photos

We previously [asserted](#) that trauma “refers to an overwhelming and intense experience that often involves significant loss or harm to a person’s physical, emotional, and/or or psychological safety. Without such rudimentary knowledge, police review board members are not able to see youth in their true, three-dimensional context.” What exactly would trauma-informed training look like for a police review board?

The premise of the interactive training would be to alert police review board members to the fact that police officers and other law enforcement personnel may have experiences which could be affecting their overall health and job performance regarding interactions with youth. As well, the training would focus on how trauma can affect youth. The content would not be overly clinical. Instead, it would inform participants of trauma in a policing context so that they could appreciate and understand the challenges facing police officers as they carry out their duties. Especially in the present political environment such training is imperative.

A general training outline should include the following:

- Offer a research-based summary of the types, physiology, prevalence, and consequences of different kinds of trauma.
- Impart how police officers and youth may reconceptualize challenging situations and behaviors as adaptive responses to traumatic events.
- Present the elements of informed trauma-informed practice to develop efforts and strategies which will enhance youth and police officer safety and will help to identify personnel at risk.
- **Emphasize the impact of trauma on a police officer’s family and community as well as the officer as an individual.** Similarly, emphasize the impact of trauma on a youth and his or her family and community.

In Galveston, Texas, a Civilian Review Board has been created to investigate internal investigations of alleged Galveston police misconduct, including allegations of using excessive force, discharging

firearms, causing serious bodily injury to others, or any other type of investigation assigned for review by the Galveston chief of police. How does one qualify for service on the Galveston Civilian Review Board?

1. By not holding an elective public office;
2. By not being a city employee nor related to a city employee within a second degree of affinity or consanguinity, nor by a law enforcement agency;
3. By making a two-year commitment to serve and attending meetings;
4. By committing to and signing confidentiality agreements including a non-disclosure clause;
5. By not have a criminal history (no misdemeanors within three years of the appointment, excluding traffic offenses);
6. By participating in training sessions conducted by the Galveston Police Department;
7. By residing in the district from which the individual is appointed;
8. By completing a verified application.

(Ord. No. 08-038, § 2, 7-24-08; Ord. No. 08-070, § 2, 11-13-08; Ord. No. 12-066, § 2, 11-27-12)

There is a lack of definition within the Galveston ordinance as to what the police training should cover in sessions with Board members. Inclusion of some of the items suggested above would provide direction to such training sessions.

In October, 2020, members of the Dallas, Texas City Council pushed for more monitoring of the Community Police Oversight Board. Why? The Board recommended to the Council that the Council review and change city policy to eliminate prosecution of low-level marijuana cases, a recommendation urged by many, including Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot.

Civilian Review Board members should receive traditional methods of training including directives to maintain objectivity, neutrality and a detached cognitive set in evaluating cases that they are asked to review. In addition, such Board members should receive

training in a trauma-based model, encouraging them to bring a more empathetic perspective to cases. In assessing cases, Board members need to be able to understand positive policing behaviors, including protection of the public, self-protection, empathy, awareness of the alleged perpetrator, and ability to adapt behavior to new situations and demands.

Board members need to create comfort for officers in the course of the review process, in what is inherently a challenge to police work already performed and being subjected to criticism. Victims of trauma may experience post traumatic stress disorder, whether those victims are police officers, alleged perpetrators, or review board members. Recent deaths and resulting protests may spur [more review boards](#), hopefully with essential training of Board members.

Police officers put themselves at risk every day. To understand trauma, one must receive training in trauma. Our system of justice demands that members of Civilian Review Boards receive training that **balances an understanding of an officer's duties to intervene against the** impact of prior experience of trauma and of the potential trauma induced by the procedures used.

Police officers want to be held to high standards. Civilian Review Boards should too.

Daniel Pollack is an attorney and **professor at Yeshiva University's** Wurzweiler School of Social Work. He can be reached at [dpollack@yu.edu](mailto:dpollack@yu.edu).

Elisa Reiter is Board Certified in Family Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Contact: [elisareiter@msn.com](mailto:elisareiter@msn.com); 214-219-9800.