

What Do We Mean by Trauma-Informed?

Any approach to working with survivors of domestic violence has to attend to both the physical and emotional impact of trauma across the lifespan and the ongoing social realities of abuse, violence, discrimination, and oppression.

A key element of being trauma informed is recognizing the strengths and resources survivors already possess or have access to. While we explore the impact of trauma, it is critical we take into consideration the many other factors that can help to mitigate the long-term effects of abuse. These factors may include personal resilience, external supports, protective caregiver responses for children, secure attachments to caring others, cultural and spiritual values and practices, and supportive communities. Positive supports from trauma-informed mental health, substance abuse, child-parent, and DV advocacy services can also make a difference.

- The term “trauma-informed” refers to services and organizations that take into account the pervasiveness, the neurobiology and impact of trauma on people who access our services, on ourselves as providers, and on our organizations and communities.
- Understanding the range of ways we can be affected by trauma and what we can do to help counteract those experiences, mitigate their effects, and transform the conditions that produce them are key aspects of a trauma-informed approach.
- Becoming trauma-informed means examining our services and service environments and taking steps to reduce further traumatization and to support healing, resilience, and well-being. It also means attending to the impact of trauma on our staff and organizations and ensuring that we have the supports we need to sustain us in doing this work.
- In a DV/trauma/social justice framework, being trauma informed also means working to change the conditions that produce abuse, violence, and trauma in the first place.
- Finally, being trauma-informed means trying to embody in our own lives and organizations the kind of world we want to create.
- Trauma is not just individual but is often collective as well.
- Individuals may not use the word “trauma” to describe their experiences. They may speak of violence or talk about the specific act, or they may not identify as a victim. It is important to listen for how the person refers to their experience and to themselves.
- Trauma involves both experiencing a threat to our lives or to our psychic or bodily integrity (or to a loved one or community) and having our coping capacity and/or ability to integrate our emotional experience overwhelmed.
- Trauma can stem not only from direct experience but also through witnessing or learning about trauma to others.
- Collective trauma is trauma that affects people as part of a particular community, culture, or group. Historical trauma is the cumulative emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounding emanating from massive group trauma experiences. Collective and historical trauma can impact individuals and communities across generations. For example, Native Americans have, for over 500 years, endured physical, emotional, social, and spiritual genocide from European and American colonialist policy. The collective traumas of colonization affect nearly 100% of Indigenous Peoples. (Packard 2013)
- Examples of cultural, historical, insidious and political/economic trauma also include experiences of African Americans, recent immigrants, and members of LGBTQ communities.

- Culture can influence the types of trauma people experience, how people interpret their experiences, how they express (or don't express) their pain, the resources and constraints available to them, and what they find supportive and healing. Attending to cultural considerations is an essential part of being trauma informed.
- When we're talking about interpersonal trauma, we are also talking about the experience of betrayal, whether the intimate betrayal of individual forms of abuse and violence or the social betrayal of discrimination and oppression.
- When we experience multiple types of trauma, the burden is often cumulative, and we can be impacted in multiple ways.
- When we are talking about trauma in the context of domestic violence, we know that the "trauma" may be ongoing. Similarly, many individuals and communities may be impacted not only by historical trauma but also by ongoing violence and oppression.
- All of these factors can affect how a survivor might feel about trusting other people in general, trusting us as service providers, and trusting the systems where they might potentially turn for help and redress.

Trauma-Informed or Just Good Advocacy?

Not understanding trauma is often what gets in the way of good advocacy.

Being trauma-informed means adding a layer of understanding about the impact of trauma – *not defining everything through a trauma lens.*

Being Trauma-informed is more than being nice. To be nice is to be human.

Being trauma-informed requires:

- Understanding the neuroscience of trauma
- Genuine empathy
- Attention to sensory information (as the victim experienced it)
- Understanding the impact on the individual from their perspective
- Attention to Explicit & Implicit memories

Russel Strand, "Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviews: Trauma-informed Interviews, Investigations & Prosecutions" webinar at

www.evawintl.org

Trauma-Informed Approach:

- Normalizes human responses to trauma
- Supports healing; minimizes revictimization
- Shifts our understanding of symptoms from
"What's wrong with you?" TO "What happened to you?"
- Recognizes symptoms as survival strategies
- Recognizes the importance of understanding the meaning people make of their experiences
- Actively honors survivor- and woman-centered and gender-inclusive approaches, voices and expertise

How Does Knowing this Help?

We Can....

- Understand survivors' responses in context
- Respond in more helpful and empathic ways
- Offer more effective interventions
- Understand our own responses and their potential impact and need for organizational support
- Recognize role of social context and coercive control

Culturally-based Responses Are Trauma and Healing Informed

Indigenous culture provides us with understandings:

- We Heal as a Collective - we heal together!
- Identity and sense of belonging
- Experiences with discrimination and oppression
- The meaning we give our experiences
- Beliefs and traditions we draw upon
- Identifying our individual gifts and strengths is necessary for individual transformation & healing
- Identifying our traditional/cultural gifts and strengths is necessary for healing & transformation as individuals, families and nations

Indigenous Culture and Spirituality are about Relationships.

- We Are All Related
- We do not heal alone.
- Values: respect, generosity, privacy and humility; spiritual realities.
- How we refer to each other matters, i.e., relative names vs. titles and labels.
- Safety

NIWRC Advocacy Curriculum

Key Factors to Consider in Building a Trauma-Informed Response:

- Understanding the neurobiology of trauma/ violence
- Necessity of making relationships/ connections as individuals
- Trust- worthiness
- Confidentiality & Respect for Privacy
- Maintain Survivor Sense of Control
- Emotional Safety
- Respond to Challenges People Face, Not Labels
- Screen In, Not Out
- Critical Thinking About Who's Needs Are Being Met
- Priorities of Safety & Accountability
- Safety Planning as Process, Not Product
- Allow for Time

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health,
Core Curriculum on Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services:
Module 1 - Domestic Violence, Trauma, Substance Abuse, and
Mental Health: Building an Integrated Framework