

Understanding trauma-informed practice

We take a trauma-informed approach in all aspects of our work

Many of the people we work with have experienced trauma — events that overwhelm their capacity to cope, often involving a breach of trust, and taking away a sense of control and safety. Trauma can shape how someone engages with services, relates to others, manages distress, or understands their own experiences.

Having a shared understanding of trauma and its impacts helps workers recognise when it may influence a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviour, or physiological response, and for workers to respond in ways that are supportive and respectful.

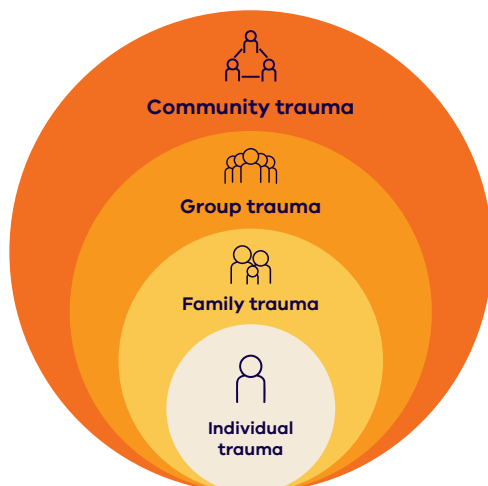
Understanding trauma is also about recognising how people cope and function in the face of adversity and violence. Empowering people to use their strengths and resources is core to being trauma-informed.

Levels of trauma

Trauma can be experienced individually or collectively, affecting families, groups, and entire communities.

When supporting someone who has experienced trauma, it's important to think about how trauma may also be influencing their support system and community. Historical and cultural trauma are often rooted in social and structural inequality, especially for groups like First Nations people, LGBTIQ+ communities, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and people with disabilities. Similarly, violence experienced by women, girls and trans-women is tied to collective experiences of gender discrimination.

The context in which people experience trauma shapes how people engage with services and the kind of support they need.



(Model adapted from the 2023 SAMHSA practical guide for implementing TIP)

Trauma, adversity and violence

Trauma often overlaps with adversity — like discrimination, poverty, exclusion, or family disruption — which can further increase people's vulnerability to trauma and violence. Adversity and discrimination can lead to reduced access and harmful experiences when seeking help from services.

Jordan's (they/them) experience in engaging with a trauma-informed service:

"I've had services treat me differently because I'm queer, so I was expecting the worst. But here, they actually listened — they wanted to understand how the assault changed my life but also how the discrimination I face affects me. I felt safe enough to speak up — and they recognised both the trauma I'd been through and the strength it took to get help."



Applying trauma-informed practice

What does a trauma-informed organisation look like?

Leader:

"We understand how trauma can impact both the people we support and the people who work here, and we take active steps for supporting both."

A trauma-informed organisation has systems and processes in place to build safety, trust, and choice into all areas — from frontline practice to policies and leadership. It also has training, supervision, and support structures that enable workers to apply trauma-informed principles in everyday practice.

A trauma-informed organisation aims to:

- **Minimise barriers** to accessing support — Create safe, welcoming environments that reduce obstacles to getting help, especially for people facing discrimination or adversity.
- **Prevent harm** — Avoid practices and systems that resemble traumatic experiences or risk re-traumatising people.
- **Promote recovery and healing** — Support people to regain control, hope, and work towards recovery from the impacts of trauma through collaborative, strengths-based care.
- **Support workers** — Ensure that workers have the tools and support they need to stay well and provide trauma-informed care effectively.

Leader:

"Trauma-informed practice is not just about individual workers — it's embedded across the whole system."

Trauma-informed workers

Workers:

"I understand how trauma can affect people, and I work in ways that promote safety, trust, and choice — adapting my approach to each person's needs and the context they are in."

"I have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to respond to people sharing their experiences of trauma, and am able to support their recovery by working with people's strengths, networks, and supports whenever I can."

"I take steps to support my own wellbeing and seek support when needed, recognising the impact of my work and how it might affect my own experiences of trauma."

Manager:

"Being trauma-informed is an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and collaboration with our colleagues and the people we support."

