



CTRI
CRISIS & TRAUMA
RESOURCE INSTITUTE

TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP

**We envision a world where
everyone is trauma-informed.**

TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP

A compassionate and trauma-informed approach to leadership is essential for creating healthy workplace cultures. Trauma is prevalent in our world and has an impact on many of the people we interact with, including staff and colleagues. Based on our book, *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces*, this workshop explores how to lead with a trauma-informed approach and provides five key principles that trauma-informed workplaces embody. By embracing these principles, organizations can contribute to the positive transformation of individuals and relationships affected by trauma, while at the same time creating the conditions that lead to high levels of employee engagement and organizational success. Every organization, from any sector, can benefit from becoming trauma-informed.

Trauma-Informed Leadership
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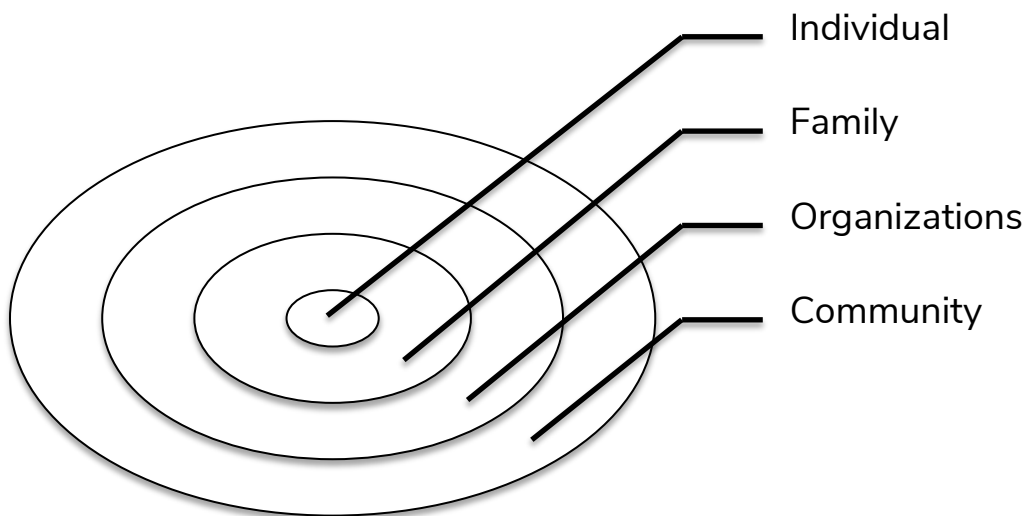
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Trauma's Ripple Effect

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.



Notes:

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.

Trauma-Informed Workplaces

Trauma-informed organizations understand the presence of trauma, acknowledge the role trauma can play in a person’s life, and promote workplace environments that support the individual and collective well-being of all staff and clients.

Trauma-informed workplaces create a sense of belonging, connection, and safety through their attitudes, policies, and practices. As a result, organizations that are trauma-informed are more resilient and better able to achieve their missions.

On the other hand, workplaces that don’t embody trauma-informed principles are often home to disrespectful behavior, a lack of safety, and feelings of disconnection. People can become isolated and may be influenced by an element of fear.

Our workplaces can be negatively influenced by the pervasive power of trauma, and they can also unintentionally amplify its impacts. However, by embracing trauma-informed principles, our organizations can also contribute to the positive transformation of individuals and relationships affected by trauma. In our own experience and work with others, we have identified five key principles that trauma-informed organizations embody:

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

Notes:

What Is Trauma-Informed Leadership?

There is a spectrum of leadership philosophies that usually fall somewhere between *relational* and *authoritarian* leadership. Trauma-informed leadership falls on the relational side of the spectrum.

In general, relational leaders build relationships and authentically care about employees. They assume the best in employees and use influence built on trust and relationships to motivate and achieve objectives. On the other hand, authoritarian leaders see employees only as tools to help meet objectives – relationships are secondary. They often assume the worst in employees and use threats and punishments to motivate.

Trauma-informed leadership moves beyond relational leadership in that trauma-informed leaders understand and are aware of the impact of trauma in the workplace. And they want to be part of the solution to supporting those affected by trauma.

Key Elements of Trauma-Informed Leadership

- Aware of the pervasive – often hidden/under the surface – impacts of trauma
- Caring, compassionate, and emphatic approaches and responses
- Assess and, in some cases, adjust ways of interacting, making decisions, and communicating
- Lead the promotion of trauma-informed principles in the workplace

While there are many factors that can mitigate the effects of trauma, trauma-informed leaders understand that, given the amount of time people spend at work, trauma-informed workplaces are one of the key factors to promoting health and well-being.

Group Discussion

What is your experience with trauma-informed workplaces/leaders?

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

Group Discussion

How have you seen the ripple effects of trauma impact your organization?

Promote Awareness

In trauma-informed organizations, leaders and employees 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 impacts of trauma and apply this learning to their work. 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.

What opportunities do staff currently have to learn about trauma? What more could be done?

Notes:

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.

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

In what ways are trauma-informed principles reflected in your policies?

Policies

In trauma-informed workplaces, policies should be evaluated and updated regularly with an eye toward enhancing trauma-informed principles. Feedback from staff and, if possible, clients should be included in this process.

Hiring

One of the best ways to promote long-term awareness is to bring new people into the organization who are already trauma-informed or have the desire to become so. Start by specifically naming trauma-informed principles in job descriptions. When conducting interviews, ask questions that help assess the candidate's level of current awareness and their openness to further exploration and growth.

How do you currently incorporate trauma-informed principles into your hiring process? What more could be done?

What has been your experience of sharing stories or talking about trauma-informed principles at meetings?

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:

“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.

Does your organization currently have a champion(s) of trauma-informed principles? If not, what steps could be taken to get one?

Group Discussion

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:

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?”

Behaviour	Common Judgement	A Curious Response
Gets mad “easily”	Always wants own way	<i>Fear often underlies anger. I wonder what might be scaring this person?</i>
Wants constant validation and approval	Insecure and needy	
Does not engage or make eye contact when spoken to	Is disrespectful	
Quick to be defensive at the slightest feedback.	Too reactive and hard to work with	

WHAT EXAMPLES DO YOU EXPERIENCE OR SEE IN YOUR SETTING?		
Behaviour	Common Judgement	A Curious Response

Empathic Curiosity 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.

Is there consistency in how empathetic curiosity is practiced in your workplace? If not, what are the effects of the inconsistency?

Group Discussion

What steps need to be taken to ensure there is consistency in how empathetic curiosity is practiced in your workplace?

Foster Safety

One of the central aspects of trauma is the experience of a threat to physical or psychological safety. This threat can continue to affect a person’s ability to feel fully safe in future environments and situations. 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 managing conflict or 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 protocols cannot be enacted from the top down or created in isolation without considering how they impact everyone in the organization – if they are, they will usually fail. Instead, 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. Everyone needs to recognize that their decisions have ripple effects and impact others. In order to achieve this, leaders, safety officers, and committees need to consult widely in the development of policies and procedures.

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

Notes:

Safety Rooted in Trust

In workplaces 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.

Because of the power inherent in leadership positions, a leader's influence on safety is magnified. Therefore, trust in leaders' decision-making is a key component to helping staff and clients feel safe. However, leaders must first work to establish trust before employees will believe that the organization has their well-being in mind.

**To what extent do staff and clients trust the decisions made by leaders?
How could the level of trust be improved?**

Notes:

“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. It reassures both staff and clients to have someone they can consult with in a position of authority, someone who is empathetic and understands their unique context.
- **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. It is helpful to clearly identify a safe space for people to use when needed.
- **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?

Group Discussion

In what ways does your organization feel physically and psychologically safe? Are there ways in which it feels unsafe? How could you work to improve safety?

Provide Choice

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. Effectively creating opportunities for choice requires all leadership and staff to work collaboratively and strive toward what's best for everyone, not just what's best for a few.

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.

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.

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

Notes:

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 for staff and clients. 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 overall feeling of a relationship with your organization.

Consider the journey of someone who engages with your organization. How do the various touchpoints they might have contribute to and influence an overall feeling of choice in their relationship with your organization? If helpful, sketch out the journey.

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 opportunities for 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 that find ways to highlight strengths increase resiliency not just in individuals, but throughout the whole workplace.

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 engage in intentional conversations in which people evaluate and verbalize their own strengths. In addition, we have found that using formal strengths assessment tools generates productive and healthy conversations.

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.

How do you and your organization work to identify and name strengths in yourselves and others?

Celebrate Diversity

An important way that organizations can honor the unique strengths of their 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.

In what ways is diversity seen as a strength in your organization? Are there practical ways in which you can better honor the unique identities of people in your workplace?

Group Discussion

What is your organization doing to highlight and affirm strengths in staff and clients? What more could it do?

Trauma-Informed Workplace 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.

- ___ 01 | My organization offers educational opportunities for learning about trauma.
- ___ 02 | My organization translates awareness of trauma into action.
- ___ 03 | My organization maintains a high standard of physical safety.
- ___ 04 | People in my workplace know their feedback will be taken seriously.
- ___ 05 | My organization celebrates the diversity of people.
- ___ 06 | Staff in my organization understand how trauma impacts others.
- ___ 07 | People in my workplace understand how flight, fight, and freeze responses can influence behaviour.
- ___ 08 | My organization maintains a high standard of psychological safety.
- ___ 09 | In my organization, a diversity of perspectives is encouraged.
- ___ 10 | My workplace affirms the strengths and resilience of people.
- ___ 11 | Awareness of trauma can be seen and demonstrated in workplace policies.
- ___ 12 | People who work in my organization convey empathetic curiosity rather than judgement towards those displaying challenging behaviours.
- ___ 13 | I trust that leaders in my workplace will make good decisions about safety.
- ___ 14 | My workplace offers staff choices about the way work is done.
- ___ 15 | People in my organization are good at seeing what a person is doing well – not just their problems or symptoms.

Scoring

Promote Awareness	Shift Attitudes	Foster Safety	Provide Choice	Highlight Strengths
01	02	03	04	05
06	07	08	09	10
11	12	13	14	15
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

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.

Reflection

01 | What responses indicate areas of concern?

02 | Of the five trauma-informed principles, what does the assessment tell you about how you are doing in each of these areas?

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

03 | In what specific ways can you work to address those areas that need the most attention?

Steps for 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.”¹
- 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.

¹ Brave Heart, M.Y.H., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D.B. (2011). “Historical trauma among indigenous peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research, and clinical considerations.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43 (4), 282-290.

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.¹

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.²

¹ Definitions are summarized from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition* (2013).

² O'Neill, L., Fraser, T., Kitchenham, A., & McDonald, V. (2018). "Hidden burdens: A review of intergenerational, historical and complex trauma, implications for Indigenous families." *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11(2):173-86.

TRAUMA – SYMPTOMS AND IMPACT

There are common signs that indicate when the survival response has started. These are normal reactions to abnormal events, that occur along a spectrum of both severity and frequency.

Arousal Or Activated Symptoms

- High emotional responses (rage, fear, agitation, restlessness, intense crying)
- Talking fast, repeating oneself; hypervigilance, high startle response, jumpy
- Muscle twitches, jerks, trembling
- Heart rate increases, hyperventilation, difficulty breathing, sweating

Numbing Or Avoiding Symptoms

- Isolation or withdrawal, difficulty being around others, collapsing
- Shock – numb or shut down presentation, lack of feeling
- No talking, lack of ability to express oneself, disorientation
- Dissociation or zoning out, not present; physically immobile or absent

COMMON IMPACTS OVER TIME

Physical Or Neurobiological Impacts

- Decreased ability to process memories or retrieve them
- Decreased ability to tell what is real or not (reality testing)
- Decreased sense of one's body
- Immune response – decreased ability to resist illnesses

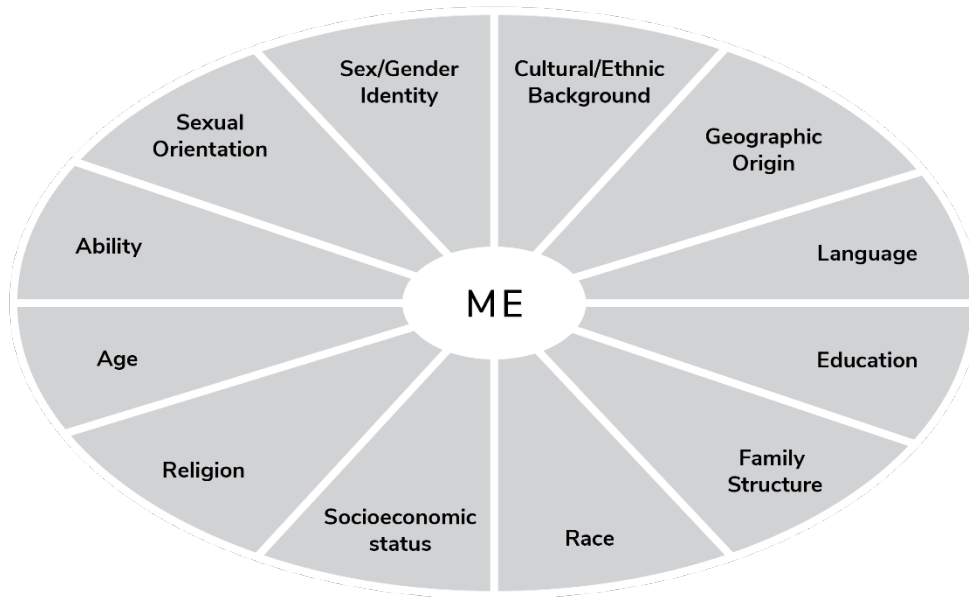
Psychological And Emotional Symptoms

- Fear of being damaged
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Self-blame, guilt, shame; self-hatred, sense of failure at life, unworthiness
- Addictions/compulsive coping patterns (substances, gambling, risky behaviours)
- Avoiding social events; general fearfulness or being overcautious

Social And Relational Symptoms

- Hypersensitive to criticism, being exposed, authority figures, roles
- Hypervigilance: waiting to be disappointed, hurt, attacked, blamed, abandoned
- Not trusting self or others; doubting intentions (e.g., “They won’t like me,” “They’re trying to hurt me on purpose,” “They’re out to get me”)
- Difficulty with boundaries – feel easily manipulated, struggle to say no
- Struggling to keep relationships; difficulty feeling intimacy
- Extreme people-pleasing or abusive/defensive behaviours toward others
- Living surrounded by chaos; difficulty starting/completing tasks/responsibilities
- Inability to relax or experience joy
- Loss of purpose, meaning, or spirituality

EXERCISE: “CULTURES I REFLECT”¹



01 | Identify who you are inside the identity wheel.

02 | On the outside of the identity wheel, identify who you perceive to be the group who currently has a dominant or privileged status in our society.

03 | Pick one section where the group you belong to matches a dominant or privileged group. What privileges come as a result?

04 | Consider what impact those privileges might have on intercultural dialogue where other participants are members of groups that have traditionally been given less privilege in our society. (E.g., if you identify as english speaking, what impact might your privileges have on intercultural communication at work, where one or more parties speak English as an additional language?)

¹ Adapted from *Letters to Marcia: A Teacher's Guide To Anti-Racist Education*, by E. Lee, 1992, Toronto: Cross-Cultural Communication Centre.

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 – Counselling Strategies for Healing and Resilience

Trauma-Informed Care – Building a Culture of Strength

Counselling Skills Workshops

Anxiety – Practical Intervention Strategies

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – Tools for Thinking Differently

Motivational Interviewing – Strategies for Supporting Change

Children and Youth Issues Workshops

Play Therapy – Tools for Helping Children and Youth

Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth – Issues and Strategies

Regulation Strategies for Children and Youth in Crisis

Addictions, Mental Health, and Disability Support Workshops

Addictions and Mental Health – Strategies for Complex Issues

Autism – Strategies for Self-Regulation, Learning, and Challenging Behaviours

Dementia – Strategies for Supporting

Violence and Restorative Justice Workshops

De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations™

Lateral Violence – Working Towards Solutions

Restorative Justice – Facilitating Dialogue

Tools for Helpers

Managing Difficult Phone Calls

Peer Support – Equipping the Natural Helper

Vicarious Trauma – Strategies for Resilience

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.
- Special members-only discounts and promotions on products and training.

FREE RESOURCES

Visit our website to check out our free resources, including a monthly webinar, printable handouts, video insights, audio exercises, and more. CTRI also has a regular podcast and blog.

CONSULTING SERVICES

Through clinical consultation, crisis response planning, critical incident group debriefing, disability support, or violence risk assessment, we can help you discover your strengths and support you as you implement positive change, increase safety, and become more trauma-informed. Contact us to find out how we can help.

TRAUMA-INFORMED ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Our free online assessment tool evaluates your organization based on five key elements of a trauma-informed organization. Complete the questionnaire to receive an 8-page report, or contact us to receive a quote to have us facilitate an assessment for your whole organization. This information will help you evaluate, understand, and discuss how your organization can become more trauma-informed.

BOOKS

We have books available through our ACHIEVE Publishing division. Titles include:

- *Counselling Insights: Practical Strategies for Helping Others with Anxiety, Grief, and More*, edited by Vicki Enns, with contributions from eight CTRI trainers
- *Counselling Activities Workbook: Handouts and Exercises for Working with People*, edited by Wilma Schroeder, with contributions from CTRI trainers
- *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces* by Nathan Gerbrandt, Randy Grieser, and Vicki Enns

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