

TRAUMA-INFORMED ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Within the anti-violence sector, we know that our workers are disproportionately impacted by vicarious trauma, and many have themselves experienced violence and trauma. These experiences have tangible impacts on staff wellness and workforce retention.

Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice

1. Trauma awareness
2. Safety and trustworthiness
3. Choice, collaboration, and connection
4. Strengths-based and skill-building

Source: [Trauma Informed Practice Guide \(2013\)](#)

Trauma-informed practice (TIP) is being applied across numerous sectors and service systems to better meet the needs of people who have experienced trauma, including survivors of gender-based violence. Yet, the application of trauma-informed practice principles within our own organizations and leadership – including policies and procedures, hiring and onboarding practices, supervision and debriefing – is not consistent across the anti-violence sector.

Let's consider how we can better apply trauma-informed practices within our organizations. Doing so will not only improve individual staff wellness, but will also benefit workplace culture and improve organizational health. Prioritizing staff wellness also contributes to retention, reducing the costs of recruiting and training new staff.

Organizational Self-Assessment

As a first step, it is important to determine where your organization is currently at, with respect to integrating trauma-informed principles. An organizational self-assessment or checklist can help organizations to identify trauma-informed practices already in place, as well as opportunities to further implement trauma-informed practice principles at the organization level.

Supporting Staff Wellness

- Prioritize staff wellness, and model and encourage self-care (breaks, exercise, mindfulness, meditation)
- Provide access to ongoing training on the impacts of trauma work (such as vicarious trauma) and the importance of self-care
- Offer trauma-informed supervision
- Review caseloads and workloads to ensure they are manageable



Workplaces and organizations have a responsibility to create a psychologically safe workplace. This includes an environment that promotes trauma-informed principles such as safety and trustworthiness, not just for those receiving services, but also for those providing services.

[Klinic Community Health Centre, 2013](#)

Considerations for Organizational TIP

Building trauma-informed organizations requires a commitment from leadership to shift organizational culture. Consider the extent to which trauma-informed practices and principles are embedded within your organization's policies and procedures, hiring and onboarding practices, physical space, communications, and staff wellness initiatives.

Hiring and Onboarding

- How do hiring committees assess applicants' trauma-informed practice knowledge and/or skills?
- How are agency policies and practices made available to new staff?
- How do onboarding practices address staff wellness and self-care?

Policies and Procedures

- Do agency policies clearly articulate a commitment to trauma-informed practice within the organization? How is this commitment operationalized?
- How are staff supported in receiving ongoing training on trauma, vicarious trauma, and the importance of self-care?
- To what extent are staff wellness and organizational health discussed in staff meetings?
- How are staff encouraged to prioritize wellness and practice self-care?
- How does the organization recognize and celebrate successes?

Supervision and Debriefing

- To what extent are staff given choice in how they undertake their work?
- How do staff workloads balance trauma work and other kinds of work?
- When and how are staff invited to collaborate in decision-making and provide feedback to the organization?
- How does the organization support staff experiencing vicarious trauma?

- Are staff mistakes and/or missteps treated as learning opportunities?
- What training do managers receive in trauma-informed supervision?

Trauma-Informed Supervision

- Recognize that staff may have experiences of trauma and/or vicarious trauma
- Normalize common impacts of doing trauma work
- Build trust through active listening and respecting confidentiality
- Highlight staff strengths, as well as opportunities for learning and growth
- Support staff to identify solutions for challenges, building on their strengths
- Invite feedback on supervision style
- Conduct regular performance reviews and goal setting meetings
- Promote and demonstrate self-awareness, healthy boundaries, and work-life balance.

Additional Resources:

<http://sanctuaryweb.com> (Dr. Sandra Bloom)
[Trauma-Informed Practice Guide](#) (BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, 2013)
[Trauma-Informed Organizations/Systems – Organizational Self Assessment](#) (Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre)
[Developing Trauma-Informed Organizations: A Tool Kit \(Second Edition\)](#) (Institute for Health and Recovery, 2012)
[Trauma-Informed Development Education](#) (YWCA Toronto)
[Strategies for Encouraging Staff Wellness in Trauma-Informed Organizations](#) (Menschner & Maul, 2016)
[Policy Guidance for Trauma Informed Human Resources Practices](#) (2017)