



Trauma Informed Care

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is the response to a deeply upsetting or distressing event that reduces a person's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness and can weaken their sense of self. Trauma often involves a sense of powerlessness in the person or community experiencing the traumatic event. Traumatic events often have lasting effects on the person's day-to-day functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Immediately after the event, shock and denial are common. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, self-preserving coping mechanisms, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

Traumatic events can be:

- A once-off experience, such as sexual assault, a natural disaster, the death of a loved one, and so on.
- A series of once-off events that intersect and build off each other.
- A continued event, such as childhood neglect, domestic violence, etc.

Trauma can affect an individual or a whole community, e.g., a natural disaster such as an earthquake or Covid-19. It can also cross between generations, e.g., the trauma experienced by our First Nations peoples.

WHAT IS "TRAUMA INFORMED CARE"?

Put simply, 'Trauma Informed Care' (TIC) is a mindset or lens that realizes that anyone you interact with may have experienced trauma, and that its effects are complex. It recognises that it is important to have a basic understanding of the nature of trauma and how it may impact the overall quality of life of the person or persons who have been traumatized by a life event. A Trauma-informed approach emphasises a shift from focusing on a person's 'problems' and thinking "What's wrong with you?", to focusing instead on a person's experience. Specifically, trying to understand "What happened to you?" recognises what may have happened to the person that could be contributing to their current experience or situation. It is important to understand that things around us that may seem benign (such as a closed room, loud noises, or a specific geographical location, etc) can be triggering for someone who has experienced trauma.



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TRAUMA INFORMED CARE AND PASTORAL CARE

There are four R's to consider in trauma-informed thinking and care:

Realising

- Firstly, it is important to realise how common trauma is, most Australian adults have experienced a traumatic event at some point in their life. Realizing the widespread impact of trauma allows a church community or those in positions of pastoral care to understand an individual's difficult behaviours may be a result of coping strategies that are trying to keep them to be safe from further harm.

Recognising

- One of the most significant impacts of suffering from trauma is the shame that can be felt when needing to seek support to deal with the traumatic experience. This shame that some people feel as a result of having been traumatized can prevent them from seeking help. A church community can play a vital role in reducing this shame through recognising and validating those suffering from trauma that there is no shame in getting help, that, in fact, doing so is a sign of their strengths.

Responding

- Through becoming more aware that trauma is a common experience and making use of available resources, church communities can respond by putting into practice a trauma-informed care approach. Policies, such as mission statements, staff handbooks and manuals can promote a culture based on beliefs about resilience and healing from trauma and promote safety within the community.

Resisting

- A trauma-informed approach rests on a 'do no harm' approach that is sensitive to how traumatic situations can be unintentionally remade. It is focused to how support is offered, ensuring that power and choice is given to the individual being supported. When support is given, it is important to think about how we can uphold safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

This lens or having a TIC perspective is practically done through the 'Six Core Principles of Trauma Informed Care':



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CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

1. Safety

Ensuring physical and emotional safety for both children and adults alike. Prioritising that common areas are welcoming; privacy is respected and interactions with other promote a sense of safety.

2. Trustworthiness and Transparency

Both adult and young person's ministries alike should pursue to build and maintain trust through honesty and transparency. This should involve not making promises you cannot keep (such as mandatory reporting protocols or overstating your ability to help).

3. Peer Support

Peer support is a useful tool to creating a sense of safety, building trust, promoting collaboration, and using stories of lived experience to promote support. The term "peers" refers to other people with lived experiences of trauma. For example, if a young person has experienced a specific trauma, then a listening ear and advice from an older church member can be valuable.

4. Collaboration

Importance is placed on 'walking alongside' someone who is experiencing trauma, rather than trying to act on their behalf. Ensure you allow the person to speak uninterrupted, actively listen to what they want or what support they need and work together in light of their needs.

5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice

Similar to collaboration, empowerment allows an individual who has experienced a traumatic event to use their voice to participate in decisions affecting them. This allows their strengths and experiences to be recognized as valuable assets in any decisions that need to be made about them. Empowerment can look like focusing on the individual's strengths and building them up.

6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Traumatic events can stem from inequalities that an individual experiences due to cultural, historical or gendered factors. For example, there are many First Nations peoples and CALD people who are not only facing current racism and bias but also carrying the intergenerational trauma from the historical sufferings that their peoples faced.



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FURTHER RESOURCES:

Having conversations about Trauma with a friend: https://blueknot.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/26_BK_FS_TalkingAboutTrauma_GeneralPublic_JULY21.pdf

Talking about Trauma with someone you don't know: https://blueknot.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/49_BK_FS_TalkingAboutTrauma_someoneYouDontKnow_JUL21.pdf

More information on Trauma-Informed Care:

<https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/>

Diving deeper into Trauma-Informed Care research:

https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/childrens_mental_health/atc-whitepaper-040616.pdf

More information on self-care and vicarious trauma:

<https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/therapeutic-resources/vicarious-trauma-self-care-to-manage-the-impact-of-other-peoples-trauma>