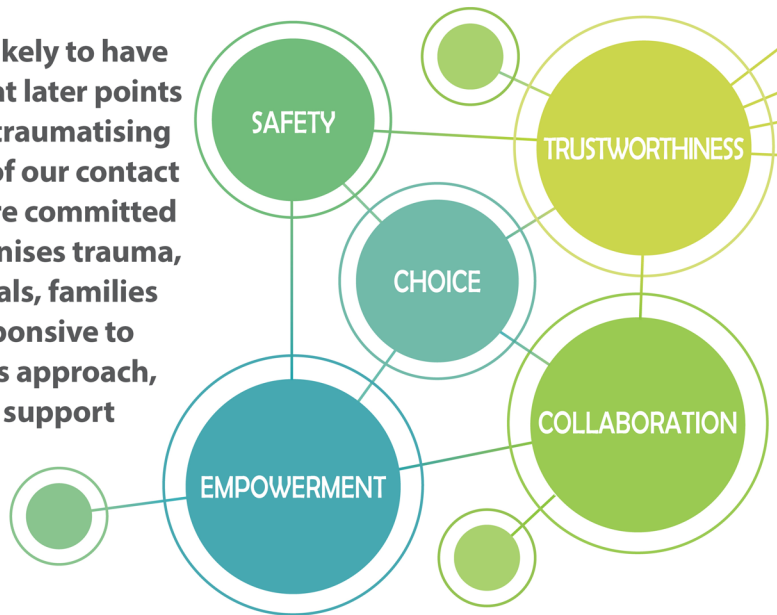




TRAUMA RESPONSIVE PRACTICE GUIDE

BEING TRAUMA INFORMED SO WE CAN BE TRAUMA RESPONSIVE

People seeking our assistance at YFS are likely to have experienced trauma in childhood and/or at later points in their lives. They may be living through traumatising situations and circumstances at the time of our contact with them. In providing our services we are committed to a strengths-based approach that recognises trauma, understands the effects it has on individuals, families and communities and is sensitive and responsive to these effects. We believe that through this approach, our needs-based service delivery will also support healing and recovery from trauma.



PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to:

- ensure we have a shared understanding of trauma and how it affects people's emotions and behaviour
- promote consistent awareness and responses across staff and programs in recognising and responding to people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma
- build staff confidence and capacity in recognising and responding to people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma
- prevent people using our services from being re-traumatised and to support their recovery.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma may stem from a single incident such as an accident or natural disaster or it can be complex involving a series of events or circumstances over time.

'Individual trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual wellbeing.' (SAMHSA, 2014)

Building on this definition, it is important to understand that groups of people may experience collective trauma. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, colonisation and the forced removal of children has had and continues to have a traumatic effect on individuals, families, and communities. For some refugees and asylum seekers, their experiences of persecution, genocide and war has had and continues to have a traumatic effect on individuals, families and communities.

Trauma may therefore be both individual and collective in nature and can affect people across generations. For example, unresolved trauma may impact on a parent's capacity to nurture and care for their children or a community's capacity to support families in nurturing and caring for their children.

The types of events that can be traumatising include grief and loss; child abuse and neglect; domestic and family violence; homelessness; poverty; substance abuse; bullying; mental illness; separation and family breakdown; incarceration; colonisation and the forced removal of children from their families; factors leading people to seek asylum or otherwise emigrate (persecution, genocide and war), adapting to living in a new country; racism; natural disasters.

HOW DOES TRAUMA IMPACT PEOPLE?

People who experience trauma make emotional and behavioural adaptations focused on keeping themselves safe in relation to others.

Trauma-based adaptations may impact a person or group's emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural development and wellbeing. The impact of trauma is influenced by a number of factors including age when the traumatising event or circumstance occurs; the type, intensity, frequency and duration of the events or circumstances; what happens before and what happens subsequent to these events or circumstances.

Trauma activates instinctive survival responses - 'fight-flight-freeze'. These responses are innate, they are built-in, people's responses are not intended or deliberate. In practical terms, stress can impact people's ability to be calm, reflect and respond flexibly. Trauma responses include both:

- agitation e.g. shaking, sweating, raised voice (hyperarousal)
- withdrawal e.g. glazed eyes, zoning out, shut down (hypoarousal).

When people are stressed or anxious these responses can re-occur even though the actual danger is no longer present.

PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA RESPONSIVE APPROACH

The five principles (ASCA, 2014) underpinning our approach to trauma are:

Safety: facilitating physical, emotional and cultural safety

Trustworthiness: creating trustworthiness through clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries

Choice: maximising choice and control

Collaboration: promoting collaboration and sharing of power

Empowerment: prioritising empowerment and skill-building

We work with a diverse group of people. Our approach to trauma is culturally respectful and responsive in how we understand and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We respect differences in age, gender, abilities, sexual orientation and socio economic status and understand how bias and prejudice can be a response to difference. We understand how experiences of bias and prejudice may impact people seeking our assistance and reflect this in how we respond to their needs.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Together, these principles provide a trauma responsive, recovery oriented, strengths based approach to practice.

As noted earlier, people seeking our assistance may now be or are likely to have experienced trauma in their lives. This then is our starting point in putting these principles into practice. From our first contact we are alert to the possibility that the person may now be experiencing trauma - or are likely to have experienced trauma – and we respond in a way that is consistent with that possibility.

Safety

Our first task is to establish conditions of safety – a person cannot progress if a relative degree of physical and emotional safety is not available or attainable.

Key actions:

- Ensure that reception and waiting areas are comfortable and inviting
- Ensure sufficient space and seating in reception and waiting areas
- Present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials through artwork, posters, flags and reading material in reception and waiting areas
- Make first contacts with people welcoming, respectful and engaging (with particular attention to use of facial expression, tone of voice and body language)
- Approach people with empathy
- Use non-judgemental language when describing people using services
- Provide people with clear information about what is happening and what happens next

What else can you and your team do to facilitate safety?

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is created through making the tasks involved in providing services clear, by being consistent in practice, and maintaining interpersonal boundaries.

Key actions:

- Provide people with clear information about what is expected of them and what they can expect from staff
- Provide people with clear information about what will be done, by whom, when, why, under what circumstances. If for some reason this does not occur as previously agreed, then apologise, explain and clarify what will occur instead.
- Maintain respectful professional boundaries in all interactions with people
- Explain to people what information is required to provide the service, how their consent will be sought to obtain information from others or share information with others and under what circumstances information will be shared without their consent
- Let people know they can access their personal information

What else can you and your team do to create trustworthiness?

Choice

People should have as much choice and control as is possible over the services they receive and how they are provided.

Key actions:

- Consider what the 'real' bottom-lines are
- Provide individualised services to people that are matched to their needs
- Give people a choice about when and how contact is made
- Give people a choice over when, where, and by whom the service is provided

What else can you and your team do to maximise choice and control?

Collaboration

Program activities and settings promote collaboration and sharing of power with people using services.

Key actions:

- Actively engage people in identifying and responding to their needs
- Cultivate an approach of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' people
- Convey an understanding of the person as expert in their own lives
- Actively engage people in case planning and review processes

What else can you and your team do to promote collaboration?

Empowerment

Programs and settings empower people and build their strengths and skills.

Key actions:

- Create a sense of hope and optimism
- Identify and recognise people's strengths and skills
- Provide access to information and resources
- Resource people to develop or enhance the knowledge and skills they need including coping skills
- Involve people in developing and evaluating services

What else can you and your team do to prioritise empowerment and skill-building?

AVOIDING RE-TRAUMATISATION AND SUPPORTING RECOVERY

Understanding these principles and putting them into practice will help us build trusting relationships, better respond to the needs of people who have experienced trauma, reduce stressful interactions and avoid re-traumatisation.

Whilst YFS does not provide clinical therapy or trauma-specific services, the way we work can be significant in supporting people's recovery from trauma and achievement of their hopes and goals.

References

Adults Surviving Child Abuse (2014) 'The Last Frontier': Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery. Wavell Heights.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. Rockville.