TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE
Building a Culture of Strength
TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE – BUILDING A CULTURE OF STRENGTH

Trauma is prevalent in our world and has an impact on many of the people we interact with, including those who engage with our organizations. Compassionate and trauma-informed care is essential to providing effective support and building sustainable services. Based on our book, A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces, this workshop explores five key principles to integrate a trauma-informed approach throughout the organization. By embracing these principles, participants can better contribute to the positive transformation of individuals and relationships affected by trauma. Becoming trauma-informed creates a sustainable foundation in any setting to promote strength, engagement, and healing.

Trauma-Informed Care – Building a Culture of Strength
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- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA)
- Canadian Professional Counsellors Association (CPCA)
- Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation (CACCF)
- National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada)
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TRAUMA’S RIPPLE EFFECT

Trauma is prevalent in our world and impacts all of us, including staff, colleagues, and clients.¹ The effects of trauma can ripple across all areas of a person’s life. Trauma often shapes our interactions and relationships at home and at work. What happens to one individual will affect how they relate to others, and how others relate to them. In this way, trauma is not just an individual experience. It even affects whole organizations by impacting the ways in which we do our work, serve our clients, and achieve our missions.

¹ A note about language: While this resource manual is for all workplaces, going forward we use the term “client” throughout. However, “client” may also refer to a student, customer, or recipient of service.
WHAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE?

Trauma-informed care is an approach that understands the presence of trauma, acknowledges the role trauma can play in a person’s life, and promotes environments that support the individual and collective well-being of everyone.

The process of becoming trauma-informed is not about becoming a trauma specialist. Rather it is about understanding the role that each person can play, big or small as we promote individual and collective healing from trauma. This means we bring an approach of compassion to behaviour we don’t understand. We respect and prioritize safety, another’s freedom of choice and look first to each others strengths.

The impact of trauma can influence how people engage with, manage and exit services. Therefore by embracing trauma-informed principles, staff and clients can become more resilient and organizations can offer the key ingredients that help people to heal through a culture of strength.

We have identified five key principles that are the key ingredients individuals and organizations can offer to help people to heal:

- Promote Awareness
- Shift Attitudes
- Foster Safety
- Provide Choice
- Highlight Strengths

What are you or your organization doing already in a trauma-informed way?
BUILDING A TRAUMA-INFORMED CULTURE

The process of building a trauma-informed culture is most useful when it is applied to individual roles and whole organizations, communities, or systems.

To establish trauma-informed cultures, we need to assess and, in some cases, adjust our ways of interacting, making decisions, and communicating. We need to become vigilant about the how: How do we communicate in trauma-informed ways? How do we make decisions from a trauma-informed perspective?

Developing a trauma-informed culture is not a simple, straightforward process – it may take an organization in multiple directions instead of on a linear path. Change is a process that takes hard work and there will often be successes in one area followed by setbacks in another. Just as the impacts of trauma are complex, the implementation of trauma-informed principles can be complicated, and there isn’t always a clear “right” answer.

Because of this complexity, it can be useful to gauge your current workplace culture through a trauma-informed care assessment. This can provide some clarity and direction for what areas of your culture need attention.

How trauma-informed do you think your organization is in both its awareness and practices?
TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE ASSESSMENT

INSTRUCTIONS
Review the statements below and rate each on a scale of 1–5. A 5 indicates you strongly agree with the statement; a 1 indicates you strongly disagree.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>My organization offers educational opportunities for learning about trauma.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>People in my workplace convey empathetic curiosity rather than judgement towards others displaying challenging behaviours.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>My organization maintains a high standard of safety that includes the needs of staff and clients.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>In my workplace, a diversity of perspectives is encouraged</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>My organization affirms the strengths and resilience of staff and clients.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>Awareness of trauma can be seen and is demonstrated in work policies.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>People in my organization understand how trauma responses can influence the behaviour and decisions of their clients.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>I trust that leaders will make good decisions about safety at work.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>Staff and clients know they can offer feedback and it will be taken seriously.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>My workplace celebrates the diversity of staff and clients.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>There is a person or group in my organization who “champions” trauma-informed principles.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>Staff in my workplace who are judgemental in their attitudes are challenged by others to consider being more curious and less judgemental.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>Safety officers and committees in my organization consult widely in the development of policies and procedures.</td>
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<td>__</td>
<td>My workplace is respectful of the choices clients make, even if they go against what is recommended</td>
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<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>In my organization, leaders, staff, and clients engage in intentional conversations where people verbalize and self-evaluate their strengths.</td>
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SCORING
Fill out the table below, and then total the columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote Awareness</th>
<th>Shift Attitudes</th>
<th>Foster Safety</th>
<th>Provide Choice</th>
<th>Highlight Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
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<td>04</td>
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</table>
INTERPRETING RESULTS

Responses to principles questions with a total score of 3-6 should be viewed with concern, particularly when that result is seen in more than one survey. Attention should be prioritized in these areas. Responses of 7-11 may indicate an area that should be watched or given secondary attention. Responses of 12-15 should be celebrated. This assessment is also available in the Free Resources section of our website.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION

| 01 | Of the five trauma-informed principles, what does the assessment tell you about how you are doing in each of these areas? |
| 02 | What responses indicate areas of concern? |
| 03 | In what specific ways can you work to address those areas that need the most attention? |
WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is a wound – often an invisible one.

The word trauma is associated with many different experiences. These can include distinct threatening or distressing events such as accidents, wars, natural disasters, or devastating losses. Broader and recurring experiences of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and persistent doses of fear and stress within negative relationships or toxic work environments can also have a traumatic effect on people.

Trauma occurs when a person or group is confronted with a threat to themselves or others and that threat overwhelms their coping resources, evoking responses of intense helplessness, distress, or fear for personal safety. Defensive and protective responses are controlled by survival instincts, resulting in recurring patterns of fight, flight, or freeze behaviors. As a result, there is an interference in the person’s, organization’s, or community’s ability to function well or adapt effectively.

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

The impact of an overwhelmingly threatening experience can be incredibly pervasive and affect a person’s physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual health.

- **Physical** manifestations of trauma can include body fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and an exaggerated startle response.
- **Cognitive** symptoms of trauma may show up in responses such as negative and self-critical beliefs, struggling to concentrate, and recurring memories.
- **Emotional** symptoms of trauma may include fluctuating and intense sensations, heightened anxiety, and helpless fear that can dominate one’s emotions.
- **Relationships** may be challenged because a person impacted by trauma may have difficulty trusting others and experience a shattered sense of healthy boundaries.
- **Spiritually**, trauma can result in a person losing a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection with one’s culture or community.

If not recognized or directly attended to, the injury can deepen and become multilayered, which may lead to deepening symptoms and, in some situations, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
**BEHAVIOURS POSSIBLY ROOTED IN TRAUMA**

Experiences of trauma can result in people reacting with the protective survival instincts of *flight*, *fight*, and *freeze* behaviours, which are often misunderstood and difficult to respond to. This is because survival instincts can also emerge in everyday situations that aren’t actually threatening. While they are useful in the face of actual threats, they can appear as unhelpful or challenging behaviours when the response doesn’t seem to match the situation.

Without recognition and proper care, the complex impacts of trauma can be mistaken for inherent characteristics of a person or group. At first glance, it is not always clear that someone’s present perspective or life choices have been influenced by past traumatic experiences. The pervasiveness of trauma and its widespread impact on a person’s life may be hidden under physical, emotional, or behavioural symptoms that don’t get recognized for what they are.

Examples of behaviours that may be rooted in trauma:

- controlling
- aggression
- avoidance of eye contact
- avoidance of conversations
- skipping appointments or meetings
- substance use
- suicidality

**Notes:**
COMMON SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMATIC EXPOSURE

Anxious or Activated Symptoms (examples of Fight or Flight)
Examples may be:

- A young person who has a hard time sitting still in class.
- A staff member who gets easily defensive or reactive at meetings.
- Someone who loudly over-shares personal information in public settings.
- A person who gets aggressively protective of their family members or friends, or joins with a group of peers who can aggressively protect each other.
- Someone who is very directive and controlling of how things should be done.
- A community that has a lot of vandalism and graffiti on public property.
- Increase in gang involvement and gun violence in concentrated areas.

Numbing or Avoiding Symptoms (examples of Freeze)
Examples may be:

- A colleague who is chronically late, or misses meetings.
- A student who can’t concentrate, or appears to be sleeping or zoned out.
- Someone who hides their belongings or tends to sneak things.
- Someone who talks about violence or intense events with no emotions.
- A community that has low or no involvement in community events – nobody shows up.
- High levels of unemployment and lack of opportunities for community youth.

Trauma can leave a person continually feeling under threat or anticipating feeling this way again. The way people then cope with these feelings can create additional feelings about the feelings. If these behaviours are not understood as signs of trauma, others will often respond with similar behaviours of aggression, avoidance, or blame and judgement.

GROUP DISCUSSION

01 | How have you seen the effects of trauma impact your clients?
LONG-TERM PATTERNS OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN A COMMUNITY

When a community has been traumatized multiple times over many years, we can see patterns of the impact of trauma at different levels of community functioning:

SOCIAL – CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Norms exist for connecting with others, preserving relationships, and building a sense of identity, belonging, and contribution to the health of the community. If there are patterns of violence and poverty within a community, maintaining trust and opportunities for communal progress break down. In organizations, people become isolated; leaders become coercive and punitive.

PHYSICAL – STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Physical buildings and space can contribute to a sense of comfort and group identity. However, economic hardship, vandalism, or displacement create conditions for added stress. Organizations may become rundown with a cold, impersonal atmosphere.

ECONOMIC AND EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Opportunities for meaningful employment or education provide sustenance and ongoing purpose in people’s lives. Trauma exacerbates the loss of meaning and motivation to pursue goals and change. In organizations, people become more reactive and resistant to change.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

How have you seen the ripple effects of trauma impact your organization or community?
PROMOTE AWARENESS

In trauma-informed organizations, all staff are aware of the pervasiveness of trauma and its significance in people’s lives. They understand that when anyone’s sense of well-being or survival is threatened, it can cause lasting emotional and psychological injury.

EDUCATING STAFF

Educating staff about trauma is integral to generating awareness. All those who work in the organization should be provided with opportunities to grow in their awareness of the prevalence and various cultural impacts of trauma. The forms of education can vary from participating in interactive workshops to watching webinars or reading about trauma.

A natural result of promoting trauma awareness is that it will lead people to self-reflect and, in some cases, develop new understandings of their own personal traumas. This process can put some staff in emotionally vulnerable positions. That is why it’s important to support staff in this process by offering safe spaces, providing opportunities for confidential debriefing, and creating meaningful self-care plans.

Notes:

What opportunities do staff currently have to learn about trauma? What more could be done?
MISSION, VISION, BELIEFS, AND VALUES

Another way organizations can promote awareness is by reflecting on the five trauma-informed principles in their mission, vision, beliefs, and values. By highlighting these principles through both internal and external communications, workplaces demonstrate commitment and set a tone of trauma awareness. The result is that everyone who works for or connects with your organization is aware of its commitment to these principles.

Notes:

MEETINGS

As promotion of awareness is best done through relationships and connections, meetings are an ideal time to discuss trauma-informed principles. Trauma doesn’t always need to be the agenda for the meeting, but instead can be a short story or reflection at the start of the meeting. Sharing instances of how trauma-informed principles are being acted out in the daily rhythm of the organization inspires the continued focus on the principles.

Notes:

In what ways do trauma-informed principles currently show up in your mission, vision, beliefs, values and policies?

What has been your experience of sharing stories or talking about trauma-informed principles at meetings?
“CHAMPION(S)” OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES

In working to promote awareness, it can be helpful to establish some form of ongoing “champion(s)” of trauma-informed principles in your workplace. This can take the form of a dedicated role within someone’s job description or the establishment of a committee. Champions are responsible for promoting trauma awareness and monitoring the organization’s evolving long-term progress in embracing trauma-informed principles.

Notes:

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

For any organization that serves vulnerable populations experiencing trauma, it is essential that staff are aware of what vicarious trauma is, and that they can recognize and monitor it in themselves and their colleagues.

Vicarious trauma is the experience of trauma symptoms brought about by directly supporting others through their experiences of trauma. This can begin with stress and fatigue but, left unmanaged, can transform a helper’s own sense of safety and result in loss of focus and motivation, as well as secondary trauma symptoms.

Workplaces can reduce the impacts of vicarious trauma and increase staff wellness through training, preventative policies, regular supervision, frequent debriefing of difficult experiences, and proactively building individual plans for meaningful self-care.

Notes:
HOLISTIC VIEW OF HEALING

Promoting awareness means staying current on best practices and respecting that there are many different paths to healing. We can assist clients to find their own healing from trauma if we’re aware and open to diverse approaches that allow them to be the central agent to determine what well-being looks like for them (and restore it).

Some of these alternative ways of healing may fall outside what you or your organization can offer or even understand. They can range from involving different methods for honouring culture, diverse counselling approaches, the use of spirituality, as well as systemic change and collective experiences of well-being to name a few. It’s important to keep in mind that people will selectively choose the path of their healing journey based on what works for them and even how they define well-being.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

01 | Are there potential paths to healing that fall outside of the scope of services your organization offers?

02 | What specific steps could your organization take to better promote trauma awareness?
SHIFT ATTITUDES

While trauma awareness is valuable at a knowledge level, an attitude shift is necessary in order to change how we engage with people. By shifting attitudes, we are able to put our awareness of trauma into action. This shift impacts the questions we ask and creates a mindset of curious empathy that we can bring to our interactions. It is demonstrated by responding to people, organizations, and communities in ways that reflect awareness of the role trauma can have. When we shift our attitudes, our biases recede and healthy responses to trauma become the norm.

SHIFT JUDGEMENT TO CURIOSITY

At the heart of this saying is a call to approach a person’s behavior with openness and curiosity. For example, instead of thinking “What is wrong with you?” when responding to a challenging behavior, consider “What has happened that might be leading to this behavior?” The problematic question “What is wrong with you?” reflects a reactive attitude that implies blame and a deficit in the person. In contrast, by withholding judgment and taking a moment to internally wonder what has happened that could explain this behavior, we are acknowledging that trauma might be influencing this person. In this way we are separating the person from the behaviour.

What common biases or attitudes do you personally and within your workplace need to work on so you can more effectively shift judgement to curiosity?

Notes:
# THE MINDSET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness Perspective: “What is wrong with you?”</th>
<th>Trauma-Informed Perspective: “What has happened to you?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The problem lies in the person</td>
<td>Considers context and makes us open minded and curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It implies fault</td>
<td>Helps us set down our own agenda that can blind us to what’s really going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person can be fixed by focusing on them alone</td>
<td>Recognizes adaptive coping strategies that serve to protect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This ignores systemic inequalities
This ignores outside influences at Work (i.e., trauma, addictions, mental health)

Recognition of the valid interaction between trauma, mental health and substance use, and non-shaming approaches to these issues.

# QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

How does this information fit your prior thoughts about what it means to be trauma-informed?
PRACTICE SHIFTING ATTITUDES

The following chart describes some challenging behaviours and common explanations that are often judgemental. Often these are explained as a deficit in personality or a pathological symptom. Practice coming up with an explanation that considers the possible influence of trauma and provides an alternative answer to the question, “What has happened that would help us understand this behaviour?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Common Belief or Explanation</th>
<th>Trauma-Informed Understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boundary issues, wants too much physical touching.</td>
<td>Acts needy, is manipulating, doesn’t know limits for affection.</td>
<td>Needs reassurance including healing touch and closeness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts disinterested, does not pay attention or is disobedient and defiant.</td>
<td>Has become obstinate and likes to challenge authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth has head on desk or is falling asleep in halls.</td>
<td>Being disrespectful – needs to “look me in the eye”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colleague gets quickly defensive in staff meeting, feels “attacked”.</td>
<td>Personality problems, too reactive and hard to work with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal in relationships, no intimacy with partner.</td>
<td>Frigid or uncaring. Can’t keep a relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurring crisis with violence, addiction or self-harm.</td>
<td>Lacking will power, just wanting attention, morally lacking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with high rates of unemployment and failing infrastructure.</td>
<td>People don’t care about their homes or all are “troubled”.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
WHAT EXAMPLES DO YOU EXPERIENCE OR SEE IN YOUR SETTING?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Common Judgement</th>
<th>A Curious Response</th>
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EMPATHIC CURIOUSITY SHOULD BE PRACTICED BY EVERYONE

It is important that this approach is not practiced by just a few people, but by everyone. This shift from judgment to curious empathy may begin at the individual level, but as more people practice it, it will naturally spread throughout the workplace. However, different employees will require different levels of support and time to shift their attitudes and biases. There will be times when judgmental attitudes need to be challenged, and staff who are slow to incorporate the shift in attitude will need to be coached.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

What biases or attitudes do you need to work on both personally and within your workplace to more effectively shift judgment to curiosity?

Is there consistency in how empathetic curiosity is practiced in your workplace? If not, what are the effects of the inconsistency?
Post-Traumatic Growth and Resilience

In any trauma story there is always a survival narrative. Part of surviving a traumatic experience are the enhanced strengths and potential that can come as a result of facing the challenge of overcoming trauma. With any challenge, there is potential for growth, which is why trauma may also bring about unexpected positive changes for a person, family, or community.

While being curious and asking “What has happened that might be leading to this behaviour?” is important, we also need to ask questions that get at a person’s story of strength, survival, and resilience. Here we move away from the backstory of trauma towards the conditions that contribute to a person’s well-being.

What is going well for you?”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What examples of post-traumatic growth have you witnessed in an individual, organization, or community? What helps support this growth?
FOSTER SAFETY

One of the central aspects of trauma is the experience of a threat to physical or psychological safety. When an organization does not give attention to safety, it can make both staff and clients vulnerable and create barriers to engagement. Therefore, fostering safety helps reduce the impact of past damaging experiences.

Fostering a safe environment requires paying close attention to the varying needs of different people. These can range from the physical, such as the need for adequate lighting and safety rails, to the psychological, which could include how safe do clients feel within your office or managing disrespectful behavior. It is important to consider both the physical and psychological elements of safety. Too often, those responsible for safety limit their focus to physical areas or only give token attention to psychological concerns.

INVOLVE EVERYONE

Safety is best fostered collectively in relationship with each other. In a sense, we co-create safe environments when each person within the organization takes on a responsibility to make safe decisions, and people believe others have their best interests in mind. In order to achieve this, leaders, safety officers, and committees need to consult widely in the development of policies and procedures.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

In what ways do you consult and involve staff and clients in fostering safety? What more could be done to include them?
SAFETY ROOTED IN TRUST

In organizations where people feel safe, they trust that decisions are being made with their safety in mind. Trust means that people can discuss safety concerns that really matter to them without fear of judgment. Building trusting relationships requires constant interaction and feedback among leadership, staff, and clients. That interaction must be characterized by listening, showing empathy, and demonstrating care for people.

Clients with significant trauma backstories will often have experienced boundary violations and abuse from people in power, and often feel unsafe in relationships and unfamiliar spaces. Therefore, it is essential that trustworthiness with clients be established early on with welcoming and consistent intake procedures that allow them to explore and get comfortable with the physical space. This may include adapting the physical space, creating crisis plans, and providing clear information on programming and consistency around expectations, rules, and scheduling appointments.

Notes:

To what extent do staff and clients trust the decisions made by leaders? How could the level of trust be improved?
“GO-TO” ELEMENTS

We have found that there are three “go-to” elements organizations should have in place to help generate psychological and physical safety:

- **Go-to leaders** are people with authority or influence who staff or clients have a trusting relationship with. Staff feel more motivated and confident to offer feedback freely when they have a healthy relationship with their supervisor or mentor. The same applies to clients interacting with staff – it is crucial to build strong relationships of reliability and trust.

- **Go-to spaces** are physical places where staff or clients can go if they feel overwhelmed or unstable. These are places where a person can be physically and psychologically comfortable, away from stress and work pressures. A key consideration for choosing a safe space in the workplace is that it is designed with accessibility and privacy in mind.

- **Go-to peers** are people with whom we have camaraderie and can exchange mutual support within our work environments. These are safe and trusted people we feel confident raising difficult questions or concerns with, knowing we will be met with respect and confidentiality. Meaningful relationships emerge when there are opportunities for staff to simply talk, eat together, joke around, and connect outside of work meetings. In safe workplaces, leaders value and encourage these sorts of connections.

In what ways are people able to access go-to leaders, spaces, and peers in your organization? What could you do to increase access to go-to leaders, safe spaces, and peers?

Notes:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP DISCUSSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways does your organization feel physically and psychologically safe? Are there ways in which it feels unsafe? How could you improve physical safety?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another significant aspect of traumatic events is the lack of choice and control that people experience. The helplessness felt in an overwhelmingly threatening situation can leave lasting imprints on a person’s sense of power to take back control over their lives. Therefore, it’s important for trauma-informed workplaces to provide meaningful opportunities for choice. It’s not uncommon for staff or clients to feel powerless and unable to influence the way they do their work or receive an organization’s services.

CONSIDER POWER DYNAMICS

One way to think about providing choice is to shift from holding power over to sharing power with others. A power with approach grows out of relationships that are built on mutual respect and support. Organizations can increase opportunities for choice among staff and clients by mindfully considering how power is distributed and managed in the workplace and sharing power where possible.

Provide clear information of what a client can expect and what their options are. There is an inherent power imbalance between staff and a client. Staff have a responsibility to ensure clients are aware they are allowed to disagree. Give them time to voice questions or concerns. This means that clients are clearly informed about their choices, rights, and responsibilities, and they are aware they do not have to answer questions or disclose anything they don’t want to.

Notes:

Does your organization practice more power over or a power with people? How have you seen the negative or positive impact of this approach?
INVITE ALL VOICES

Providing staff and clients with choices means respecting their unique identities and affirming the natural diversity among individuals and communities. It means intentionally inviting minority voices and those with less organizational power to share their experiences and suggestions. At times, it will require us to respect the choices and voices that run contrary to – or even challenge – the status quo.

Notes:

How does your workplace consider the unique identities and natural diversity of people as it relates to creating opportunities for choice?

MAPPING A PERSON'S JOURNEY

Intentionally mapping the journey of an employee or client as they connect with your organization can be a useful exercise for gaining insight into how to increase choices and avoid pain points. Start by thinking about the moment a person becomes aware of your organization and has their initial interaction with it. Who greets them as they enter your workspace? What information do they receive about accepting and receiving services or purchasing and receiving products? What do they see and experience physically? How do services continue and end? The sum total of these touchpoints contributes to and influences the feeling of a relationship with your organization.
Each touchpoint can inspire confidence, reassuring and supporting your client. Or, these interactions can cause pain, frustration, and even re-traumatization. By gathering detailed feedback from multiple perspectives and learning what it’s like to walk in the shoes of a client or staff member, you can discover both the positive experiences and stressors of those who interact with your organization.

GROUP DISCUSSION

How does your organization offer staff and clients choices for how work is done and what services they receive? How could you provide more choice?
HIGHLIGHT STRENGTHS

Every person has inherent strengths that help them survive. For people who have come through traumatic experiences, highlighting strengths is especially relevant because it helps to emphasize and build up their inherent resilience. After all, they have survived because of their strengths and have found new and creative ways to live and overcome obstacles.

RESILIENCY

When we focus on strengths and use language that reflects what a person is doing well – not just their problems or symptoms – we contribute to their resilience and ability to flourish. Resiliency is the ability to survive and adapt in the face of stress and adverse life experiences, and it is extremely valuable for healing from trauma. Organizations and staff that find ways to highlight strengths increase resiliency not just in individuals, but throughout the whole workplace.

Notes:

Give attention to what’s working well!

What examples of resiliency have you experienced or witnessed?
IDENTIFYING AND NAMING STRENGTHS

Unfortunately, many people do not know their own strengths or have limited knowledge of them. Because of this, we recommend that leaders, staff, and clients use formal strengths assessment tools to evaluate and engage in intentional conversations to verbalize their own and others strengths.

To highlight strengths in others, acknowledge when you notice someone doing something well. This can be done verbally or in written form. Sometimes it can be beneficial to do this in front of others. Most of us appreciate receiving acknowledgment or being noticed for strengths, and it motivates us to do more of whatever earned us the praise. Acknowledging strengths leads people to become more confident, resourceful, resistant to burnout, and able to access their full potential. It’s important that these messages are authentic and applied to concrete examples – not just generalized praise. Specific feedback conveys a deeper sense of appreciation, helps the person see clearly what they are doing well, and is more likely to be valued.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

How do you and your organization work to identify and name strengths in yourselves co-workers and clients?
CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

An important way that we can honor the unique strengths of staff and clients is by celebrating their diversity. Our sense of identity – which may include multiple areas such as culture, race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, and sexual identities – is central to who we are as people. For everyone, and especially for those who have experienced trauma, feeling proud and secure in our identity is crucial for our ability to thrive. Workplaces can help in this process by highlighting the strengths found in diversity.

Unique individual and collective strengths can be found by getting to know each other and recognizing the inherent resources and resilience each person brings. When we learn about and engage with experiences and perspectives that differ from our own, our biases are corrected and we become more respectful of differences, breaking down barriers that can cause tension and conflict.

Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION

What is your organization doing to highlight and affirm strengths in staff and clients? What more could it do?
TIPS FOR HIGHLIGHTING STRENGTHS IN CLIENTS

Research continues to demonstrate that clients’ abilities and strengths are directly linked to successful outcomes.

- Learn about client’s expectations and tailor the relationship and support process accordingly
- Identify what is going well and then build on it
- Use client’s language preferences and word choices to strengthen relationship between helper and client
- Stop viewing the helper or counsellor as the expert in the relationship
- Steer client away from seeing themselves as deficient or incapable and towards examples that highlight personal strengths and success

STAY WELL AND FOCUS ON YOUR OWN STRENGTHS

By proactively building a plan for your own meaningful self-care, you can increase personal resiliency. There are many ways to take care of yourself in the professional and personal realms. It’s important to engage in regular supervision, debrief intense experiences, and seek out people at work to look up to and watch, listen, and learn from. In the personal sphere, simply being good to yourself can make a difference! Do something you enjoy each day; give yourself positive messages; talk to a friend, a counsellor, or family member, and know your abilities and your limits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are your strengths? How can you maintain a more regular focus on them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

REFLECTION

EXPLORE YOUR “TOP 5”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>01</th>
<th>list the top five people you spend the most time with. NOTE: These are the five people you interact with most.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>02</th>
<th>List the top five people who feed and nourish your wellness</th>
</tr>
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</table>
STEPS TO IMPROVING

CHANGE TEAM

In order to successfully work towards building a trauma-informed culture, you first need a committed group of people who will lead the change – the “champions.” This will require at least one senior leader. This group will need to work through the following three phases:

Phase 1 | Assess. Clarity about the present situation allows you to more easily plan for change. Talk with and listen to everyone in your organization. Consider your current strengths, as well as the aspects that are holding you back.

Phase 2 | Develop a plan to address problem areas. What specific steps can you take to address some of the areas that are getting in the way of being trauma-informed? Work directly with employees in helping to develop this plan.

Phase 3 | Monitor and reassess. Changes that will help improve workplace culture are usually fragile at first, so monitor the changes. Check in with employees both informally and formally.

MAKE SMALL CHANGES NOW

An overarching principle to keep in mind is that anytime you see something that could be easily changed, you should change it now. Some barriers to engagement may be eliminated immediately, and changing them quickly builds momentum for the longer-term changes.

SUSTAINING CHANGE

Sustaining a trauma-informed workplace requires ongoing attention to the five trauma-informed principles. Organizations with high levels of trauma-informed awareness and practice are never complacent. Instead, they continually revisit and reinforce those things that make their workplace trauma-informed.

Notes:
APPENDIX

TYPES OF TRAUMATIC INJURY

Many experiences can contribute to a person experiencing trauma. However, it is not the event itself that is the trauma – it is the nature of the sustained injury. Each person may be affected differently. Specific experiences may fit into more than one category of traumatic injury.

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

- Developmental trauma occurs during the vulnerability of childhood or adolescence because of the active development of the nervous system and personality.
  - Alcoholism/drug abuse, violence, or neglect in the home
  - Chronic illness or need for invasive medical procedures
  - Intergenerational effects of traumatic injury such as colonization (residential school legacy) or of war-affected family members
  - Systemic oppression, racism, discrimination, bullying

SHOCK TRAUMA

- This occurs when a person has a shock reaction to a specific event. It involves high levels of activation from the nervous system as the person reacts from deep, primitive instincts to survive a sudden, severe threat. It often involves traumatic loss.
- Often the event(s) are easily recognized as severe and unexpected. However, this is not always the case. For example, planned medical procedures can still be traumatic.
  - Assault, attack, or their imminent threat
  - Surgeries, dental, or other medical procedures
  - Motor vehicle accidents, falls, plane crashes (or near misses)
  - Natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods, fires, hurricanes)
  - Stillbirth, miscarriages, sudden infant death syndrome
  - Tragic death of any loved one, terminal illness diagnosis

Notes:
SECONDARY TRAUMA

- Current day experiences may replicate parts of past trauma, adding layers of impact.
- Learning of the trauma of a loved one or of one’s home community can also produce traumatic impact, even if the person is not in direct contact with the person or community. For example, refugees may experience grief, flashbacks, and survivor’s guilt when hearing news of their home country.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

- The impacts of trauma do not remain only with those directly involved, but can also profoundly affect those who are more on the periphery. Hearing and seeing other people’s experiences of trauma can create similar trauma symptoms in friends, family members, and helpers.

RELATIONAL TRAUMA

- Feeling threatened by another person adds a layer of violation and disruption to Trauma. The impact is especially complicated if the source of the threat is someone in a position of trust or supposed to provide a sense of safety for the individual. Examples include:
  - Family or relationship violence
  - War, terrorism, genocide, political conflicts causing a person to flee
  - Bullying, violence, robbery, physical or sexual assault

Notes:
COMMUNITY IMPACT AND LAYERS OF TRAUMA

SUSTAINED, COMMUNITY-BASED TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Sustained, community-based traumatic stress is the repeated experience of traumatic events within a community setting. There are often complex layers of relational trauma experiences because of the established relationships that are involved in the injury.
- Examples may include:
  - Civil war – history of past alliance and past animosity within the community
  - Culturally- or faith-based conflicts
  - Repeated acts of violence or loss involving the same relationships without opportunity to fully recover
  - Multiple suicides within a community

Given the ripple effects of trauma, these experiences impact and influence the whole community. Smaller and remote communities can be particularly affected.

INTERGENERATIONAL/HISTORIC TRAUMA

- Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2011) defines historic trauma as “The cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the life span, which emanates from massive group trauma.”
- Even when current generations do not experience direct traumatic injury, the effects of history influence the present through relationships, teachings, and embedded meaning associated with family or community events.
- Behavioural epigenetic effects can be inherited through the attachment of behavioural and emotional experiences that are part of memories. DNA doesn’t change, but there are molecular attachments that become inheritable as a tendency toward or predisposition for either vulnerability or resilience. (E.g., anxiety, depression, emotional or behavioural dysregulation, optimism, positive or negative coping)
- Current experiences of trauma become layered on top, and a family or community with historic trauma may be more or differently vulnerable to new experiences of threat.

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DEFINITIONS OF POST-TRAUMATIC IMPACT

Our understanding and description of the nature of trauma and post-traumatic impact continues to evolve. For a long time, the signs and symptoms of trauma were understood as a mental illness. However, we now understand that trauma affects the body, mind, and spirit, and is linked to our natural reactivity to abnormal and overwhelming stressors. This impact can lead to disordered affect and behaviour.

Below are brief definitions of some of the common terms used in the mental health field to describe and diagnose responses to traumatic events that cause extreme distress:

**Acute Stress or Traumatic Stress**

- When a person directly experiences or witnesses a traumatic event, learns of a traumatic experience of a close family member or friend, or experiences repeated exposure to traumatic details, such as with first responders.
- When the impact of trauma results in symptoms that last for a minimum of three days and a maximum of four weeks, and occurs within four weeks of the initial stressor.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

- When a person directly experiences or witnesses a traumatic event, learns of a traumatic experience of a close family member or friend, or experiences repeated exposure to traumatic details, such as with first responders.
- Presence of symptoms from each of the following four categories: intrusion, avoidance, negative and numbing emotions/beliefs, anxiety/hyperarousal.

DEVELOPMENT OF SYMPTOMS AND DELAYED EXPRESSION

PTSD can occur at any age, and symptoms usually begin within the first three months following a traumatic incident. There may be a delay of months or years before accumulative symptoms occur that meet the full criteria of PTSD.3

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMATIC IMPACT

The ripple effect of traumatic impact that can carry on to subsequent generations within a family and cultural system, through social, developmental, and epigenetic effects. Attachment, parenting, emotion regulation, and belief patterns may all be affected by the presence of traumatic impact. Also, there is increasing evidence that various brain structures/systems may be genetically affected by the influence of traumatic stress.4

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3 Definitions are summarized from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (2013).

BUILDING A CULTURE OF STRENGTH

LASTING CHANGE INVOLVES MULTIPLE LEVELS OF AWARENESS AND ACTION

Any lasting change requires some congruency between these varying levels of awareness and action. It is common for initial changes to reflect the external goals and behaviours of some individuals within an organization. As a collective sense of identity and culture shifts within the organization, more individuals will also deepen their commitment, and lasting change can occur.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System or Organization</th>
<th>Values (Internal)</th>
<th>Behaviours (External)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A collective sense of purpose, shared values and history. Principles that guide mission.</td>
<td>May or may not be reflected in their structures, procedures and patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>A person’s beliefs and values. Driving force behind meaning and motivation.</td>
<td>May or may not be reflected in their choices, commitments and day to day behaviours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

01 | Change is a process. Where is your organization or community in the process of change? Where is the motivation or energy for change?

02 | Often changes at the behavioural level are emphasized. However, lasting change requires shifts also at the values level. What would make change matter to the individuals and organizations in your community?
REFERENCES


Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA’s concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. SAMHSA’s Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative.


CTRI WORKSHOPS AND SERVICES

TRAINING
Our training is available through open enrollment public workshops that anyone can attend virtually or in-person, private workshops held on-location or virtually for your group, and on-demand and webinar formats. What follows is a sample of the 50+ workshop topics we offer. For a complete list, please visit our website.

TRAUMA AND CRISIS RESPONSE WORKSHOPS
Crisis Response Planning
Trauma – Strategies for Resolving the Impact of Post-Traumatic Stress
Trauma-Informed Care – Building a Culture of Strength
Walking Through Grief – Helping Others Deal with Loss

COUNSELLING SKILLS WORKSHOPS
Anxiety – Practical Intervention Strategies
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – Tools for Thinking Differently
Mindfulness Counselling Strategies – Activating Compassion and Regulation
Motivational Interviewing – Strategies for Supporting Change

CHILDREN & YOUTH ISSUES WORKSHOPS
Challenging Behaviours in Youth – Strategies for Intervention
Play Therapy – Tools for Helping Children and Youth
Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth – Issues and Strategies

ADDITIONS, MENTAL HEALTH, & DISABILITY SUPPORT WORKSHOPS
Addictions and Mental Illness – Working with Co-occurring Disorders
Autism – Strategies for Self-Regulation, Learning, and Challenging Behaviours
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – Strategies for Supporting
Harm Reduction – A Framework for Change, Choice, and Control

VIOLENCE AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WORKSHOPS
De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations™
Violence Threat Assessment – Planning and Response
Restorative Justice – Facilitating Dialogue

TOOLS FOR HELPERS
Managing Difficult Phone Calls
Peer Support – Equipping the Natural Helper
Providing Support Remotely – Strategies for Helping From a Distance
MEMBER PLAN
CTRI offers a membership plan that provides the member with unlimited access to our on-demand, one-hour webinars. Member benefits include:

- Unlimited access to all on-demand webinars whenever and however often you want. New content is added throughout the year.
- Notification of special discounts and promotions on products and training only available to members.

CONSULTING SERVICES
CTRI’s consulting services are designed to help individuals, caregivers, communities, and organizations prevent and cope with unfortunate and distressing events. To explore how to implement these services, please contact us to discuss your needs in more detail.

- Clinical Consultation
- Crisis Response Team and Plan Development
- Violence Risk Assessment and Planning

ASSESSMENT TOOLS
CTRI assessment tools help leaders and organizations have thoughtful and proactive discussions related to a variety of topics and issues. Each assessment tool package includes one facilitator’s guide and 25 copies of the assessment tool questionnaire.

- Trauma-Informed Workplace Assessment Tool
- Wellness Assessment Tool
- Workplace Violence Assessment Tool
- Emergency Preparedness Assessment Tool

BOOKS
We have books available for purchase through our ACHIEVE Publishing division:

- Counselling Insights – Practical Strategies for Helping Others with Anxiety Grief and More, edited by Vicki Enns, with contributions from eight CTRI trainers.
- Counselling in Relationships – Insights for Helping Families Develop Healthy Connections, edited by Vicki Enns, with contributions from nine CTRI trainers.
- Once a Wizard, by Curtis L. Wiebe, clinical consultation by Vicki Enns.