

TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE



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Edinburgh Children’s Partnership

Approach to Trauma Informed People, Teams, Services, and Organisations

“…traumatic events are those in which a person is harmed, where there is a serious threat of harm, or where the person sees someone else being harmed.” [(transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot](https://transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot/media/x54hw43l/nationaltraumatrainingframework.pdf))

# INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government’s ambition, shared with COSLA and many other partners, is for a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce across Scotland, ensuring that services and care are delivered in ways that:

* are informed by people with lived experience
* recognises the importance of wellbeing in the workforce
* recognises where people are affected by trauma and adversity
* responds in ways that prevent further harm
* supports recovery
* can address inequalities and improve life chances

In 2018 the  [knowledge and skills framework](https://transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot/media/x54hw43l/nationaltraumatrainingframework.pdf) for psychological trauma, developed by NHS Education for Scotland (NES) was published. This framework sets out the knowledge and skills needed by everyone in the Scottish workforce to be able to recognise where an individual may be affected by trauma and to adapt their practice accordingly in order to minimise distress and support recovery through a safe and compassionate response.

It is important that in Edinburgh we have services that support people, both those using services as well as those employed to deliver them, and that they are supported in understanding trauma, and being able to, even on the most basic of levels, respond to trauma.

Although Trauma Informed Practice may sound new or complex to many colleagues, who may well be put off by the name; Trauma Informed Practice is straightforward and aligns to very common values of kindness, listening, caring, treating people with dignity and respect and being mindful that people have all been on a journey and how they may well be behaving with you is an insight into that journey.

The following document outlines the 5 principles of trauma informed practice, which has the double benefit of not only supporting us to become more trauma informed, it also promotes how we should enter all helping and supportive relationships.

# CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As always people need to be mindful that their experiences may well be very different to those of others around them. Those experiences may well have been negatively affected by the attitudes, judgements, legislation and prejudice that Scottish society has historically promoted.

Many people will have been and still face the issues of prejudice and discrimination, which further compounds their trauma experience. Such characteristics may include the person’s:

* Race
* Sex
* Sexuality
* Ability/Disability
* Gender identity
* Religious beliefs

Our awareness, sensitivity and mindfulness of the different experiences that people bring with them is a key aspect to making sure that by demonstrating the **5 principles** we do not further the impact that discrimination and prejudice has already occurred, compounding the trauma experiences that they may also have experienced.

# THE 5 PRINCIPLES

There are **5 principles** of Trauma Informed Practice:

* Safety
* Trust
* Collaboration
* Choice
* Empowerment

# SAFETY

Our roles and responsibilities are to do no harm. To be Trauma Informed is to be sensitive and to be paying attention to how safe we can make people feel. Safety can be both physical and emotional.

How do you, your team, your service, your organisation help all people – those using your organisation’s services and those belonging to it – feel safe? When did you last have a conversation with someone about whether they feel safe? We can make many assumptions about safety, yet like so much of trauma informed practice, it is not for us as we are asking the questions, it is for the person we are asking that our focus must be on.

# TRUST

If we are to support people who have experienced trauma in their lives, then we must behave and act in ways that convey trustworthiness. There are four simple approaches to generating trust:

Listening – to understand, not just to respond

Being reliable – doing what you say you will, when you said you would; and if you are unable to do so, being open about that

Being honest – telling the truth, even when the truth is unlikely to be positively received

Being dependable – being consistent in how you act and behave

Trust takes time to build, yet once lost can be very difficult to regain. Ways to lose trust are through:

Not listening – not being interested in what is being said to you, not following through on actions

Being unreliable – not showing up, or showing up yet not being focused

Being dishonest - not telling the truth, or not revealing information that is needed

Being uncaring – not showing compassion or kindness

Being impolite – lacking courtesy and forgetting – please, thank you, hello, how are you?

Holding people to different standards – double standards, ‘ok for me to be late, yet not you?’

How do you, your team, your service and your organisation build trust? What are you doing to make sure you are not breaking people’s trust?

# COLLABORATION

Collaboration is doing things with people. Collaboration is not:

* Doing things for people
* Doing things to people
* Ignoring people and their views

By doing things with people, we are discussing the situation with them, and having that person contribute and share the challenge with you of what needs resolved. To collaborate is to share. To collaborate is to trust that the person is an equal partner in the challenge or problem they are faced with.

How do you, your team, your service, your organisation collaborate? How are you making sure that you are avoiding doing things for, to people, or ignoring them and their views?

# CHOICE

Choice is having possibilities. Options which will hold different values and outcomes. Choose A and this might happen. Choose B and something different might happen. Offering, when it is possible, choice to people is always better than offering no choice. By offering choice, we are supporting people retain control over decisions, preferences and options. Choices and options do not need to be about final decisions, they can and often are the small things, such as where to meet, when to meet, does the person require anyone to come with them etc. This starts the relationship by giving the message that the person has choice and control.

The pitfall to avoid is offering choices when none truly exist. This will be a rarity, as there are almost always choices – even if they are very small e.g. would you prefer to sit there or here? - yet you need to be clear when choices become limited or are reduced to a point where there is only one option available.

How do you, your team, your service, your organisation offer choices to people? What can you do to improve the offer of choices?

# EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is about giving someone the authority or power over something. In trauma informed practice empowerment is making sure that people retain their own sense of authority and power in their lives. By supporting people see the authority and power they have ensures that people do not lose their own sense of power and authority – to become disempowered. By supporting people in keep their own authority and power protects that person from losing control of decision making about their own life. For some people the idea of having authority and power is an alien one, and it is important that support is offered to identify that sense of power and authority.

How do you, your team, your service, your organisation support people to keep or build their sense of authority and power? What can you do to make sure that you are not taking away people’s sense of personal power and authority?

# TRAUMA AWARENESS

With the **5 principles** in place, on an individual, team, service and organisational level, to be Trauma Informed we need to be aware of the following:

# REALISE PREVALENCE

Trauma is unfortunately all around us. We may have personally experienced trauma or know someone close to us who has. We may work with people who have experienced trauma or have colleagues who have experienced trauma. The chances are that you know many people who have experienced trauma.

Trauma can occur at any time of life – from childhood right through to older age.

Being aware that trauma is very common, allows us to begin any relationship with an openness to the fact that the person we are building a relationship with, may well have experienced trauma. That may remain hidden to us, or be obvious, either through self-disclosure or behaviours that they display.

Through adopting the **5 principles** approach, you will not only support those people who have a trauma experience, your approach will also benefit all people you encounter. It also ensures that our approach to trauma informed practice does not create different standards for different people. The above principles support all people yet have specific relevance for those people who have experienced trauma.

# RECOGNISE IMPACT

The impact of trauma can affect people in many ways. It could affect:

* How people respond to other people and the relationships they have (including with people who provide services)
* Affect the person’s abilities when stressed
* Their long-term health and wellbeing – physical and mental
* Affect how people cope with life and life events
* How the person learns
* How they view themselves
* How they take care of themselves

This is not an exhaustive list yet gives an indication of the impact that trauma has on people. ***Trauma however affects people in different and unique ways***. It is important that we understand that the impact of trauma is not a choice that the person is making, it is the lasting impact that it has been left upon them.

Through using the **5 principles** to guide how we respond towards and with people, we can become open to the idea and possibility that the way someone is behaving and interacting may well be down to their previous experiences and that they will benefit from your mindfulness of the **5 principles**.

# RESIST RETRAUMATISATION

When someone who has had a trauma experience they can become primed to see and sense danger and can react with a fight-flight-freeze response to situations that remind them of the trauma they experienced before: in these situations, the person can sometimes feel as bad as when the trauma was actually happening (this is called re-traumatisation). Experiences that have this affect upon a person are likely to see that person withdraw from contact, support and your service.

We can, through adopting the **5 Principles** in how we work, make sure that that we lessen the chance of someone becoming retraumatised by focusing on - trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and safety.

# RESPOND

We can have people all around us that have experienced trauma.

That is why adopting a whole approach (individual, team, service and organisational) to the **5 principles** is crucial in supporting people using services or those providing such services.

The **5 principles** mean as much to those working in teams, services and organisations, as they do to how we support people approaching them. When the work we do also brings us into contact with people who are affected by trauma, there is an added responsibility to recognise this, adjust how we work to take account of the impact of trauma, and respond in a way which supports recovery, does no harm and recognises the needs that people have.

People, teams, services and organisations need to be mindful of supporting people who meet and engage with people who may have a trauma experience. Through their work, people may well be told or have things shared that are difficult and distressing to hear. Colleagues, teams, services and organisations need to keep in mind the need to offer support to people who through adopting the **5 principles** are having personal and distressing information shared with them.

# RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Safe and supportive relationships are known to be key in fostering resilience and in enabling recovery following adversity and trauma. For this reason, it is important that people do recognise the potential for each contact they have with people to demonstrate through their actions and behaviours the **5 Principles**. In this way, whether having a trauma experience or not, our responses are far more likely to foster recovery and support, rather than risk retraumatising the person.

# RESPECT RESILIENCE

Despite trauma being prevalent and bringing with it the risk of long-lasting impact, ***this is not inevitable***. People show amazing resilience, courage and determination following trauma events. It is important therefore that when we are demonstrating the **5 principles** that we do not make the person feel like or believe that they are viewed as being a victim.

People’s own abilities to respond to and move forward with their lives, despite the trauma experience they have faced, needs support and the person’s own authority and power over their life encouraged. People’s strengths need to be celebrated and used to build other areas of strength in their lives.

# TRAUMA INFORMED POLICIES, SYSTEMS, ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE

All policies, systems, environments and people need to incorporate the **5 principles** of trauma informed practice. Through the adoption of the behaviours and approaches the **5 principles** promote into our policies, systems, environments and our people, we will move towards a position where no matter the person’s trauma experience, they will find a group of people, teams, services and organisations far better place to get alongside their journey of support and recovery.

Colleagues may find the following videos of interest and further learning:

[Opening Doors](https://vimeo.com/274703693) (8 minutes

[Sowing Seeds](https://vimeo.com/334642616) (11 minutes) colleagues working with children and young people

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