

Walk as One

BECOMING A LEADING ORGANIZATION IN TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES TO SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SECTOR

This section of the guide clarifies trauma and violence-informed approaches for organizational leaders and policymakers in the gender-based violence sector. It provides information, tools, and strategies so you can embed these approaches in your organization's policies, procedures, practices, and workplace culture.

REVISITING THE NEED FOR TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES TO SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SECTOR

Trauma is the response to an event that **overwhelms our ability to cope**. It describes the challenging effects that living through a distressing event or series of events can have for an individual. Trauma may impact one's physical, psychological (emotional or cognitive), social, and spiritual health and well-being.

Defining a traumatic event can be difficult as the same event may be more traumatic for some people than for others. However, traumatic events experienced **early in life**, such as abuse, neglect, and disrupted attachment, can often be devastating. **Later life events**, such as experiencing violence, a serious accident, sudden unexpected loss, or living through a natural disaster or war can be equally challenging and traumatic (CAMH, 2022).

Trauma can also result from intergenerational and historical acts, such as genocide, terrorism, and colonialism that continue to reside in systems, structures, and people in power.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches are about **creating safety** for all by understanding trauma and the **intersecting impacts** of systemic and interpersonal violence and structural inequities on their life and what brings them to their point of interacting with your organization. This approach emphasizes both historical and ongoing violence and their traumatic impacts.

*Events are traumatic due to **complex interactions** between the individual's neurobiology, their previous and ongoing experiences of trauma and violence, and the influence of their broader community and social structures.*

Trauma and violence-informed approaches are designed to **shift your focus** when interacting with your clients, staff, and others, so you can see that their behaviours, challenges, and experiences are shaped by their current circumstances and possibly also by previous and historical traumatic experiences. It involves shifting your perspective from "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened, and perhaps is still happening, to you?"

Consideration is given not only to ongoing interpersonal forms of violence, but also structural – systemic forms, such as systemic racism, other forms of discrimination, and poverty, and their effects.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches are not about you eliciting or treating people's trauma, but rather focusing on **minimizing the potential for harm and re-traumatization** and **enhancing safety, control, and resilience** for everyone engaged in every interaction with your organization and within your organization.

Actioning trauma and violence-informed approaches

A trauma and violence-informed approach incorporates universal precautions to prevent further harm or re-traumatization by creating a culture of safety for all.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches require everyone in your organization to examine their assumptions and beliefs and to work from a place of humility and humanity.

Practicing in a trauma and violence-informed way also means providing safe and respectful services to everyone whether or not you know about their experiences of trauma/violence.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches for organizations are demonstrated through both outward-facing and inward-looking actions. Within an organization, **Outward-facing actions** are those organizational actions focused on clients, colleagues, and the public, whereas **inward-looking actions** are how your organization supports the work being done by your staff.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches, to service delivery in the gender-based violence sector in the Northwest Territories, are grounded in **five core principles**. To implement trauma and violence-informed approaches, organizations must:

1. Build their own and others awareness and understanding of trauma, violence, and their impact on people's lives and behaviour
2. Emphasize safety and trust
3. Offer people real choices through connection and collaboration
4. Recognize and build people's strengths and resilience
5. Incorporate a people-centred perspective

These core principles do not operate in isolation from each other. Rather, they are interwoven like the parts of a tree.



Principles of Trauma and Violence-Informed Approaches

Becoming a trauma and violence-informed organization requires incorporating trauma and violence-informed approaches throughout your organization – policies, procedures, practices, and workplace culture – to minimize the potential for harm and re-traumatization and to enhance safety, control, and resilience for everyone interacting with your organization and within your organization.

UNDERSTANDING THE PEOPLE YOU SERVE

Your organization has many stakeholders. The people who need your services are invested in what these services provide. Your staff and managers are invested in your organization as a place to work, to grow personally and professionally, and as a source of livelihood.

Clients are those who see your organization mainly as a provider of something they need. Their quality of experience is measured by their interaction in the process of accessing what they need. Staff participate in your organization by being a part of it. Their quality of experience is measured by their sense of value. Both your staff and clients need to feel safe, trusted, respected, and supported in their interactions with your organization.

Valuing Clients

Without clients, your organization would have no reason to exist. You design your services to meet your clients' needs. You solicit their opinions, and you adjust your offerings when needed. Even when you can not meet all your clients' needs, you hope their experience was satisfying – that is, that it caused no harm.

Valuing Staff

The workplace experiences your organization gives your staff should be satisfying as well – or else they'll have no reason to work for you, other than the fact that you sign their paychecks. When your organization meets staff needs, the staff come to work with more positive attitudes and the intention of doing a good job. If your staff does not feel valued, your workplace environment may become toxic. Your staff will perform as well as necessary to keep their jobs, but they're unlikely to go the extra mile to do creative work and come through for you and your clients in a crisis.

Driving Service Satisfaction at All Levels

Your staff are the face of your organization – the liaisons your clients interact with. Satisfied staff represent your organization with integrity and enthusiasm. Their own staff experience translates to a positive attitude toward external clients. Clients who see respectful, compassionate, and engaged staff are more likely to value your organization and the services you offer than clients who hear your staff complaining behind your back.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches to service delivery ask you to see your external client in their entirety, as a sum of all their experiences and to take steps to honour them and serve them as such. Trauma and violence-informed approaches ask that you understand and approach serving your staff with the same due consideration.

GIVE YOUR STAFF THE SAME CARE AND CONSIDERATION AS YOUR CLIENTS

Staff have many client-like interactions within your organization that provide an opportunity, or a risk, to improve their overall staff experience. When organizations embrace the idea that staff have expectations and needs around trauma and violence-informed approaches, they can foster an environment that improves the staff experience.

The staff impacted by serving your clients are not just staff on the front lines, but back-office personnel too. If everyone in your organization feels that they are being managed based on the entirety of who they are, then everyone can succeed. For instance, when Jeff doesn't get payroll timesheets in on time, Jane can't process it, and the workforce doesn't get paid.

Like interactions with your external clients, your organization's interactions with staff can be either something that improves or degrades their experience. Organizations need to recognize that these experiences have an impact, are measurable, and therefore can be improved.

Here are four practical ways you can foster an environment that embraces and maximizes trauma and violence-informed approaches for staff and that are probably already on your to-do list!

1. Start with feedback

Organizations need to identify where key client interactions occur for staff. Once these critical moments are identified, journey mapping is a great way to outline from start to end what this experience is like for staff. This will allow you to understand where breakdowns in the experience may occur, and in turn - where you may need additional feedback from staff to find a solution.

Getting staff feedback at the moment of an interaction/incident, similar to a client transactional study, allows you to get timely and specific feedback on where a service process breaks down.

A Journey Mapping Tip Sheet can be found in the Appendix.

2. Take action and use closed-loop follow-up

Most organizations use closed-loop feedback with clients to turn a negative interaction into a positive experience. This principle can also be applied to staff. Developing an organizational culture that seeks and appreciates feedback creates a healthy work environment. For instance, if a staff member depends on another staff member for support/information and does not get the answer they need in an initial interaction, the supervisor can drive a debriefing and change focused meeting to ensure the situation goes differently in the future.

3. Create service standards

Creating internal service standards will give all staff a baseline for how they should be operating. These service standards help everyone in your organization feel valued, sets an example for others to follow, and sets a precedent for consistency in service delivery.

4. Celebrate success

Staff are motivated when they are celebrated and will repeat those behaviours. When a team, individual, division, or department displays great internal service, use it as a training moment to teach other staff about internal best practices.

It is important to note that delivering trauma and violence-informed approaches to service delivery **starts at the top with managers and directors**. As staff see their leaders living out these principles, they will be more likely to engage with the principles, approaches, and workplace culture, and adopt them themselves. Understanding the power of internal culture helps create a client-focused, trauma and violence-informed organizational culture.

ACTIONING TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

Implementing the five principles underlying trauma and violence-informed approaches into policies, procedures, practices, and ultimately, your workplace culture can and has made a significant difference for many organizations, their clients, and their staff.

Policies, procedures, practices, and workplace culture are ...

Norms are the way the organization interacts with clients and staff in non-exceptional circumstances or normally. **Expressed norms can be found in policies and procedures. Practised norms can be found in workplace practices, culture, and staff (power) dynamics.** Ideally, expressed, and practiced norms are identical and allow clients and staff to feel safe and respected by the system.

Policies define what is the RIGHT thing to do and **procedures** describe the way that the right thing SHOULD be done.

Practices are how those things are ACTUALLY done in the organization on a typical day.

Organizational culture is the collection of values, expectations, and behaviours that guide and inform the actions of all team members to perform those practices. As the organizational culture is determined by individuals and not policy, it can be supportive or it can be dysfunctional. This is often determined by how power dynamics are managed within the organization.

WHAT DO TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES LOOK LIKE IN ACTION?

Building on the common understanding and framework, here are some practical examples of how your organization can action the five principles underlying trauma and violence-informed approaches.

Reminder: Trauma and violence-informed approaches for organizations are demonstrated through both outward-facing and inward-looking actions. Outward-facing actions are those organizational actions focused on clients, colleagues, and the public, whereas inward-looking actions are how your organization supports the work being done by your staff.

Principle 1: Build awareness and understanding of trauma, violence, and their impact on people's attitudes, behaviours, and lives

Your organization can build awareness and understanding of trauma, violence, and their impact on people's lives and behaviour through how you deliver your services. Organizations also have an ethical mandate to ensure workers are aware of the potential effects of the work and how to cope.

Outward-facing actions:

- Incorporate trauma and violence-informed approaches into staff onboarding, orientation, and ongoing training.
- Adopt the universal precaution: treat everyone as if they have experienced trauma/violence. We do not need to know individual histories to create cultures of safety for all.
- Examine and seek to understand the impact of privilege, power, and biases and provide training in diversity, inclusion, cultural humility, and cultural safety.
- Provide opportunities for staff to share learnings.
- Take actions to address and prevent vicarious trauma and other trauma exposure responses, and support health and wellness.

Remember to also look inward:

- Explore power dynamics in the organization – who has power, who doesn't, and address any imbalances.
- Ensure your leadership group is educated in trauma, violence, and their impact on people's lives and behaviour to help them better support your work.
- Evaluate new policies, practices, procedures, and initiatives through a trauma and violence-informed lens and adjust as needed before implementation.
- Ensure organizational practices demonstrate inclusion and show cultural humility and that cultural safety is built into your services and evaluated regularly.
- Have clear, consistent, and applied policies on all forms of workplace violence and harassment.
- Conduct regular, meaningful performance reviews that do not include individual measurements of work.

Principle 2: Emphasize safety and trust

Trauma and violence-informed approaches incorporate universal precautions to ensure everyone is treated as if they have experience of trauma and/or violence. It is not necessary to know a person's background or story to be able to interact in a safe, respectful, thoughtful, trauma and violence-informed manner. This is true for clients, staff, and the community.

Outward-facing actions:

- Create welcoming and safe spaces and practices for service delivery.
- Monitor staff to ensure they take a non-judgemental, respectful approach with all clients, even the difficult ones.
- Provide clear information and predictable expectations about changes in practice, new procedures, and new staff in advance of the changes.
- Debrief after difficult and potentially traumatizing clients and situations using a trauma and violence-informed lens to guide discussion, self-care strategies, and for ongoing learning and growth.
- Name and talk about stress, traumatization, and trauma exposure responses.
- Act on complaints about clients or staff through thorough and proper investigation. Do not dismiss concerns out of hand or justify inappropriate behaviour.
- Review organizational safety plans with staff regularly and hold monthly safety briefings.

Remember to also look inward:

- Work with community partners to build warm referrals as a practice and to manage high-risk cases as a community.
- Take a calm, non-judgemental, respectful approach when interacting with staff.
- Ensure your organization has supports such as debriefs, critical incident debriefing, peer support, check-ins, and mental health and wellness/self-care initiatives built into policies.
- Encourage a *no-questions-asked* approach to staff using supports available including sick time, mental health services, and other initiatives.
- Provide opportunities for staff input into policies, procedures, and practices.
- Have a clear and transparent procedure for workplace discipline and HR.
- Ensure complete safety plans are written and in use in all areas of your organization. Review these plans on a regular basis.
- Ensure supervisors and managers prioritize human resources equally to service and program delivery.

Principle 3: Offer real choices through connection and collaboration

Creating safety and trust within your organization and with your clients and community partners facilitates connection and collaboration.

Trauma and violence-informed approaches recognize the importance of collaborating with clients and staff to determine their needs, to identify realistic and meaningful choices, and to support their decision-making.

For an organization, this includes connecting and working with other service providers to better understand their programs and services, to facilitate referrals and service delivery transitions, and to foster a sense of community within teams, across organizations, and sectors.

Outward-facing actions:

- Ensure service options for individuals are meaningful and realistic, based on their unique circumstances and not just *by the book*
- Help staff develop local knowledge of relevant programs and services and available options.
- Train staff in empathetic listening and ensure they implement these learnings in their interactions with clients.
- Train staff to consider choices collaboratively with the client – which involves a *working with* approach to identifying real choices while also supporting the client's decision-making process.
- Ensure staff understand and articulate boundaries: what they and your organization can do as well as the limits of the system.
- When staff have been off due to operational stress, engage them in developing their return-to-work process.
- Talk about fit with work assignments and explore opportunities for informal leadership development or other staff goals.

Remember to also look inward:

- Develop policies and processes that allow for flexibility and encourage shared decision-making with clients.
- Strengthen relationships with community partners to cultivate collaboration and community coordination.
- Involve clients to help guide the organization in making structural and program changes that can mitigate harm or re-traumatization.
- Develop resources based on knowledge of relevant local programs and services, community options, and cultural norms, and keep it up-to-date and available for all staff.

Principle 4: Recognize and build people's strengths and resilience

Trauma and violence-informed approaches incorporate a strengths-based, rather than deficits-based, approach to providing services and interacting with your clients, staff, and community. A strengths-based approach focuses on people's strengths – their positive attributes and behaviours – their resourcefulness and resilience - as well as those in their support network and community rather than focusing on weaknesses. With its emphasis on strengths, resourcefulness, and resilience, hope is embedded in a strengths-based approach.

Outward-facing: we can never know exactly what it is to walk in another's shoes. Instead, we can:

- Allow staff to take sufficient time to have meaningful engagement with clients.
- Train staff on how to minimize common triggers and recognize and respond to trauma responses with calming and grounding strategies.
- Ensure staff validate examples of resilience amongst your clients. Encourage staff to share examples with other staff if/when appropriate.
- Ensure staff are aware of and leverage the healing value of traditional cultural connections.
- Teach staff about a strengths-based approach to providing service so that they understand and can recognize strengths and resilience in clients, colleagues, and themselves.
- Protect time for breaks and meals.
- Cultivate leadership at all levels of the organization.

Remember to also look inward:

- Review your policies and programs to see where you can build in more personalization and flexibility for staff and clients.
- Review (and rewrite, if necessary,) organizational policies to allow flexibility in how staff time is used to ensure meaningful engagement.
- Ensure human resource policies include resiliency in core skills when recruiting new staff.
- Find ways to formally value staff resiliency within the organization.

Principle 5: Incorporate a People-Centred Perspective

A people-centred perspective grounds our services in the needs, experiences, and knowledge of your clients, staff, and community. **Safety, dignity, and compassion** are the primary qualities of this principle. Actioning this principle acknowledges our shared humanity and recognizes that your staff, clients, and community members are more than the person you experience *in a moment*.

Outward-facing:

- Teach staff to recognize and acknowledge that clients are people beyond the needs, crisis, or behaviour they are presenting.
- Focus on safety, dignity, and compassion in all interactions.
- Ensure staff take the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual health and well-being (360 degree or medicine wheel approach) of the person being served into consideration.
- Find meaningful ways to celebrate/acknowledge contributions from staff at all levels and in all positions in the organization.
- Create a workplace culture of mutual respect and cultivate a strong sense of purpose and belonging for and with staff.
- Ensure managers and supervisors practice humility.

Remember to also look inward:

- Prioritize safety, dignity, and compassion in workplace interactions and culture.
- Create opportunities for the voices of internal and external clients to be heard in decisions shaping your organization and the services provided.
- Ensure policies and procedures are people-centred rather than punishment focussed.
- Eliminate structures and systems that do not recognize the need for adequate resources, training, opportunities, and support in carrying out the responsibilities of providing service.
- Create policies around workplace culture and how to ensure it supports trauma and violence-informed approaches.

It changes our relationships when we see people who have experienced violence and trauma as valued community members with knowledge we do not have. Fostering inclusion and seeking ongoing input and feedback from clients, colleagues, community partners, and your community builds relationships and strengthens the community.

Take a moment to reflect on your organization and its efforts in actioning the 5 trauma and violence-informed principles.

- How do the 5 principles align with your organizational culture? How might you address points of incongruence?

- Where has there been pushback from staff and/or management? How have you responded?

- How will you ensure trauma and violence-informed approaches will not just be *the flavour of the month* in your organization?

- How can you share your successes with other organizations in your field?

- Do you need more clarity or direction on trauma and violence-informed approaches? How will you get it?



SYSTEMIC CHANGE SHINING THE LIGHT AND FINDING YOUR FOCUS

Becoming a trauma and violence-informed organization means making a commitment to changing the policies, procedures, practices, and culture of the entire organization. This type of change requires that staff at all levels and in all roles modify what they do based on an understanding of the impact of trauma and violence, the specific needs of trauma and violence survivors, and adequate supports and resources so that staff can maintain their health and wellbeing. **This process takes time and requires that an organization understand the stages of change and how to identify its own strengths and challenges.**

This process varies from organization to organization and requires both adaptive and technical solutions. One training event will not result in an organization becoming trauma and violence-informed.

Identify a person or a group of people who have the desire and capacity to assist their organization in becoming trauma and violence-informed.

This group is known as the “trauma and violence-informed change team”. At least one of these people must be in a position of authority to make system-wide changes in the program. These are the “champions for change” in your organization and should represent a variety of roles and disciplines in your organization. This team should not exceed ten individuals.

Success tips for the trauma and violence-informed change team:

- It is helpful to have more than one leader identified as a champion for change so that it is not the responsibility of one individual to make all change happen.
- Leaders must have the authority to make change happen and all members of this team should be given the time in their work-life to devote to the change process.
- This is not a *service-only* process. Successful change happens when human resources and operations are included in the discussion.
- Establish clear deliverables and timelines for the changes you want to see.
- Remind each other of the stages of change and that people may be at different stages at any one time.
- **Pre-contemplation** is the stage at which there is no intention to change behaviour in the foreseeable future. Many individuals in this state are unaware or under-aware of problems.
 - **Contemplation** is the stage in which people are aware that a problem exists and are seriously thinking about overcoming it but have not yet made a commitment to take action.
 - **Preparation** is the stage that combines intention and behavioural criteria. Individuals in this stage are intending to take action.
 - **Action** is the stage in which individuals modify their behaviour, experiences, or environment to overcome their problems. Action involves the most overt behavioural changes and requires considerable commitment of time and energy.

- **Maintenance** is the stage in which people work to prevent going back to the status quo and consolidate the gains attained during action.

Your team and your organization may be at varying stages of interest in changing to be more trauma and violence-informed. The change team must get the majority of the organization into at least the contemplation stage before planning or actioning any change initiatives.

The change team may wish to implement an **organizational assessment** (see assessment tool in the Appendix) and a walk-through to identify client touchpoints that can easily be updated to be more trauma and violence-informed. Needed changes to policies, procedures, practices, and workplace culture may also be identified through this process.

TAKING A WHOLE ORGANIZATION APPROACH – WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

Once the organization is contemplating change, it is important to build success skills for the change. The trauma and violence-informed change team can begin to prioritize training needs for the organization and use a Prioritization Matrix to determine focus areas (see Appendix)

At this stage, it is important that the leadership team communicate the value of becoming trauma and violence-informed and prepare staff to understand their role in training, policy, procedure, and practice, and workplace culture changes. This sets the stage for the work that the trauma and violence-informed approaches to change team will undertake.

Success tips:

- Determine interest that staff have and consider how staff can provide input to the change team.
- Be prepared for staff who express doubts or who slip back into the “pre-contemplation” stage.
- Be transparent about the process and have this be an ongoing conversation, not a “one-time” conversation!
- Consider making the announcement public in an organization newsletter, e-mail blast, or organization-wide staff meetings.

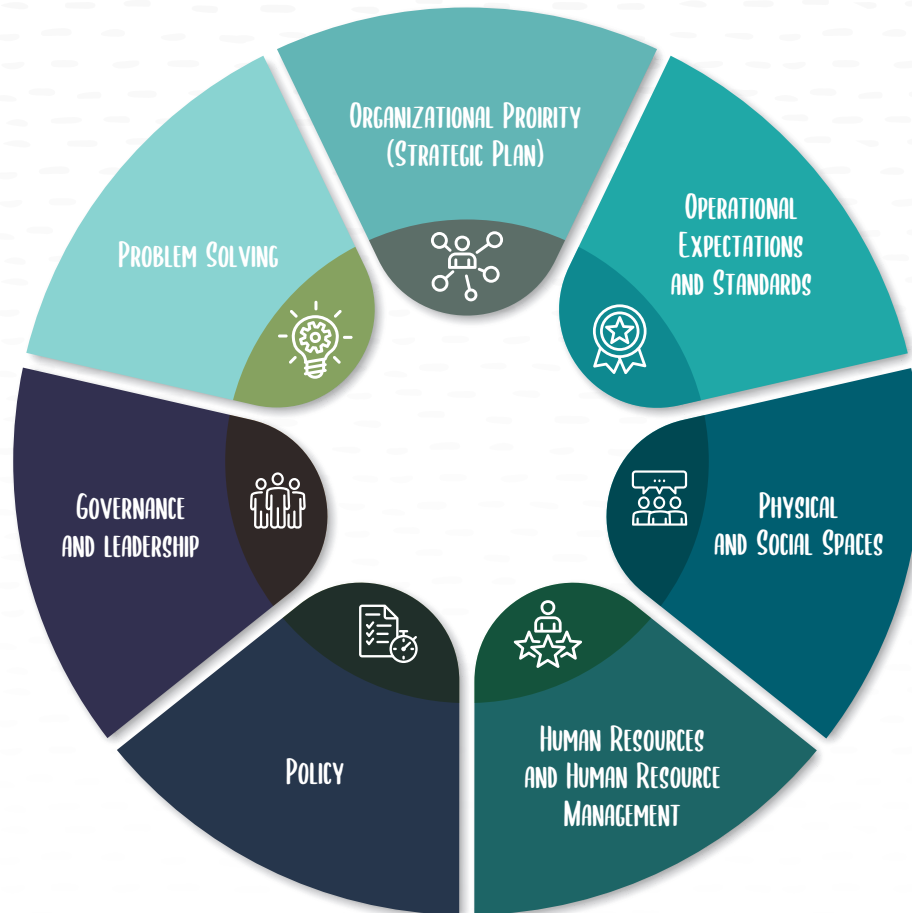
Once you have determined where your organization and staff are at, provide early training in areas such as the following:

- The fundamentals of trauma, violence, and implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches.
- Diversity and inclusion.
- Culturally humility and safety.
- That required to meet unique needs of specific audiences your organization serves (for example, children and youth).

- The effects on staff of being repeatedly exposed, directly and indirectly, to trauma and/or violence, through their work to establish an understanding of trauma exposure responses, including vicarious trauma, self-care strategies, and mental health and wellness supports and services.

Some organizations choose to call this stage a kick-off as a way to introduce staff to the organization's commitment to becoming trauma and violence-informed. It is important that any change impacting how individuals do their job, or how the organization supports and/or evaluates their jobs should be communicated as a new initiative in advance and not be implemented in piecemeal stages.

Introductory training on trauma and violence-informed approaches is helpful at this stage. Depending on the needs of your staff and organization, more in-depth training can be offered later to sustain and build trauma and violence-informed learnings, applications, and to inform policy, procedure, and practice changes. Annual trauma and violence-informed refresher training is helpful to sustain knowledge and practical implementation too.



BUILDING YOUR SYSTEMS OF TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES

If you have not yet completed an internal and formal assessment of your organization's existing service in relation to trauma and violence-informed approaches, now would be a good time to do so. Results from the organizational self-assessment can drive change that facilitates better service for your clients and supports for your staff, their ability to grow and be healthy, and maximizes safety. Recommendations and guidance from the assessment can help you identify, implement, and sustain trauma and violence-informed approaches.

The organizational assessment can help you:

- Measure where your organization is at a given point in time.
- Create a common language around trauma and violence-informed approaches within your organization at all levels of staff.
- Provide guidance for creating a common language around trauma and violence-informed approaches within your broader community.
- Identify specific tools, resources, and strategies your organization needs to help your organization better serve your clients and better support its staff.
- Bring to light important areas for your organization to address related to trauma and violence-informed approaches to service and workplace culture.
- Create a roadmap for organizational change related to trauma- and violence-informed service and workplace culture.
- Assess progress and improvement over time.

A sample Organizational Self-Assessment can be found in the Appendix.

More Change

After receiving training in trauma and violence-informed approaches, identifying key change areas within your organization through an assessment tool, and implementing easy changes, the change team should make recommendations for what further changes may be needed in the organization to sustain the momentum, and truly entrench trauma and violence-informed approaches.

Success Tips

- Identify the incentives or hooks that will keep staff invested in the process such as safety for all, improved service outcomes, and prevention of vicarious trauma.
- COMMUNICATE! Incorporate messaging and materials into staff rooms, regular staff meetings, and staff-led training. Consider creating a communication plan that keeps everyone informed including internal and external clients.

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE – THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

Developing a trauma and violence-informed approach requires change at multiple levels of an organization and systematic alignment with the five key principles described earlier. Change must be systemic and entrenched in the culture of your organization.

Change initiatives should be made in all the following organizational systems to ensure the integrity of your commitment to trauma and violence-informed approaches to service delivery and to align your organizational culture. Don't try to tackle them all at once. Find where it is easiest to take the first step and start there. The journey is a collection of steps, and you need not take those steps alone.

This is not provided as a checklist or a prescriptive step-by-step process. These are the domains of organizational change. What makes it unique to establishing a trauma and violence-informed organizational approach is **the intersection between the key principles of organizational change and the key trauma and violence-informed principles.**

From the start, include those who have lived experiences of trauma and violence. Their voices and experience are essential and will ensure the project has integrity. Survivors are just as likely to be staff members as they are clients. Privilege their voices. They can show you where the challenges and the opportunities sit.

Vision, mission, and value statements tell the story of your organization. Incorporate a statement in your mission that your organization takes a trauma and violence-informed approach to put your priorities into the public record. The statement can be developed through input, discussion, and assessment that captures the journey and the spirit of why it is important to become trauma and violence-informed.

Here are an example of embedding your trauma and violence-informed approach into your guiding statements:

- [Organization name] is committed to ongoing learning and development that enhances safety, equity, and dignity for our clients, our staff, and the broader community. We strive to be ever aware of the dynamics and impacts of trauma and violence on people's lives and behaviour.
- Our Organization is trauma and violence-informed in that it recognizes: the prevalence of violence in its many forms, realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma and violence-informed approaches into policies, procedures, practices, and workplace cultures while actively seeking to minimize harm and prevent re-traumatization.

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

Collaboration is a strategic imperative

Collaboration across organizations and sectors is built on a shared understanding of trauma, violence, and principles of a trauma and violence-informed approach. While trauma and violence-informed approaches may not be the stated mission of various service sectors, understanding how awareness of trauma and violence can help or hinder achievement of an organization's mission is a critical aspect of building collaborations. People with significant trauma histories often present with a complexity of needs, crossing various service sectors.

Here are some questions to consider when incorporating cross-sector collaboration into your strategic priorities:

- Is there a system of communication in place with other partner organizations working with the individual receiving services for making trauma and violence-informed decisions?
- Are collaborative partners trauma and violence-informed?
- How does the organization identify community providers and referral agencies that have experience delivering evidence-based trauma and violence-informed services?
- What mechanisms are in place to promote cross-sector training on trauma, violence, and trauma and violence-informed approaches?

Questions adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

OPERATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS

Communication: Language matters

Communication pervades every aspect of organizational life. It touches everything. Yet remarkably, organizations often pay too little attention to it. Effective communication should be a focus and not an afterthought in your organization.

It builds and maintains relationships

Communication not only builds relationships but also creates safety and influences trust. A lack of effective communication in your workplace may make it difficult for your staff to build and foster productive relationships with your clients.

It facilitates innovation

When staff and clients are comfortable in expressing themselves, cooperation and innovation within the organization can be improved. Staff will be able to convey their thoughts on how to improve a process to be more trauma and violence-informed. For instance, supervisors who know the value of soliciting and listening to feedback, meanwhile, should be able to pick up those ideas and implement them.

It builds an effective organization

Encouraging an environment where open trauma and violence-informed communication is the focus should turn your unit into a more cohesive and effective team. Employee morale is improved when the staff members are allowed to freely express themselves, or when the management takes every effort to reach out and communicate.

Regular internal communication can also foster strength and a trauma and violence-informed culture in the organization, especially when the staff members are recognized for their achievements. Your staff will also become more effective when they are clearly told of their responsibilities, and how each one of them can contribute towards the achievement of a common goal.

It increases employee engagement

Experts define employee engagement as the level of emotional commitment an employee has to organizational goals and values. It is often misunderstood as employee happiness and satisfaction. However, the difference is that an employee can be happy with their organization, but this does not mean that they will support workplace values and culture or practise trauma and violence-informed norms.

Effective communication in the workplace can positively affect employee engagement. Management that communicates its plans and visions with the rest of the organization should be able to make staff feel more valued and appreciated. Employees will not only know how the organization and everyone in it is doing, but also how they fit into the big picture.

Once staff realize how their respective work assignments contribute towards the organizational mandate, they are more likely to follow best practices.

Financing and Budgets

Financing structures should be designed to support a trauma and violence-informed approach which includes resources for staff training on trauma, key principles of a trauma and violence-informed approach; development of appropriate and safe facilities; establishment of peer-support; provision of evidence-supported trauma screening, assessment, treatment, and recovery supports; and development of trauma and violence-informed cross-sector collaborations. Educate funders on the importance of these needs and budget for them.

Here are some questions to ask around financing for trauma and violence-informed service delivery.

- Does your budget include funding support for ongoing trauma and violence-informed approaches training for leadership and staff development?
- What funding exists for cross-sector training on trauma and trauma-informed approaches?
- What funding exists for peer specialists and supports?
- How does the budget support provision of a physically and psychologically safe environment?

Questions adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SPACES

It is important that all physical, sensory, and relational environments be welcoming, calming, and responsive to client needs. This means you should reduce known triggers and emotional stressors.

You should also consider accessibility in your physical design for both public and private areas. Staff should be encouraged to maximize natural lighting, avoid clutter and scents, and optimize plants where possible. Artwork should reflect nature (calming) or local culture and/or the culture of the clients you serve (inclusive). Waiting room materials should also be inclusive and identify community resources. Staff should consider noise, scents, and other triggers as they make choices about their day and conduct their work.

Conduct a Walk-through of your Spaces

Consider walking through the physical and social spaces where you provide services to clients. You can then often better consider the extent to which these environments are likely to feel welcoming, physically and psychologically safe, and reduce harm for everyone, but especially for those who are most likely to feel unwelcome and unsafe.

The space can be anywhere you provide services to clients (e.g., in an office or a home setting). Put yourself in your clients' shoes and imagine what it might be like for them to be in this physical and social space. Be sure to think through safety, dignity, and equity from the perspective of key demographics that your

organization is aiming to serve, for instance, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, or 2SLGBTQ+ and gender diverse peoples. Pay particular attention to things in this environment that might create feelings of discomfort, stigma, or feeling unsafe. Following is a walk-through exercise for you to experience your organization as if you were a client.

Approaching and Entering the Space

As you approach and enter, imagine it's your first visit:

- How easy is it to get to and to find? How much effort have you had to make to get here?
- How do you enter? Is it clear how you are supposed to enter? Is it accessible to people with varying mobility needs?
- What do you notice as you approach the building? Enter the building? What does this look and feel like?
- Who is present? Who is speaking? What do you observe about people? What do you notice about people's facial expressions, their posture? What stands out for you?
- Who is communicating with who? How are people communicating? What is their tone of voice?
- Are people making eye contact? If so, who is making eye contact with whom?
- What is welcoming or unwelcoming as you enter?
- What tone does the signage convey? Who do you imagine decides the signage? What influences those decisions?
- Who would feel welcome or unwelcome here? Do you feel welcome here? Why or why not?
- What things or people in the space might deter people from engaging with who they encounter here?

First Contact with your Organization

Now imagine what the first contact is like with a staff member:

- Is there a reception area? Where is it located? How do you know where it is and how you are supposed to go there? If contact is made by phone, is the telephone system easy to use? How often is the line busy? Are there other physical barriers between you and the staff member (e.g., a glass wall)?
- How are you greeted and by whom? Do you know the role of the staff member who greets you?
- What messages do staff convey? Consider usual facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and words.
- What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in this first contact? Who would feel most comfortable? Are different people treated differently and if so, in what way, by whom, and based on what?
- What questions are you asked and in what order? (Imagine the questions on your intake form if there is one). What does it draw attention to? From what does it detract attention?

- When staff engage with clients, do you think that they consider what is affecting people's choice to be there? For example, do you think that staff account for how hard it might be to even get to or call your organization?
- How do staff engage with people who do not speak English as a first language? Does anything about their communication change?
- Do the staff take into consideration the client's age or physical ability? For example, how do they speak with Elders/older adults? Are clients able to sit at reception or are they standing? Are they often put 'on hold'?
- How do staff engage with people who seem to have trouble focusing on questions being asked?

Waiting Area (if applicable)

- If you had to describe the space to someone in two words, what would you say?
- What is the strongest feeling you have as you enter the waiting area?
- What does it look like? What is there for people to occupy waiting time?
- Are washrooms available and accessible? Are the waiting areas and washrooms clean?
- What kinds of chairs are available for people? Do they seem comfortable?
- Are snacks or beverages available?
- What do you notice about the other clients waiting here? Do they seem comfortable to you? Are they talking to one another?
- Notice who is helping people in the waiting area. Who is talking to clients? Who is helping if someone appears distressed or uncomfortable? Do some people seem uncomfortable? Why?
- What do you see that is relevant to people's privacy, their identity and/or their reason for being there? Think about it
- How is privacy and confidentiality protected in this space?
- Who would feel comfortable in this space? Who wouldn't? Why?

Meeting Rooms

- What is the layout of this space? How would you describe the feel – warm, cold, cozy, other?
- How do you get to these rooms? Who goes with you? Who is allowed to be with you?
- Is a staff person always in the room? If so, what role is the staff person?
- Do you understand how decisions are made regarding who will be seen first? Is this based on order of arrival or some other priority rating?
- What do you notice about when and how staff talk with clients? How does the encounter begin and end?
- What actions do staff take to ensure your privacy and comfort?
- Would you feel comfortable in this space? What might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?
- How does an encounter end? Do the staff check-in with you? Is there an opportunity for questions? Think about it.

- Are the spaces set up to best serve clients or staff?
- Who would feel respected in this space? Who would not? Why?
- What small things could be changed to make the spaces more welcoming?

Other Considerations

Bathrooms

- Are they available, accessible, well-signed and cleaned/provisioned regularly?
- Is a key needed?
- Is there a non-gendered bathroom? A baby-changing/nursing area?

Forms and documentation

- What language/terminology is used to describe clients? What does it draw attention to? What does it overlook?
- How does the form position you in relation to the client? How does it shape your perspective of power/authority?
- What do the forms guide you to say? Whose interests/ concerns are prioritized?
- Is the form available in multiple languages?

Documenting/taking reports

- Where does it happen? Is it designed to protect client privacy?
- Can the clients see what is being written about them?
- Do you offer your clients an opportunity to review and/or clarify what has been written about them?

If you feel your physical environment supports the principles of trauma and violence-informed approaches, consider the following questions to help you pinpoint the specific things you are doing well so that you can protect them.

- How does the physical environment promote a sense of welcome, calm, and safety for clients and staff?
- In what ways do staff members recognize and address aspects of the physical environment that may be triggering or re-traumatizing, and work with people on developing strategies to deal with this?
- How has the organization developed mechanisms to address gender-related physical and emotional safety concerns (e.g., gender-specific spaces and activities)
- How has the organization provided space that both staff and people receiving services can use to practice self-care?

Questions adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

Top Tip for Physical and Social Spaces

- *Spaces with clear sightlines and few barriers create a sense of safety and calm.*
 - *The use of lighter cool colours, soft yet well-lit spaces (rather than fluorescent lighting), plants, and reduced clutter contribute to creating a calming environment.*
 - *Accessibility is factored into all aspects of the space including bathrooms.*
 - *Furniture should be durable, comfortable, and easy to clean. Well-spaced furniture enhances feelings of personal safety and furniture placement can be used to optimize privacy too.*
 - *Natural art is calming, and local art is often comforting as it reflects the community and can contribute to creating a sense of cultural safety.*
 - *Consideration is also given to background noise (kept low if possible) and scents that may be triggers or allergens are avoided.*
-

HUMAN RESOURCES AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Build commitment and capacity by incorporating trauma and violence-informed approaches to language into human resources.

Include trauma and violence-informed language in job descriptions

Sample language:

- Deliver responsibilities from a trauma and-violence informed perspective.
- Communicate with your supervisor when you experience being overwhelmed.
- Conduct weekly self-reflection on all client interactions.
- Participate actively in monthly staff meetings.
- Advocate for system change when systems and policies interfere with your ability to effectively work with clients.

Include trauma and violence-informed language in job postings and the hiring process

Sample language:

- Preferred candidates will have a background and applied experience in delivering trauma and violence-informed service.
- This job requires an ability to relate authentically and effectively with people of varied backgrounds and experiences.
- This job requires candidates to practise self-care both inside and outside of work hours.

Include trauma and violence-informed approaches in performance reviews:

Sample language:

- Ensures all supervisors model self-care and appropriate work/life balance for employees.
- Works effectively as a team player in supporting your colleague's resilience.
- Avoids professional isolation.
- As a supervisor, monitors staff for trauma exposure responses including vicarious trauma as this is as important as monitoring completion of case documentation.
- Completes critical incident debriefing as required.

It is important to make employee evaluations meaningful. Do not rush them. Discuss employee strengths, needs, and areas the employee wishes to develop professionally during the upcoming review period. Be sure to include how you and the employee will handle primary and secondary traumatic stress reactions and how you as their supervisor can support their work/life balance.

Here are some additional trauma and violence-informed approaches to HR practices:

- Ensure employee orientation emphasizes the potential impact of secondary trauma and what the employee should do when they are negatively impacted by this work.
- Have Human Resources monitor absenteeism and vacation days and notify the supervisor of any patterns. For example, if someone has not taken time off from work in the past six months, their supervisor may want to encourage it; or if someone has taken an abundant amount of time off, the supervisor may want to dive deeper into why that might be
- Offer flexibility in work hours if possible (even if it is coming in 30 minutes early and leaving early one day).
- Use *stay conversations* to gain data to better understand why employees stay and what they value most. It will also give you a head's up if there are issues that need to be addressed.
- Ensure your organization conducts exit interviews with employees to keep abreast of the reasons for staff turnover.
- Ensure your staff know what support services are available to them – either through the employee assistance program or publicly available services.
- Ensure access to peer or supervisor de-briefs after difficult clients or being exposed to trauma and/or violence.
- Consider setting up an in-house (or multi-organization) peer support program. In-house peer support acknowledges the value of informal supports and shared experiences of the work. In its best form, "it operates with autonomy and entrusts support workers to make judgments and decisions. As peer support work can be exhausting and emotionally challenging, care must be taken to ensure that those involved in it have ongoing training and formalized support to prevent burnout and injury." (Source: BC First Responders Mental Health, 2017)
- Consider mechanisms for employees to be able to go above their supervisor without negative repercussions to share when they do not feel supported regarding a stress or trauma reaction.

Here are some additional training and workforce development questions to consider:

- How does the organization address the psychological stress that can arise when working with individuals who have had traumatic experiences or direct exposure to trauma and violence?
- How does the organization support training and workforce development for staff to understand and increase their trauma knowledge, skills, and strategies?
- How does the organization ensure that all staff (direct service, supervisors, front desk/reception, and support staff) receive basic training on trauma, its impact, and strategies for trauma and violence-informed approaches across the organization and across personnel functions?
- How does workforce development/staff training address the ways identity, culture, community, and oppression can affect a person's experience of trauma, access to supports and resources, and opportunities for safety?
- How does ongoing workforce development/staff training provide staff supports in developing the knowledge and skills to work sensitively and effectively with people who have experienced violence and/or other traumatic events?
- What types of training and resources are provided to staff and supervisors on incorporating trauma and violence-informed practice and supervision in their work?
- What workforce development strategies are in place to assist staff in working with peer supports and recognizing the value of peer support as integral to the organization's workforce?

Questions adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

POLICY

There are written policies and protocols establishing a trauma and violence-informed approach as an essential part of the organizational mission. Organizational procedures and cross-organization protocols, including working with community-based agencies, should reflect trauma and violence-informed principles.

This approach must become entrenched into the culture, practices, and procedures of the organization and not solely rely on training or one or two champions.

Review your organizational policies to ensure they:

- Create safe and supportive environments by acknowledging the root causes of trauma and the importance of not probing or requiring disclosure.
- Recognize the relationship between violence, trauma, and physical, psychological, social, and spiritual health and well-being.
- Demonstrate a commitment to trauma and violence-informed approaches through staff orientation and training.

Here are some questions to consider around your policies:

- Are clients and staff made aware of the policy/values statement?
- Are policies/values statements posted where they can be seen by clients and staff (e.g., online and/or on the physical premises)?
- Are clients told about limits to privacy and/or confidentiality?
- Do staff know how to handle limits to privacy and confidentiality about reporting, disclosure, client safety, etc.?
- Is there a process in place for when policies have been violated? Is that process communicated and followed?
- Is there a grievance policy and are clients and staff made aware of it?
- Are crisis plans clear about how to handle or de-escalate crisis situations?
- Do these plans provide direction about debriefing/follow-up in the event of a crisis or (re) traumatizing situation?
- Are staff and/or volunteers made aware of these plans?
- Does management regularly review crisis plans and share updates with staff and volunteers?
- Is there a clearly defined group/authority that is responsible for implementing trauma and violence-informed services in your organization? This may involve a trauma and violence-informed initiative, committee, or working group that is fully supported and endorsed by the administration.
- How do the organization's written policies and procedures include a focus on trauma and issues of safety and confidentiality?

- How do the organization's written policies and procedures recognize the pervasiveness of trauma and violence in the lives of people using services, and express a commitment to reducing harm and re-traumatization and promoting well-being and resilience?
- How do human resources policies attend to the impact of repeated exposure to violence and/or trauma?
- What policies and procedures are in place for including clients, people with lived experience of violence/trauma, and staff in the organization's planning, governance, policymaking, services, and evaluation?

Questions adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

LEADERSHIP – FORMAL AND INFORMAL

The leadership and governance of the organization support and invest in implementing and sustaining a trauma and violence-informed approach. A position and/or team are identified as the organization's point of responsibility to lead and oversee this work. The peer voice is also included in this ongoing process. Integrating trauma and violence-informed approaches provides opportunities to empower staff and support emerging leaders and champions. Leading from a place of service rather than authority is a way to embody trauma and violence-informed approaches.

Even short-term change is not sustainable without the continued and explicit commitment of leaders that is regularly communicated throughout the organization. Sustained change comes from steadfast leadership, a clear message about why change is necessary with evidence-based benefits for staff and those being served. Leaders must promote rather than simply announce a change initiative. Promotion includes educating staff about the rationale for the trauma and violence-informed approaches journey with opportunities for discussion and input. Explore together how these approaches practices can improve service delivery for clients and staff and make the workplace healthier and more supportive.

Leaders demonstrated commitment includes a willingness to discuss with staff members the impact and role of trauma and violence, both on the people being served as well as on themselves.

Supervisors

Here are some tips for supervisors to take a leadership role in building a trauma and violence-informed approaches to work culture.

- Spend time ensuring staff members feel physically and psychologically safe.
- Deploy staff members in teams during difficult, and potentially traumatizing, situations so they do not feel isolated or solely responsible.
- Create a culture where it is not only okay to talk about stress reactions but create a culture where employees are encouraged to discuss the impact their work has on them.

- Be mindful of workplace bullying, especially where reactions to stress are happening. If you see one employee minimizing someone's feelings, be sure to publicly support that employee who is experiencing the stress.
- Be mindful of the impact when clients and situations go in a different direction than the staff wanted it to go. This is particularly challenging for staff, and they may need additional support during these times.
- Ensure your staff know that you are available to debrief after difficult clients, situations, or exposure to trauma and/or violence.
- Remember, you are a supervisor, not a counsellor. So, you can listen and be supportive, ask how you, their peers and/or the organization can help. Know your own limits which are ok to communicate while also identifying mental health options to your staff.

Be mindful that staff worry (especially new workers) about making a mistake with their clients. Allow that topic to be part of the regular discussions to minimize feelings of professional isolation.

Remember to not stop here though – true change must flow through your entire organization.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Staff and organizations often get locked into traditional problem-solving techniques despite these being either obsolete or ineffective and primarily based on conflict and power. For example, individuals often attempt to solve problems on their own with the hope of coming up with a solution by themselves for themselves. Many organizations actively promote this approach. Trauma and violence-informed approaches to organizations understand that problem setting and problem-solving is the responsibility of the entire organization.

Many staff operate in silos. They may equate the ability to solve problems by themselves as a form of independence and initiative. This works only to a certain degree. As the problem becomes more complex, this solo-solving technique becomes ineffective. At best it leads to one solution, one time rather than consistent approaches or in some cases entire system changes.

Collaborative problem solving occurs as you collaborate with other people to exchange information, ideas, or perspectives. The essence of this type of collaboration is based on “yes, and” thinking – building on and valuing each other's ideas, sometimes including your clients.

When someone brings a problem forward, there must be a consistent process to engage staff in looking for the causes and discovering solutions. The leader's role is not to resolve the problem alone but to guide them through a collaborative problem-solving approach.

Attitudes for Collaborative Problem Solving

- **Win-win abundance thinking:** Collaboration allows you to work with others to develop solutions that will work for you both. The key concept is to believe that it is possible to create a synergistic solution before you create them. It is not “you vs. me” Instead, develop an “abundance mentality” - “If you win, we all win.”
- **Patience:** Collaboration takes time. You need to recognize that you are both helping one another to reach a resolution, and it may take more than one meeting to discuss. You will often need to work together over time to reach a satisfying solution that you will both agree on.
- **“Yes, and” thinking:** Move away from polarized (either/or) thinking, and develop a “yes, and” way of thinking. This thinking is supporting a suggested idea and building on the idea to make it better.

Benefits of Collaborative Problem Solving

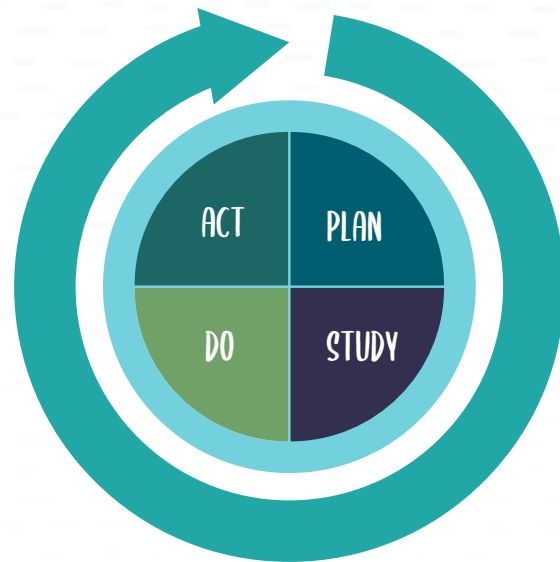
Collaborative problem solving opens communication and builds trust in the relationship as you and your co-collaborator discover that you are both working together toward a shared outcome. This increases a joint commitment to the relationship and to the organization. It also indicates a commitment to helping others reach their goals and objectives, and improving everyone’s collaborative communication also encourages finding creative solutions. This increases the likelihood that others will take ownership of an issue and its solution.

These attitudes and approaches must become the cultural norm for your organization.

Collaborative Problem-Solving Techniques

There are techniques that can help you engage in collaborative communication. Here are a few examples:

- Build on and connect ideas, rather than discarding one idea and looking for another one.
- Explore the strengths and drawbacks of each idea, compare, and balance the pluses and drawbacks of each idea.
- Convert drawbacks to new possibilities. Try to find ways to integrate and combine new possibilities into an existing idea.
- When sharing your own opinion, make sure you offer it as a suggestion and not as a directive. The intention of collaborative problem solving is to provide a catalyst for exploration and consideration, instead of having the other person accept your advice or direction.



The collaborative problem-solving approach paves ways to open communication, trust, better planning, and smooth implementation of a solution.

One first responder organization initiated a trauma and violence-informed approaches project because there were so many staff who were off work due to operational stress. Leaders had to find a way to make changes in the organization to better support staff and to intervene earlier.

Early discussions surfaced cultural norms of specific concern:

- *Show no weakness – asking for, or needing, help is a sign of weakness or failure*
- *Don't ask, don't tell – it is better to stay silent about your own and others' struggles*
- *Gender inequity – gender-based social norms entering the workplace as harassment and career barriers*

Without a collaborative problem-solving culture, these cultural norms could lead to more siloing or bullying.

REFLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Consider collecting information on staff retention, client satisfaction, no show rates, community perception of the organization, and other factors that would enhance how the organization functions. As programs begin to achieve their initial goals and modify their plans it is helpful to brainstorm ways to document the impact that this type of change is having in your work, specifically client feedback and outcomes. Such documentation can justify the use of additional resources to sustain your work to maintain your leadership in trauma and violence-informed approaches.

A sense of excitement and enthusiasm to implement trauma and violence-informed approaches can increase the momentum for the project during implementation. Challenges can also arise because trauma and violence-informed approaches implementation may raise questions about the status quo and power dynamics. This is when to remind people that organizational change takes time, patience, and commitment. It takes the ongoing review of policies, procedures, and practices. Disruption and discomfort are to be expected for the project to be successful in supporting change.

As a learning organization, you will go through improvement cycles that prioritize ongoing learning and development in act-plan-study-do loops of activity and reflection. It is essential to have structural support in place to encourage feedback, learn from mistakes and approach challenges systematically and thoughtfully. Support from the organization in addressing hot-button issues is critical; leadership's participation in the process allows for top-down and bottom-up accountability and demonstrates ongoing commitment.

An annual repeat of the assessment can show concrete change over time. Being able to show change inspires confidence in the change process and also helps identify those places that may still need adjustment.

Here are some questions to consider when evaluating your success at implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches to service delivery:

- Is there a system in place that monitors the organization's progress in being trauma-informed?
- Does the organization solicit feedback from both staff and individuals receiving services?
- What strategies and processes does the organization use to evaluate whether staff members feel safe and valued at the organization?
- How does the organization incorporate attention to culture and trauma in organization operations and quality improvement processes?
- What mechanisms are in place for information collected to be incorporated into the organization's quality assurance processes and how well do those mechanisms address creating accessible, culturally relevant, trauma and violence informed services and supports?

Becoming Trauma and Violence-Informed Is a Process, Not a Destination.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Becoming trauma and violence-informed is a journey, not a checklist and not a “one and done”. It requires the organization's policies, procedures, practices, and workplace culture to reflect and entrench the five core principles. This journey requires continued learning, growth, and adaptation. It requires commitment, time, and a sustained effort.

Trauma and violence-informed principles and approaches are a means of improving service delivery in the gender-based violence sector and in doing so, minimizing harm, preventing re-traumatization, and creating safety, dignity, and equity for all.

Trauma AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please complete the assessment, reading each item and rating from strongly disagree to strongly agree based on your experience in the organization over the last year. Use your initial impression: Remember you are evaluating the organization, not individuals.

I. Supporting Staff

A. Training and Education		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
Staff at all levels receive ongoing training on the following topics:							
1	What trauma and violence are.						
2	How trauma and violence affect the brain and body.						
3	The relationship between mental health, trauma, and violence.						
4	The relationship between substance use and trauma and violence.						
5	The relationship between homelessness and trauma and violence.						
6	The relationship between childhood trauma and violence and adult re-victimization (e.g. family violence, sexual assault).						
7	Differences in how people understand and respond to trauma and violence (gender, culture, age).						
8	How working with trauma and violence survivors impacts staff.						

9	De-escalation strategies (i.e. ways to help people to calm down before reaching the point of crisis).						
10	How to establish and maintain healthy professional boundaries.						
B. Staff Supervision, Support, and Self-Care		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
1	Staff members have regular team meetings.						
2	Topics related to self-care are addressed in team meetings (e.g. vicarious trauma, burn-out, stress-reducing strategies).						
3	Staff members have a regularly scheduled time for individual supervision.						
4	Staff members receive individual supervision from a supervisor who is trained in understanding trauma and violence and vicarious trauma.						
5	Part of supervision time is used to help staff members understand how their stress reactions and own history of trauma and violence impact their work with clients.						
6	The organization helps staff debrief after a crisis.						
7	The organization has a formal system for reviewing staff performance.						
8	The organization provides opportunities for ongoing staff evaluation of the program/ organization.						
9	The organization provides opportunities for staff input into program practices.						

II. Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

A. Establishing a Safe Physical Environment		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
1	Staff monitors who are coming in and out.						
3	The environment around the building is safe: the parking lot, sidewalks, and entrances/exits are well-lit, signage provides clear directions, and the building is accessible.						
4	The organization's space is accessible, avoids clutter, has clear sightlines, few barriers, and comfortable, well-spaced furniture.						
5	Thoughtfulness is given to ambient lighting, background noise, reducing clutter, and minimizing scents (possible triggers/allergens).						
6	Bathrooms are well-maintained, with adequate lighting and bathroom doors are lockable.						
7	Efforts are made to reduce known triggers, adverse stimuli, and other environmental stressors.						
8	The organization incorporates inclusive art and material, including those for children.						
B. Establishing a Supportive Environment		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
Information Sharing							
1	The organization reviews rules, rights and grievance procedures with clients.						
2	Clients are informed about how the organization responds to personal crises (e.g. suicidal statements, violent behaviour, and mandatory reports) in advance of need.						
3	Materials are posted about traumatic stress (e.g. what it is, how it impacts people, and available trauma and violence-specific resources).						
Cultural Safety							
1	Staff and clients are allowed to speak their language within the organization.						
2	Staff and clients see themselves reflected in resource materials.						
3	Cultural humility is practiced by all staff.						

B. Establishing a Supportive Environment		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
Privacy and Confidentiality							
1	The organization informs clients about the extent and limits of privacy and confidentiality (kinds of records kept, where/who has access, when obligated to make a report to police/ social services etc.).						
2	Staff do not talk about clients in common spaces.						
3	Staff do not discuss the personal issues of one client with another client.						
4	Clients who have violated rules are approached in private.						
5	There are private spaces for staff and client conversations.						
Open and Respectful Communication							
1	Staff members practise motivational interviewing techniques with clients (e.g., open-ended questions, affirmations, and reflective listening).						
2	The organization uses “people first” language rather than labels (e.g. “people who are experiencing homelessness” rather than “homeless people”).						
3	Staff uses descriptive language rather than characterizing terms to describe clients (e.g. describing a person as ‘having a hard time getting her needs met’ rather than ‘attention seeking’).						
Consistency and Predictability							
1	The organization follows schedules and keeps appointments as much as possible.						
2	The organization has consistently and equitably applied policies and procedures.						

III. Service Delivery

A. Developing Goals and Plans							
1	Staff collaborate with clients in setting their goals.						
2	Client needs and goals are reviewed and updated regularly.						
3	Staff offer to work with clients to develop plans to address possible future needs.						
B. Choice and Collaboration							
1	The organization allows sufficient time and flexibility to staff to respond to unique client needs.						
2	The program provides opportunities for coordination for services not provided within that organization.						
C. The Journey							
1	The program evaluates its efforts and ability to provide trauma and violence-informed service regularly.						

IV. Involving Clients

A. Involving Current and Former Clients		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
1	Current clients are given opportunities to evaluate the services they receive and offer their suggestions for improvement in anonymous and/or confidential ways.						
2	Former clients are invited to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences with the services they received.						

V. Adapting Policies

A. Creating Written Policies		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know	Not applicable
1	The organization has a written statement that includes a commitment to implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches.						
2	The organization has a written commitment to demonstrating respect for cultural differences and practices.						
4	The organization has a written policy to address potential threats to clients and staff.						
5	The organization has a written policy outlining organizational responses to staff burnout and/or vicarious trauma needs.						
6	The organization has written policies outlining professional conduct for staff (e.g. boundaries, responses to clients, etc.).						
B. Reviewing Policies							
1	The organization reviews its policies on a regular basis to identify whether they are sensitive to the needs of trauma and violence survivors.						
2	The organization involves staff in its review of policies.						

Adopted from the National Center on Family Homelessness Trauma-Informed Organizational Self-Assessment and "Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care: A Self-Assessment and Planning Protocol" article by Roger D. Fallot, Ph.D. & Maxine Harris, Ph.D.

How to Build A STAFF JOURNEY MAP

In trauma and violence-informed practice, focusing on the staff experience is critical — especially during times of crisis or in a downturn. Creating a staff journey map is one way to uncover problem areas and solutions.

What is a staff journey?

A staff journey is the path someone takes from the time of applying to an organization through to the exit from that organization. Staff experience is the feeling about everything that constitutes that path or specific feelings about specific touchpoints. The touchpoints that have the most impact on that experience are described as moments that matter, and these are the most important things to include in a staff journey map.

What is a staff journey map?

At its simplest, a staff journey map is a graphical image that represents the organizational path, or moments that matter, for a particular type of staff.

A staff journey map can be a high-level comprehensive overview of the staff experience, from recruitment to training to final offboarding, as in the staff journey map template below. It can also depict a particular part of the journey, such as pain points of the journey, or stages that cause problems. Staff journey maps are also likely to include specific information about the touchpoints you're focusing on, ratings of a particular interaction and next steps.

Why are staff journey maps important?

A staff journey map is an important tool to understand the staff experience. Your team can use the map to identify main areas for improvement and then create new strategies, based on data from a staff feedback mechanism or other sources. When done correctly, staff journey maps can uncover areas that need improvement.

Staff journey map template

No two roles are alike, so every staff journey map will be slightly different. However, this template can help you get started creating your own map. The template offers some objectives for major touchpoints of the staff journey, as well as some strategies and methods to follow. The staff experience can then be rated using the feelings key. The notes section enables your team to evaluate what went wrong or right and identify the next steps

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE JOURNEY MAP

A diagnostic tool that will help you visualize an employee's current experience in your organization, the Employee Experience Journey Map includes "touchpoints" at which you can assess whether an employee's experience meets their expectations. Below is a sample journey map with examples of Discovery Touchpoints, Insights, and Opportunities.

DISCOVERY The perception of the organization and the Hiring Process.	Stages			
	DISCOVERY	ONBOARDING	TRAINING	
ONBOARDING The integration into the organization.	Touchpoints			
	Applicant tracking system -Recruiter outreach -Interview			
TRAINING The acquisition of knowledge or skills.	Emotional Curve			
WORK The achievement of the task and the way one connects to others and to teams.				
	Needs			
REWARDS Everything related to compensation, benefits, and how to obtain them.	Insights			
	-Recruiting process caused frustration but team mitigated damage			
MOBILITY Professional changes relevant to the employee.	Opportunities			
	-Eliminate resume "black hole"			
BREAKS Moments when you aren't working but you maintain a work relationship.				
EXIT The way in which a person disassociates themselves from the organization.				

The full journey map template, with additional information, is available on the website.

5 STEPS TO CREATING YOUR OWN STAFF JOURNEY MAP

1. Understand your 'why'

As an HR leader, you serve a crucial role in advocating for the staff experience and driving the mapping process. As with any map, you need to know where you want to go before you understand the kind of map you need.

Initially, you can start by outlining the map by hand to easily make adjustments, and then build it out from there. While some organizations may want a complex map that covers all touchpoints, pain points and potential strategies, others may want a simple, straightforward map that identifies the most important touchpoints of a staff's journey from beginning to end (as with the template). You can adjust the template based on these requirements.

2. Decide on personas to map

Once you have identified goals, use the staff journey map template to identify the staff personas or segments whose journeys you want to map, since each experience will be unique.

For example, front-line staff will have a different journey than the operational or support staff. Bear in mind that an entry-level staff's touchpoints and pain points will be different than management.

3. Identify touchpoints

An important step in creating a staff journey map is to plot the most important touchpoints for each persona or segment you're mapping or to focus on specific issues. These moments that matter include critical junctures in the staff journey, from the first moment of contact as a candidate to the offboarding experience. Important touchpoints also include staff performance reviews, training, and client interactions. More specific ones could be mapping how the organization handles life events, such as a new baby, or problem areas, such as a lack of raises or processes for dealing with difficult staff or managers.

4. Gather feedback

Reach out to staff to identify which touchpoints matter most and to get a fuller understanding of each one. For example, you'll want to identify what the staff wants to accomplish at each touchpoint and what are the pain points.

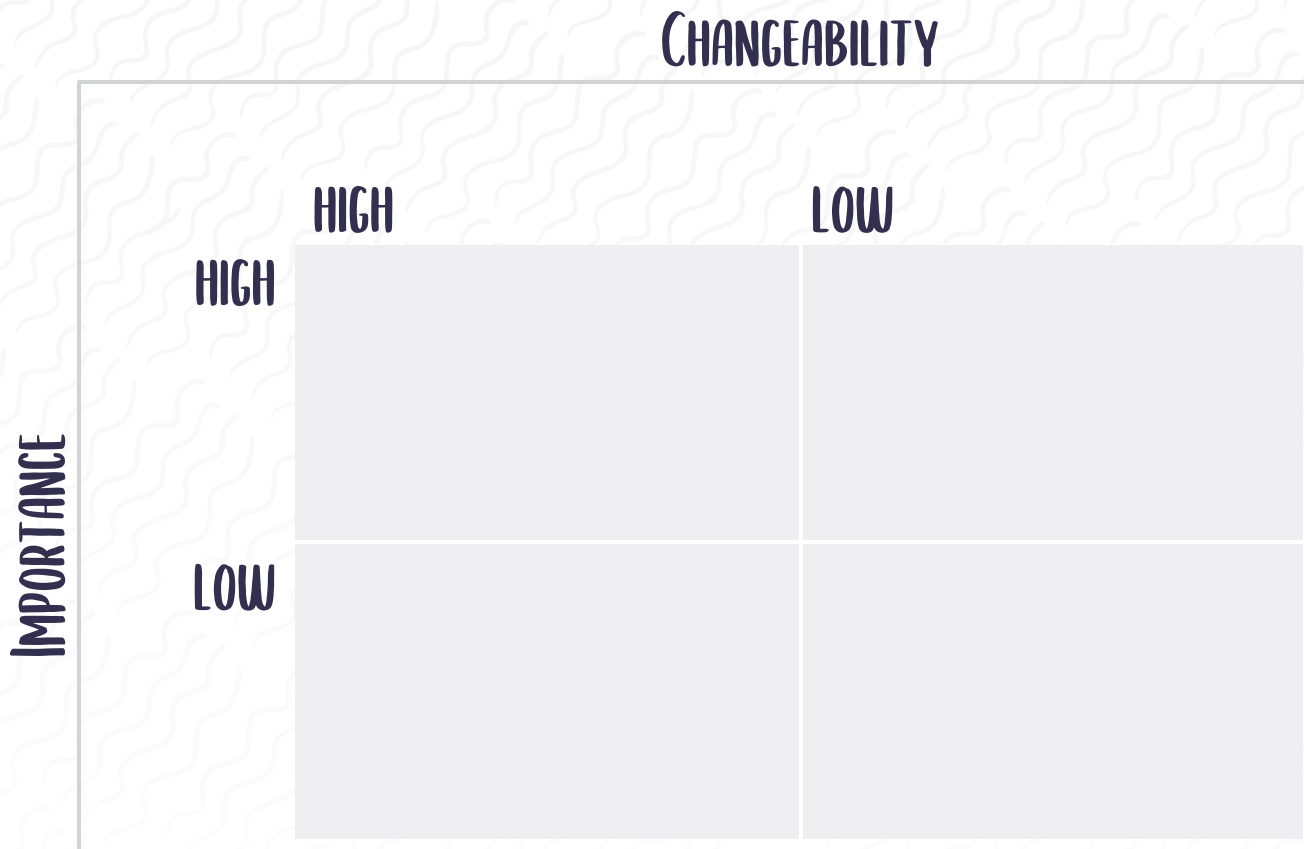
5. Keep the map up-to-date

Creating a staff journey map is not a one-and-done process, since change is the rule, not the exception. For example, few would have foreseen that communicating about the coronavirus would become critical to staff experience. And when staff experience their own or vicarious trauma, you need to be able to be responsive and make changes from the norm where necessary.

Conduct a staff engagement survey periodically (even if informally) to gather feedback on the staff experience and enable important events to trigger new discussions. For example, hold exit interviews to gather feedback on a staff's experience including what pain points were most responsible for the decision to leave.

Creating a staff journey map is not an end unto itself, so it's important to understand how to use a journey map to boost staff experience.

Prioritization Matrix



*Changeability –

Do we have the capacity (resources and readiness) to make this change?

*Importance –

How much will this impact/affect the issue in our organization?