



Trauma Awareness Training

A co-produced resource

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Trauma informed approach

Trauma informed means we recognise trauma as an important element of women's experiences and recovery and seek to empower, build trust and meet her needs respectfully and safely.

By adopting the five core principles of a trauma-informed approach to engagement you can support women to engage in a safe and respectful way.

What do we mean by *trauma*?

"Any event that overwhelms a person's capacity for positive coping"

Trauma informed 5 core principles

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness
3. Choice
4. Collaboration
5. Empowerment

What does *triggering* mean?

A trigger is an external stimulus that sets off a physical or emotional reaction in a person.

Stimulus can be a sight, sound, smell, person, place, behaviour or anything that reminds a woman of the traumatic event.

Certain places and situations can be especially triggering for traumatised women including prisons, hospitals, institutional care, pregnancy, labour & birth and breastfeeding.

Potential triggers in the perinatal period

- Routine obstetric care
- Physical contact from health professionals
- Blood tests
- Blood loss / sight of blood
- Hospital stays
- Potent smells
- Unexpected medical interventions
- Severe pain
- Fear of death
- Simulation of the breast (breastfeeding)

Practical tips for engagement

- Wherever possible, invite women personally.
- Share information in advance about what to expect.
- When and where is the meeting? Is it accessible?
- What is the purpose and has this been clearly communicated?
- Who will be present?
- What is the expectation?
- Will women be offered refreshments?
- Will travel be paid? This is important as some women may not be able to attend if travel isn't paid on the day.
- Can women bring baby?
- Is this a safe space to share?

Speaking to women in advance:

- If concerns are highlighted – this builds trustworthiness and collaboration.
- Ensure women feel reassured.
- They are much more likely to engage and that engagement is more likely to be felt positively and women will feel empowered.
- Think about the barriers women might face to attending. Ask them what support they need to attend?

How to recognise signs of trauma

- Intrusion - Trauma is continually re-experienced through flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories
- Avoidance - Behaviour based on trying to avoid or escape particular thoughts and feelings
- Disassociation - Detachment, loss of memory or amnesia (mind and body)
- Cognitive impairment - Irrational thinking, misinterpretation, misconception
- Depression/mental health issues and anxiety
- Emotional distress or numbing
- Aggression
- Hypervigilance - Enhanced state of sensory sensitivity
- Post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD)

How to support women

Trauma-informed approach

- Careful planning
- Building relationships
- Clear information and expectations
- Wrap-around support
- Language
 - *Women have told us that they don't like to be described with words such as 'vulnerable' because this is perceived as permanent, use descriptive words such as 'facing challenges' because this implies temporary state, this aligns with strengths-based approach and avoids labelling.*
- Active listening
 - *Use skills such as clarifying and summarising to ensure you understand correctly and offer women an opportunity to confirm/adjust (see active listening resource for more tips).*
- Sharing outcomes

Summary of breakout room discussions

- Organise pre- and post- meetings for this project in a non-research setting. Smaller groups to discuss detail of what main meeting will be like, building relationships and giving people a platform.
- Ensure everyone in the room is prepared for the meeting so that we all feel empowered.
- Positive triggers; relating to others when they share their experiences and then feeling encouraged to share your experiences.
- Some of the principles are already built in, like the option to end an interview, participants are paid for their time, valued.
- Think from a trauma-informed perspective.
- Self-awareness, we may bring our own experiences to any interactions, be aware of how they influence how we speak.
- Challenges of understanding cultural awareness when the people we are speaking to come from a different background to us.
- Give women space to tell their story. Ensure women know they have been heard and offer more opportunities to share.
- When a disclosure is made, how can this be shared with other colleagues (confidentiality) to ensure that the woman does not have to re-tell her story on multiple occasions?

Summary of breakout room discussions (*continued*)

- Cross over with participatory, community-led principles of research.
- Avoiding re-traumatisation.
- Not making assumptions; just because someone has not disclosed a trauma does not mean it is not there.
- Be careful of the language you use; language is important.
- Research spaces can be intimidating. Not leading with credentials but instead asking 'what brings you to this work?' or 'what brings you here?' Make the introduction a unifying and trust building experience.