



Trauma-informed approach learning briefing

What is a trauma?

Trauma can refer to a traumatic, abusive, or neglectful event(s), that are experienced as being emotionally or physically harmful or life threatening. Whether an event(s) is traumatic depends not only on the adult's experience of the event, but also how it negatively impacts on emotional, social, spiritual, and physical wellbeing.

Trauma can be understood in terms of the 3 E's:

- **Event:** what was the event(s)?
- **Experienced:** what was the adult's experience of the event?
- **Effects:** what were the effects of the event on the adult?

What is trauma-informed care?

Trauma-Informed care means being able to see beyond an adult's presenting behaviours and to ask, 'what has happened to you' rather than 'what is wrong with you?'.

It involves recognising when someone may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account, and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm, and recognises and supports people's resilience.

This approach allows adults to feel safe and develop trusting relationships with services and practitioners. Being "trauma-informed" is much more than a term. It is multi-layered and requires a whole system approach. It applies to all areas of an organisation and across the system. This includes integrating trauma-related aspects, knowledge, and concepts into things such as training, recruitment, policies and procedures, etc.

Working with trauma: the five R's

- **Realising:** how common the experience of trauma and adversity is.
- **Recognising:** the different ways that trauma can affect people.
- **Responding:** by taking account of the ways that people can be affected by trauma to support recovery.
- **Resist re-traumatisation:** by providing opportunities to offer a greater sense of choice and control, empowerment, collaboration and safety.
- **Reflective:** Trauma-informed services reflect on their practice, with a fundamental focus on relationships at the heart of our work.

Trauma-informed care in practice: the five principles

Safety

Physical and emotional safety are key to do meaningful work. Traumatized adults may have developed an overactive stress-response and may often feel unsafe.

- Be open and honest, explain what is happening and why at every stage, making sure the adult understands what will happen next, the possible outcomes, and practical information, such as when and how you will meet.
- Consider [intersectionality](#) and how to meet people's needs for cultural safety. Minority groups are often disproportionately affected by trauma; discrimination can also worsen/increase the impact of trauma.

Important point to note

Re-traumatisation can occur when talking about specific events. In general, it should be made clear that adults are not required to talk about the specific details of trauma. When gathering information, it is not always necessary to know the full details, but rather the impact of trauma and details of recovery.

Trust

For adults who have experienced trauma, it can be difficult to establish trust.

- Develop trust by implementing good personal and practitioner boundaries; be aware that you may need to re-establish trust each time you meet with the adult.
- Be reliable and honest about what you can and cannot do, while recognising and addressing the power imbalances between you and the adult.
- Use a non-judgmental, compassionate approach and be responsive to the experiences of those you work with, remembering that everyone experiences trauma differently.

Choice

Offering realistic choices may be challenging for the adult and those working with them.

- Acknowledge the power difference at the initial stages to support working with adults who may have experienced others misusing power.
- Acknowledge the limits in choice, for example changes in staff. However, practitioners should aim to constantly keep these issues in mind to establish trust.
- Engage the adult and give them choice in how work continues. Consent should be sought, explaining how information will be shared and the limits to confidentiality, giving the adult options and discussing with them what they would like to happen.

Collaboration

Collaboration means working towards a common goal or purpose. Adults who have experienced trauma may have very little trust in their needs mattering to others, or very little experience of being involved in decisions, so may need support and encouragement to do this.

- Interactions that contain a psychoeducational element – where practitioners invite people to collaborate in their recovery by sharing information – are particularly useful.
- Collaboration could involve asking someone what they need for a certain part of the meeting or visit, or identifying coping strategies that may be helpful or problematic in the longer term and discussing options for support.

Empowerment

The principles described above all contribute to empowering adults we work with. Showing someone that they can be safe, demonstrating you can be trusted and so can they, offering choice and collaboration to someone who has never had these options, are all empowering.

- Empowerment means treating the person as an equal. This may include offering challenge (constructively, rather than judgmentally), which can enable reflection and be very useful.
- Supporting and empowering adults to recognise unhealthy coping strategies can be a life-changing opportunity.

Learning resources

To extend your learning, please do refer our following [learning resources](#):

- Making Safeguarding Personal learning briefing and podcast
- Person-Centred Approaches learning briefing and podcast
- Multi-agency working learning briefing and podcast

To support your Continual Practitioner Development (CPD) we have created a [CPD Reflective Log](#) for your use. Please feel free to use this to track, and reflect on, the practitioner development that you complete using our resources.

References

[National Trauma Training Programme - What is meant by trauma?](#)

[Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[SMAHSA Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma Informed Approach](#)

[Community Care: A Trauma Informed approach to social work practice-tips](#)