

What is Trauma?

Adapted from Treatment Improvement Protocol #57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

A Traumatic Experience...

- results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.
- overwhelms a person’s coping capacity where normal, protective responses to threats (fight, flight, freeze) are activated and remain even after the event passes
- affects functioning and well-being, either through temporary symptoms, delayed symptoms, prolonged symptoms, or an enduring mental and/or physical health consequences

What impacts if an event is traumatic or not?

The 3 E’s: The event(s), how a person experiences the event(s), and the effects of the event(s)

Event	Experience	Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be singular, multiple events or chronic conditions that occur to individuals or groups of people. • Can be natural or human caused • Includes direct experiences, witnessing events, or hearing about events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How a person interprets, labels, or assigns meaning to the event • Done subconsciously • Two people can live the same event and experience/interpret it in different ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically or emotionally harmful • Lasting negative effects on functioning and well-being (emotional, mental, physical, social, or spiritual)

Types of Traumas – The “Event”

	Natural	Individual	Group	Cultural
Definition	Non-human caused	Human-caused and occurs to one person	Affects a particular group of people that share a common identity, history, or activities	Covers a broad range of violence and actions that attempt to dismantle cultural practices, resources, and identities
Examples	Earthquake, flood, tornado, hurricane, wildfire	Domestic violence, sexual assault, robbery, kidnapping, accidents	Murder of a fellow gang member, combat veterans, first responders	Holocaust, Native American displacement
Impact	Responses depend on extent of losses; amount of time it takes to reestablish daily routines; and amount, accessibility, and duration of relief services.	Survivors more likely struggle with issues of causation that can distort perception of responsibility for the trauma, and may not receive the support or concern that are given to other victims of traumatic events.	Groups often keep the traumatic experiences within the group, feeling that outsiders will not understand. Members may encourage others in the group to shut down emotionally and repress their trauma.	Often include intentional or unintentional acts that erode the heritage of a culture. This can either cause the heritage to disappear, or for those who are left can become bonded.

Factors that Impact Trauma Reactions - How you “experience” the event

- The traumatic event itself (including type, specific characteristics, length of trauma)
- Individual history and characteristics (including genetics, biological/psychological makeup)
- Developmental factors (traumas that occur within specific stages of development that affect later development, or tragedies that occur outside an expected developmental stage)
- Sociocultural attributes (including cultural aspects that affect the experience of traumatic events and community reactions)
- Available resources (internal and external, such as coping skills and family support)

What Impact Does Trauma Have? – The “Effects” of Trauma

Emotions

Emotional reactions can vary and are significantly influenced by social and cultural norms. Traumatic stress tends to evoke two extremes, feeling too much or feeling too little. Some trauma survivors have difficulty regulating emotions. Emotional reactions can include agitation, anger, depression, sadness, humiliation, guilt, hopelessness and shame.

Thoughts

The impact of trauma is heavily influenced by the meaning the survivor attaches to the traumatic event. Survivors’ unique interpretations of an event (including their beliefs and assumptions) contribute to how they process, cope with, and recover from trauma. Trauma challenges the just-world or core life assumptions that help individuals navigate daily life. Trauma can alter three main cognitive patterns: thoughts about self (e.g. their purpose, feelings or beliefs in their competence or resiliency), the world (e.g. view of others, sense of safety, fairness), and the future (e.g. hopefulness).

Behaviors

People often engage in behaviors to manage the after effects, intensity of emotions, or the distressing aspects of the traumatic experience. Behavioral reactions can include aggression, self-harm, substance use, self-destructive behaviors, impulsivity, and hypervigilance.

Interactions and relationships

Trauma can affect relationships significantly. Trauma survivors can feel ashamed not only of the trauma itself, but also their reactions, which can decrease their ability to use support systems - believing no one will be understanding or trustworthy, or because they perceive their needs as a burden to others. Survivors can also experience a significant sense of betrayal that can disrupt supportive relationships and the ability to trust - which can leave individuals alienated, socially isolated, and terrified of developing relationships.

Physical

There is a significant connection between trauma and chronic health conditions. Common physical symptoms and disorders include somatic complaints (bodily symptoms or dysfunctions used to express emotional distress), sleep disturbances, or a wide range of physical disorders including hypertension, physical ailments, nightmares, or flashbacks.

Traumatic stress reactions are normal reactions to abnormal situations.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

Trauma-Informed approaches are based on a framework that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of trauma including:

- Acknowledging the role and widespread impact of trauma in people's lives
- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma
- Integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices
- Avoiding re-traumatization
- Understanding potential paths for recovery and empowers personal choice
- Individualizing care and approaches to fit each person's needs

The Trauma-Informed Difference

Traditional Perspectives	Trauma-Informed Perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenging behaviors are personal deficits• Difficult behaviors are disruptive and maladaptive• Punitive approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenging behaviors are ways of coping• Difficult behaviors may be an automatic stress response• Strengths-based

Trauma-Informed Principles

- Approach everyone with care and consideration for what they may have or may be going through
- Create environments based on values of dignity and respect for people and diversity
- Pay attention to physical space, body language, tone, culture and atmosphere
- Prioritize the emotional climate over achieving tasks
- Support personal choices and shared decision-making
- Be empathetic, non-judgmental and open.
- Don't take anything personally.
- Never judge or dismiss behaviors. People behave in ways they have learned to manage their feelings, instability, needs, or trauma.
- Respect the dignity of the people without regard to sex, race, age, sexual orientation

Avoiding Re-Traumatization

- Work to understand people and possible triggers
- Minimize potential triggers
 - Develop safe physical spaces (well-lit, comfortable, natural light, calming colors, relaxing noises)
- Maintain supportive, empathetic relationships
- Provide clear and consistent messages

Create Nurturing Space through a Values-Driven Community

- Create safe, productive spaces that reinforce respect and dignity
- Values shape spirit, tone, culture, atmosphere
- Be flexible with where people are at and our differences
- Pay attention to the emotional climate of the setting over the need to “get things done”
- Important to build trust with the people and the organization
- Develop egalitarian models of power: Equal respect and value for all positions
- Create environments that support autonomy and honor each individual’s contributions and skills
- Pay attention to the emotional climate of the setting over the need to get things done

Invalidating Spaces

- Non-responsive to needs
- Experiences are trivialized
- Tells people they are wrong
- Doesn’t tolerate emotions
- Dismissive language

Validating Spaces

- Authentically validate
- Help people identify and communicate needs
- Use active listening
- Welcoming and Respectful
- Culturally competent

What is Culture?

- Many people look at culture as ethnic heritage, but culture is a broad term that includes a variety of groups or identities including: race, language, gender, sexual orientation, class, family, age/generation, religion or spirituality, geographic origin
- Culture is a combination of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns that are shared by a community with a shared identity

What is Cultural Humility?

- It is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures.
- It is not about trying to change others to become more like you or assume you know anyone based on their identification with one group.
- It is about cultivating an open attitude or open mind, and new skills in yourself, while at the same time learning about and honoring other peoples other's people culture's and individual identities.

Cultural Competency vs Cultural Humility

Cultural Competency says, “I’m the expert.” Cultural Humility says, “You’re the expert.”

The goal of competency is to equip you with the right answers. Cultural humility instead aims to find the right questions. Cultural humility is a shift from focus on your knowledge to the other person’s knowledge.

Cultural Competency is an end product. Cultural Humility is a lifelong process.

Cultural humility focuses on the continued process of learning. It is an attitude to adopt, not a status to achieve.

Strategy for Cultural Humility (ASSESS Model by Lisa Boesen)

- Ask questions in a safe, humble manner
- Seek self-awareness
- Suspend judgement
- Express kindness and compassion
- Support a safe and welcoming environment
- Start where the person is

Conflict Resolution

Give the person undivided attention.

- When people are paid attention to they feel validated; they feel important.

Be empathic and nonjudgmental.

- When someone says or does something you perceive as weird or irrational, try not to judge or discount their feelings. Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they're real to the other person. Pay attention to them.

Clarify messages.

- When a subject makes a statement, you may think you know what the person means. The only way to be sure is to ask; yet questions may be perceived as challenging. Restate what you think you heard or ask open-ended questions.

Avoid overreacting.

- Remain calm, rational, and professional. While you can't control the person's behavior, how you respond to their behavior will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses.
- Don't be defensive, even though the frustration is being directed at you, it is not about you.

Focus on feelings.

- Facts are important, but how a person feels is the heart of the matter. Some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what's happening to them. Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message.
- Pay attention to behaviors as they can clue you in to how people may be feeling or how you may need to respond.
- Empathize with the emotions that are causing the behaviors

Allow silence for reflection.

- We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, sometimes it's the best choice. It can give a person a chance to reflect on what's happening, and how he or she needs to proceed.

Allow time for decisions.

- When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you've said.

Respect personal space.

- If possible, stand 1.5 to three feet away from a person who's escalating. Allowing personal space tends to decrease a person's anxiety and can help you prevent acting-out behavior.

Use nonthreatening non-verbals.

- The more a person loses control, the less they hear your words—and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone.
- Don't approach someone head on, approach at an angle.

Trauma-Informed Leadership

What is Trauma-Informed Leadership?

Understanding Trauma and its effects in order to recruit, engage, and lead the work in ways that respects where individuals are at and creates safe spaces for everyone to participate and build community.

Key Aspects of Trauma for Consumer Leaders to Understand

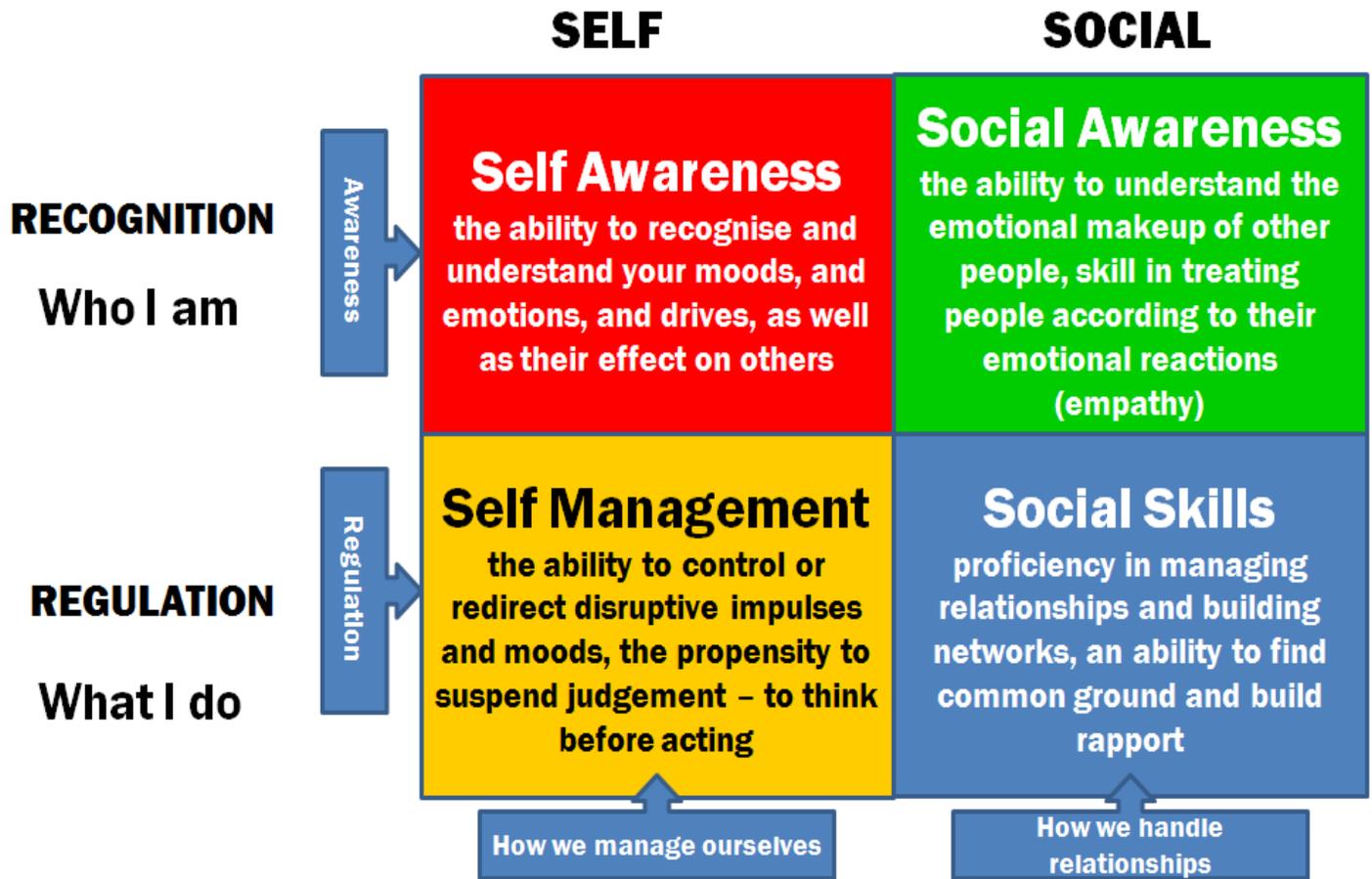
- The impacts that trauma has on thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships
- Key factors of recovery, including the importance of safe spaces and healthy interactions/relationships
- Core principles of Trauma-Informed Approaches
- What Secondary Trauma is
- How to engage in Self-Care

Trauma-Informed Leadership Skills

Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Active, Patient Listening•Be empathetic, non-judgmental, and open•Only 7% of communication is what you say. Pay attention to tone and body language.
Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Be aware of other's emotions – and pay attention to your own•Approach people with consideration for what they have or may be going through•Leaders can set the tone - pay attention to creating a values-driven environment
Group Participation/Facilitaiton	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Learn about the group and it's members•Understand and manage group dyanmics•Find common ground and engage participation to build consensus
Conflict Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Create open participation and outline guidelines for meetings•Allow for respectful disagreement•Understanding members may help anticipate where tensions may arise
Cultural Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Allow individuals to define their own culture and identity•Suspend ideas about what you think you know based on generalizations

Tips: Communication is key.

Emotional Intelligence



Source: Discovery in Action. May 2018.

<https://www.discoveryinaction.com.au/latest-news/tips-to-improve-your-emotional-intelligence>

