



What Does It Mean to Be Trauma Informed?

Trauma informed practice

There is a high prevalence of trauma in people with concurrent disorders. Trauma may include:

- Early childhood abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional)
- Rape or interpersonal violence as an adult
- Experiences associated with political oppression in refugee or other immigrant populations

People who have suffered previous traumatic experiences may not want to trust you or follow through with your treatment recommendations. Their perspectives of safety, relationships, identity of self and others may be altered as a result of trauma.

Trauma informed service involves understanding, anticipating, and responding to issues, expectations, and special needs that are often present in survivors of trauma. This includes reducing the risk of re-traumatization. You will need to shift the focus from asking What's wrong with you to What has happened to you?

Assessing for trauma

- Clarify confidentiality
- Be prepared to listen
- Accept the information
- Express empathy and caring
- Acknowledge the prevalence of abuse
- Validate the disclosure
- Address time limitations
- Offer reassurance
- Collaborate to develop an immediate plan for self-care
- Recognize that action is not always required
- Ask whether this is the person's first disclosure

What NOT to do after a disclosure

After someone discloses trauma, do not:

- Convey pity (Oh, you poor thing)
- Offer simplistic advice (like Look on the bright side or Get over it)
- Overstate or dwell on the negative (A thing like that could ruin your whole life)
- Smile (a neutral or concerned expression is more appropriate)
- Touch the survivor without permission, even if you intend it as a soothing gesture
- Interrupt
- Minimize or ignore the person's experience of trauma, the potential impact of the trauma, or the decision to disclose (like How bad could it be? or Let's just concentrate on your schizophrenia.)
- Ask intrusive questions that are not pertinent to the treatment or consultation
- Disclose your own history of trauma
- Give the impression that you know everything there is to know on the subject

If you think you may have responded inappropriately to the disclosure, or if the person's feedback suggests a negative reaction to your initial responses, you should immediately clarify your intended message and check for further reaction.

More information

- [Alberta Health Services Trauma Informed Care Resources](#)
- [British Columbia Trauma Informed Practice Guide](#)
- [Manitoba Trauma Informed Information and Education Centre](#)