University of Lethbridge

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Trauma-Informed Approach

Regardless of its source, trauma contains three common elements:

- It was unexpected.
- The person was unprepared.
- There was nothing the person could do to stop it from happening.

A Trauma-Informed Approach recognises and acknowledges trauma and its prevalence, alongside awareness and sensitivity to its dynamics, in all aspects of service delivery. This approach is grounded in and directed by a thorough understanding of the neurological, biological, psychological and social effects of trauma and interpersonal violence and the prevalence of these experiences in persons who receive services.[1] It involves not only changing assumptions about how we organise and provide services but creates organisational cultures that are personal, holistic, caring, and open. A trauma based approach primarily views the individual as having been harmed by something or someone.

The core Trauma-Informed principles are:

1. Acknowledgement – recognizing that trauma is pervasive
2. Safety
3. Ensuring Cultural Competence
4. Supporting Individual Control, Choice, and Autonomy
5. Trust & Compassion
6. Collaboration
7. Strengths-based

Ways to Practice a Trauma-Informed Approach:

- Recognize that the individual had no control over what happened to them. Let them know that the way they survived during the traumatic experience(s) was actually their way of resisting what was happening to them and of saying no, even if it did nothing to stop the person behaving abusively.
- Healing happens in relationships. Recognize that safe, trusting, authentic, and positive relationships can aid recovery through restoration of core neural pathways.
- Use a strengths-based perspective.

[1] Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) 2013, Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Towards a cultural shift in policy reform across mental health and human services in Australia, A National Strategic Direction, Position Paper and Recommendations of the National Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group, Authors: Bateman, J & Henderson, C (MHCC) Kezelman, C (Adults Surviving Child Abuse, ASCA)

- Frame questions and statements with empathy, being careful not to be judgmental or blaming.
- Respond to disclosure with belief and validation: acknowledge that what happened to the individual was bad, but that the individual is not a bad person.
- Understanding how cultural context influences perception of and response to traumatic events and the recovery process; respecting diversity, providing opportunities for individuals to engage in cultural rituals, and connecting with resources respectful of and specific to cultural backgrounds.
- Ask what support looks like to this individual and provide appropriate referrals to support services.
- Understanding that recovery and healing is possible for everyone regardless of how vulnerable they may appear.
- Keeping individuals well-informed about all aspects of the system, outlining clear expectations, providing opportunities for individuals to make decision, and maintaining awareness and respect for basic human rights and freedoms.
- Provide responses that are consistent and predictable
- Promoting democracy and equalization of power differentials; sharing power and decision-making across all levels of an organization, whether related to daily decisions or in the review and creation of policies and procedures.
- Watch for and try to reduce triggers and trauma reactions.[2]

Resource for Further Learning

Websites:

- Klinic Community Health Centre. (2013). *Trauma-informed The Trauma Toolkit. Second Edition*. Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Trauma-informed.ca.
- Alberta Health Services: Trauma-Informed Care Learning Modules: www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page15526.aspx.
- Echo: www.echoparenting.org/how-to-be-trauma-informed-for-real/

Books

- Herman, Judith M.D., (1992). *Trauma and Recovery.* Basic Books: New York
- *When the Body Says No:* Gabor, Maté.
- *Rising Strong:* Brown, Brené.
- *The Body Keeps the Score*: *Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Bessel van der Kolk.

[2] Klinic Community Health Centre. (2013). *Trauma-informed The Trauma Toolkit. Second Edition*. Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Trauma-informed.ca.