

Principles of Trauma-Informed Care and Therapeutic Services

A literature review identified the following eight core principles for trauma-informed practice:

1. Understanding Trauma and Its Impact.
2. Cultural Competency.
3. Safety.
4. Supporting Consumer Control, Choice & Autonomy.
5. Sharing Power and Governance.
6. Integrating care.
7. Healing Happens in Relationships.
8. Strength-Based Approach.

Each principle is described in more detail below.

Understanding Trauma and Its Impact

Understanding trauma is the central tenant of the framework and underpins all the principles set out in this section. This involves recognising that clients may present with challenging behaviours which may be symptomatic of adaptive responses to trauma.¹ Trauma-informed practitioners must use their understandings of trauma to overcome the client's apprehension of services and make it easy as possible for them to access services. By understanding trauma, practitioners may help to validate a victim's experience of trauma and its impacts. When a service does not understand trauma or its impact, it is "the equivalent of denying the existence and significance of trauma".²

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency should be the foundation for services that work across cultures. It involves establishing attitudes, policies and behaviours which acknowledge culture, seeks to understand the different dynamics between people of diverse backgrounds, adapts to meet cultural needs and incorporates them, and is inquisitive of diversity.³ All interventions under this framework are conscious of shared histories, are respectful, and specific to culture.⁴ To be culturally competent, an organisation must take on the framework at all levels including its board, management, staff and services.

Safety

A core belief of trauma-informed care is that recovery cannot occur while a victim is physically or emotionally unsafe. A key task of a provider is to identify the sources of trauma and to ensure that the client is out of the way of ongoing harm.⁵ This involves identifying strategies to remove the client from harm and to create a safe environment where healing can occur.⁶ To create this environment, workers must be consistent, transparent and respectful in their responses to ensure that clients feel physically, culturally and emotionally safe.^{7,8,9}

¹ Hopper, Bassuk & Ollivet, 2010:81; MHCC, 2013:10

² Elliot et al., 2005:462

³ Whaley & Davis, 2007:564; Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework, 2008:23 cited in Lumby & Farrelly, 2009:4

⁴ Bateman, Henderson, & Kezelman, 2013:10

⁵ Jackson et al., 2013:19

⁶ Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010:81; Atkinson, 2012:22

⁷ Bateman, Henderson, & Kezelman, 2013:10

⁸ Jackson et al., 2013:19

Supporting Consumer Control, Choice & Autonomy

For trauma-informed therapeutic services to be effective, they need to establish client control and autonomy so that the client feels strengthened and competent at the end of the program. Control over services and their treatment helps a client to regain a sense of control over their lives and decisions, and rebuild their sense of autonomy.¹⁰ This involves providing opportunities for clients to be engaged with all aspects of the service, to be in charge of decisions and to collaborate in goal setting. Services need to collaborate with clients on their treatment and need to keep the client informed of any changes;¹¹ allowing the client to choose their treatment can be very empowering.¹² A key element to success is creation of ‘predictable environments’ where clients know what to expect and have control over the space.¹³ One helpful aspect may be outlining what the service can provide and setting out with clients what is expected from the service and from them. Though anecdotal evidence, it has been reported by Maari Maa Health that when they set out behavioural expectations for their community members they found reductions in aggression and threats.¹⁴

Sharing Power and Governance

Within the trauma-informed framework, sharing power and governance refers to equalising power differential through the promotion of democracy within the organisational structures, allowing those at all levels of the organisation to contribute to decision making and review of policies and procedures, and recruiting those with lived-experiences onto the board.¹⁵ Being community owned and controlled is one key element of effectively addressing family violence within Indigenous communities.¹⁶

Integrating Care

As mentioned in the section on *Safety*, clients benefit when services are integrated and provide a holistic response to their needs. Under the common understanding of trauma-informed care, services need to be brought together to provide support for all facets of the individual whether emotional, physical, spiritual, social, or cultural.¹⁷ Currently, spiritual and cultural elements of a person’s wellbeing have been considerably overlooked by mainstream services but are necessary for a holistic approach to recovery from trauma.¹⁸ It is only through bridging the gap between services and providing an integrated approach that the complex needs of clients can be addressed. Many women presenting to family violence services will also experience homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health problems.¹⁹ Services must be integrated to improve the client’s prospects for recovery.

Healing Happens in Relationships

Creation of authentic relationships aids healing and recovery of trauma survivors by restoring core neural pathways.²⁰ The creation of a ‘therapeutic alliance’ between a

⁹ Lumby and Farrelly, 2009:11

¹⁰ Bateman, Henderson, & Kezelman, 2013:10; Atkinson, 2012:33

¹¹ Atkinson, 2012:33

¹² Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010:82

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Grealy, Milward & Farmer, 2015:35

¹⁵ Bateman, Henderson, & Kezelman, 2013:11; Atkinson, 2012:33; Procter et al., 2017:18

¹⁶ Memmott et al, 2006:8

¹⁷ Atkinson, 2012:33; McEwan et al., 2008:3

¹⁸ McEwan et al., 2008:3

¹⁹ Bateman, Henderson, & Kezelman, 2013:16

²⁰ Atkinson, 2012:33; MHCC, 2013:11

client and practitioner is a necessary step for successful client outcomes.²¹ The relationship between a client and practitioner may initially be strained and difficult to enter into due to the client's experience of abusive or untrustworthy authority figures.²² However, this relationship is crucial not only for addressing issues that the client is currently experiencing, but also for allowing them to feel safe to deal with past traumas.²³ The connection can "provide a corrective emotional experience" for the client.²⁴ Once trust is gained, a practitioner can best guide their client and speak honestly and openly about a client's vulnerabilities.²⁵ Additionally, peer-to-peer relationships may be facilitated to help create networks of support for the client.

Strength-Based Approach

Rather than focusing on the negative behaviours and aspects of a client, this approach seeks to identify their strengths and develop healthy coping skills which align with their capabilities.²⁶ This means orientating the therapies to be future-focused and involve skill building exercises for increasing resiliency.²⁷ Therapies which have multiple components that play to the different strengths of clients are likely to be successful.²⁸

²¹ Knight, 2014:27

²² Ibid. p.26

²³ Ibid. p.25

²⁴ Ibid. p.27

²⁵ Wendt & Baker, 2013:519; Stirling et al., 2012:6

²⁶ Atkinson, 2012:33

²⁷ Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010:82

²⁸ Munro, 2012:4