



What is meant by being 'trauma-informed'?

The impact of overwhelming adverse experiences combined with a lack of resiliency factors being present can lead to accumulated trauma. This can include events experienced early in life, such as child abuse, neglect, witnessing violence and being disconnected from one's community and culture. Later life traumatic experiences may include accidents, natural disasters, assault or sudden unexpected loss.

Trauma can impact:

- ◆ **physical and mental health**
- ◆ **relationships**
- ◆ **sense of safety, trust, and confidence**
- ◆ **a child's developing brain, which in turn can affect their behaviour, emotions, and ways of thinking**

By being trauma informed, we can help children and adults manage their trauma responses and avoid the potential long term impacts of trauma such as sleeping problems, inability to concentrate, depression, self blame and self-destructive behaviours. We can also respond in a trauma-informed way to in-the-moment trauma responses such as clenching of fists, rapid breathing or being unable to speak or move.

Caregivers and care providers can be trauma-informed by understanding the impact of trauma on people's lives and finding ways to support safety and wellness. Being trauma-informed means understanding the components of resiliency and how those factors are essential anchors in the work with families. It also involves practicing self care, and supporting other caregivers, care providers and social workers as we learn together about and prevent secondary trauma.

1. Trauma Awareness

Being "trauma aware" means recognizing that trauma is common for children and youth in care and their families. It means understanding that many of their reactions and behaviours (e.g., being angry, withdrawn, hostile, testing limits) may be a result of trauma and not bad behaviour or illness.

Being "trauma aware" also involves recognizing the potential for secondary trauma in ourselves, other parents and social workers. It involves committing to learning about self care, organizational strategies for preventing all forms of secondary trauma, and strategies for supporting resilience and wellness in all we do.

2. Safety and Trustworthiness

Trauma impacts a person's sense of safety and security. Strategies for promoting physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural safety and feelings of trust can help children begin to feel less of a sense of danger, and more of a sense of security. Safety and trustworthiness are also important in creating warm interactions with families. Caregivers and care providers can be clear, kind and trustworthy in their communication, and they can reassure natural families that their children will be kept safe.

In addition, it is important for people supporting others who have trauma experiences to have their own personal safety and wellness plan.

3. Choice, Collaboration, and Connection

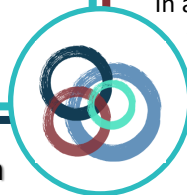
Positive connections means authentic and warm. These human interactions with caregivers, care providers, parents and other adults are a key foundation in promoting growth, stability and recovery from trauma for children, youth, and their families.

Experiences of trauma can result in feelings of powerlessness. Providing meaningful opportunities for children, youth, and their families to make decisions and be partners in their care can help restore a sense of control and responsibility.

4. Strengths Based and Skill Building

Foster parents can support growth and healing by helping children and youth develop skills for managing the short- and long-term effects of trauma. These skills can include relaxation skills, new social skills, and spiritual practices which can be strengthened by partnering with the family's culture.

Strengths based means seeking to understand the entire person and circumstance, seeing "what works" and "how to do more of what works" rather than focusing primarily on identifying and stopping problem behaviours in children, parents, and even systems.





Practical tips for caregivers & care providers to be trauma-informed

1. Trauma Awareness Examples

Learn about:

- ◆ trauma responses
- ◆ how to teach calming skills
- ◆ how to support overall resilience
- ◆ self-care strategies (books, websites, apps).

Share strategies for how to facilitate the use of grounding skills by children, young people and adults.

Access training and explore online resources such as the ones listed below.

Discuss with other parents and social workers what you are learning.

2. Safety and Trustworthiness Examples

Predictability helps to create a sense of safety and security.

- ◆ Stick with routines; be as consistent as possible.
- ◆ Explain why before doing something.
- ◆ Let children know the plan for the morning/day/week; write out a schedule.
- ◆ Prepare them for transitions.

Notice and support how safety and trustworthiness is occurring in planning meetings with families.

3. Choice, Collaboration, and Connection Examples

Feeling a lack of control can result in responses such as anger, defiance, fear, and a sense of powerlessness. Offer children manageable, age-appropriate choices that are meaningful for them:

- ◆ this can be as simple as offering them a choice between a banana and an orange;
- ◆ or, it can be a choice about when to do their homework or chores.

Practice the “**calm creates calm**” strategy. This means for example, that you adjust your tone of voice, offer to do a breathing exercise together (co-regulation) and/or name what you notice they are experiencing, e.g., “It looks like you’re feeling tense. Would it be helpful to _____?”

4. Strengths-Based and Skill Building Examples

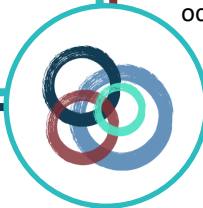
Every child responds differently to adverse experiences. It can take time to figure out what will help them manage their responses and move towards healing. You can help them develop skills such as:

- ◆ breathing techniques
- ◆ relaxation skills, or
- ◆ other things that they can be ready to do when they are upset or overwhelmed.

Assist children to develop strengths by helping them:

- ◆ develop goals
- ◆ explore their interests, and
- ◆ maintain and build new relationships.

Noticing and communicating about the strengths of natural parents is another example of being trauma-informed.



Online Resources

Heart-Mind Online (British Columbia) | <https://heartmindonline.org/resources>

Evidence-informed resources from the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education to support the positive and emotional development of children. Aligns with competencies developed by the BC Ministry of Education.

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative | <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources>

Accessible information about brain development, the impact of trauma, and ways to support recovery and healing.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (United States) | <https://www.nctsn.org/>

Resources for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events.

Children and Family Futures (United States) | <https://www.cffutures.org/trauma-informed-care/>

Resources for families affected by trauma, substance use, and mental health disorders.

Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University Resource Library | <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resourcecategory/tools-guides/>

Self Care Wheel | <http://www.olgaphoenix.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SelfCare-Wheel-Final.pdf>

Guide to Wellness and Comfort Activities | https://www.porticonetwork.ca/documents/21686/33120/wellness_guide-FPO-V3_57561.pdf/f2ddeb43-d98e-427b-b8ee-25c186554022