

(also see ACEs briefing)

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WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE?

Being 'trauma-informed' means using a knowledge of psychological trauma and its potential effects to be kind, empathetic and compassionate. Being kind is at the heart of everything you do as a professional or organisation. Trauma informed practice means recognising how common traumatic stress is, its potential impacts and acting to avoid the possibility that people are 're-traumatised' or unnecessarily stressed by interacting with you or your service.

It may also mean reviewing/auditing your service to make sure this is the case and changing practice.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS

- What happened to you NOT what's wrong with you?
- Do I know how to recognise trauma?
- Do I know how to support someone displaying signs of trauma?
- Do I know where to signpost/refer people or families?
- Do I show compassionate practice/ 'trauma-informed' practice in my work?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW

Trauma-Informed practice does not 'treat' trauma in the same way as a therapy service does.

It is designed to help people overcome barriers that their experience of trauma creates for them in accessing help.

You don't have to be a therapist to be therapeutic (Treisman, 2018). Its possible to provide support or provide a calm, empathetic environment and service for a trauma survivor without providing actual therapy.

Most tend to agree that a 'trauma-informed' approach is best as this is asset-based, but there are disagreements about using this term as it could exclude people that don't know it.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Studies carried out in both England and Wales and the USA consistently demonstrate that approximately half of the population has experienced at least one traumatic or stressful event within childhood (1 ACEs)¹. Given trauma is common, there are large numbers of people who may struggle to trust the professionals providing important services to vulnerable individuals.

In order to ensure people access the support they need there must be safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

- active listening
- no victim blaming
- Look for signs of trauma in colleagues
- Make building relationships a priority

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Each profession will experience trauma and adversity survivors in different ways in their work. However there are some important ways for professionals to think/behave:

- reduce "them" and "us" barriers
- reducing stress during transitions
- Connection before correction; regulate, relate, reason – 'Time in' not 'time out'
- Avoid triggers: no probing questions



WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO?

"Organisational culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner" (Cave, 2017, Treisman, 2018). Its important to recognise that responses to trauma must be organisation-wide to have a proper impact

Organisations can aim to 'be trauma-informed' by conducting reflective exercises, eg: reviews, walkthroughs and audits of their services to determine their strengths in trauma-informed practice. They can then aim to make any changes to improve:

- language/ terminology
- service user participation
- cultural sensitivity
- procedures
- staff wellbeing
- physical environment
- policies

HOW TO DO IT AND WHERE TO ACCESS SUPPORT

Approaches trialled in the USA have involved using internal working groups to conduct reviews and then recommending changes to services. This may perhaps use consultancy and usually involves feedback and inclusion from service users. Useful links include:

- www.safehandstinkingminds.co.uk
- SAMHSA's guidance for a trauma-informed approach
- NES – Opening doors: Trauma-Informed Practice for the workforce

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¹Bellis, M.A., Hughes, K., Leckenby, N., Perkins, C. and Lowey, H., (2014), National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviours in England, *BMC Medicine*, 12 (72), accessed at: <https://bmjmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-014-0127-2>. Cave, A. (2017), Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast. So What's for Lunch?, *Forbes*, 9th November, accessed at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewcave/2017/11/09/culture-eats-strategy-for-breakfast-so-whats-for-lunch/#.3>. Treisman, K., (2018), 'Becoming a more culturally, adversity, and trauma-informed infused, and responsive organisation', *Moving Towards Being and Sustaining a Trauma-Responsive Barnardo's*, presented at the NEC, Birmingham: 1st-3rd May 2019, London: Winston Churchill Memorial Trust