

Take Time to Reflect

– A PRACTICE REFLECTION TOOL

DEVELOP YOUR PRACTICE OF APPLYING TRAUMA-AND-VIOLENCE INFORMED PRINCIPLES

For too many of us, the workplace is a fast-paced, high-pressure environment with little time to just breathe. Professionals working in the gender-based violence sector are often dealing with high stakes and escalating situations, working with people and populations in which traumatization and violence are ongoing. Vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, moral distress, and secondary traumatic stress are all too common experiences for frontline service providers.

Individuals and organizations can take steps to reduce the harms that are caused by working in the gender-based violence sector. Integrating and applying trauma and violence-informed principles can help protect you and the people you serve from harm and re-traumatization.

The Power of Support

Human beings are incredibly resilient with even modest support. Every encounter in your day is an opportunity to practice trauma and violence-informed principles and to build your skills. Remaining calm, being present, and demonstrating respect, compassion, and nonjudgement can cut through even the most difficult situations to offer hope and support that is meaningful. You don't have to solve other people's situations. Instead, ground yourself in humility to "be with" others in solidarity with our shared humanity.

Becoming Trauma and Violence-Informed takes practice

As part of implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches, **take time to reflect** on different encounters throughout your day using the principles as a guide. Over time, the questions and reflection will become automatic, and you will find that you see the world through the trauma and violence-informed lens.

Reflect on specific encounters with survivors/clients. Take care to reflect critically for the purpose of learning and development, not to use the exercise to judge yourself or others harshly. Perfection is not the goal. Integrating trauma and violence-informed principles into your practice is a journey with ups and downs. The work is difficult and complex. Balance compassion for yourself with honesty and critical thinking.

Questions that are outward-facing: seek to prevent harm and re-traumatization.

1. Build awareness and understanding of trauma, violence, and their impact on people's lives and behaviour

- Were you honestly able to look past the behaviour or label the person came in with?

- How did you do that? (Be concrete and specific - what did you do?)

- Was there any point that you found yourself in judgement?

- What was it?

2. Emphasize safety and trust

- What did you do to create safety? (Be concrete and specific - what did you do?)

- What did you do to deserve trust? (Be concrete and specific - what did you do?)

- Were you aware of power dynamics that create "us and them" divisions?

- Imagine how the person would describe the meeting/session when they left. What words might they use to describe it?



3. Offer real choices through connection and collaboration

- Did you ask and then listen carefully for what the person wants?

- Did you talk honestly about the services that are available?

- Did you brainstorm options that support the person's expressed wants?

4. Recognize and build people's strengths and resilience

- What strengths did you see in the person? If you did not see them in the moment, think about them now.

- What did you do that was supportive?

- Do you think the other person experienced it as support?

5. Incorporate a people-centred perspective

- Did you practice humility – do you believe the other person is the expert of their life?

- Were you able to let go of finding solutions for them?

- Was there mutual regard and respect in the interaction?



Outward-facing exercise:

- Think about the meeting or session from the other person's perspective. How would you describe it if you were them?

- What words would they use to describe their experience of you – with you? What do you think they left with?

- From that perspective, what principles did you use? What do you want to further develop?

Questions that are inward-looking: your health and wellbeing are a priority.

1. Build awareness and understanding of trauma, violence, and their impact on people's lives and behaviour

- How are you feeling in this moment? What are you thinking?

- Was there an encounter in your day that left you upset, hurt, drained, and/or angry? If so, where do you feel it in your body?

- Does structural violence play into the encounter? If so, how?

2. Emphasize safety and trust

- Did you feel safe in the encounter?



- Do you feel supported in your workplace?

3. Offer real choices through connection and collaboration

- What were your choices in the situation?

- Who could support you?

- Are you sufficiently aware of relevant community resources?

4. Recognize and build people's strengths and resilience

- What do you feel good about in the encounter?

- Did you give yourself time afterward to take a break, ground yourself, and/or debrief?

- Do you practice self-care and actively foster resilience?

5. Incorporate a people-centred perspective

- Did you feel respect, dignity, and safety in the encounter?

- Do you get caught in thinking it's up to you to solve the problem?



- Do you remember to take time to recognize the contribution you and your colleagues make in others' lives?

Inward-looking exercise:

Find words to describe how you are/how you were.

- Focus on your response, rather than the event.

- Where does it sit in your body?

- Say them out loud.

- Write the descriptive words down to see them and think about what they are telling you.

What steps can you take to support yourself?

- Suggestions can be found in the practical guide, see: Your self-care and wellness strategy

