

What is Trauma and Trauma-informed Care?

The term trauma can refer to a wide range of traumatic, abusive or neglectful events or series of events (including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma in adulthood) that are experienced as being emotionally or physically harmful or life threatening. Whether an event(s) is traumatic depends not only on our individual experience of the event, but also how it negatively impacts one's emotional, social, spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. Trauma will often have lasting adverse effects. We are all affected by traumatic events in different ways.

Experiences that may be traumatic include:

- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Living with a family member with mental health or substance use disorders
- Sudden, unexplained separation from a loved one
- Poverty, lack of opportunity and mobility
- Racism, discrimination, and oppression
- Violence in the community, war, or terrorism
- Accidents, natural disasters
- Incarceration



Experiences like these can interfere with a person's sense of safety, self and self-efficacy, as well as the ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Traumatized people commonly feel terror, shame, helplessness and powerlessness. The terms "violence," "trauma," "abuse" and "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) are often used interchangeably. Most trauma experts suggest one way to clarify these terms is to think of trauma as a response to violence or some other overwhelmingly negative experience. Trauma is both an event and a particular response to an event; PTSD is one type of disorder that results from trauma.

Trauma Informed Care:

At its core, the trauma-informed model replaces the labelling of clients or patients as being "sick," resistant or uncooperative with that of being affected by an "injury." Viewing trauma as an injury shifts the conversation from asking "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?"

Utilizing a trauma-informed approach does not necessarily require disclosure of trauma. Rather, services are provided in ways that recognize the need for physical and emotional safety, as well as choice and control in decisions affecting one's treatment. Trauma-informed practice is more about the overall essence of the approach, or way of being in the relationship, than a specific treatment strategy or method.

A key aspect of trauma-informed services is to create an environment where service users do not experience further traumatization or re-traumatization (events that reflect earlier experiences of powerlessness and loss of control) and where they can make decisions about their treatment needs at a pace that feels safe to them.

