

# Creating Physically and Psychologically Safe Environments

REACHING OUT FOR HELP CAN BE DAUNTING AND NEW ENVIRONMENTS CAN ADD TO THE STRESS AND ANXIETY A TRAUMATIZED PERSON IS ALREADY FEELING.

Work environments that feel physically and psychologically safe help to put clients and staff at ease. There are many aspects of your work environment that contribute to creating physical and psychological safety; some changes may be beyond your budget while others are relatively straightforward to do.

## Physical environment

- The use of lighter cool colours, soft yet well-lit spaces (rather than fluorescent lighting), and reduced clutter contribute to creating a calming environment
  - Cool colours include blue, green, and purple.
  - Lighter-coloured rooms are perceived as calmer and safer.
  - Avoid stark white and deeply hued warm colours (i.e., red, orange, yellow).
- Natural lighting is optimized where possible
- Accessibility is factored into elevators, door widths and door handles, access to exits, bathrooms in their entirety, and furniture placement
- Comfortable, well-spaced furniture enhances feelings of safety; furniture and space are used to optimize privacy too
- Consideration is also given to background noise (kept low if possible) and scents that may be triggers or allergens are avoided.
- The space presents as well-kept, clutter is avoided, and materials available are inclusive.
- Spaces with clear sightlines and few barriers create a sense of safety and calm.

## Psychological environment

- Welcoming intake processes, forms, and signage help create safe work environments.
  - Staff are trained to greet clients in a warm, welcoming, and professional manner.
  - Opportunities to complete forms in advance or in privacy are offered.
  - Signage uses positive and welcoming language, with requests rather than commands, and incorporate local languages.
- Natural art is calming.
- Local art is comforting as it reflects the community and can contribute to creating a sense of cultural safety.
- Plants are calming and contribute to a welcoming and safe environment.
- Positive and inclusive materials about community resources that reflect the diversity of the people being served contributes to creating cultural safety.
- Consideration should also be given to reflecting people living with disabilities and 2SLGBTQ+ people in waiting room posters, art, and materials about community resources.