

KEY ELEMENTS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

1. Understand triggers + their impacts

See PDF: Understanding triggers



2. Use accessible, non-triggering language

See PDF: Simple language changes for a trauma-informed practice

3. Promote transparency in processes
4. Center a person's voice and choice, and ensure respect and sensitivity

See PDF: Working together with voice + choice



5. Meet a person where they are at in their lives
6. Utilize a strengths-based approach

See PDF: Meeting people where they are at

7. Utilize a non-judgemental approach
8. Unlearn assumptions and actively challenge biases

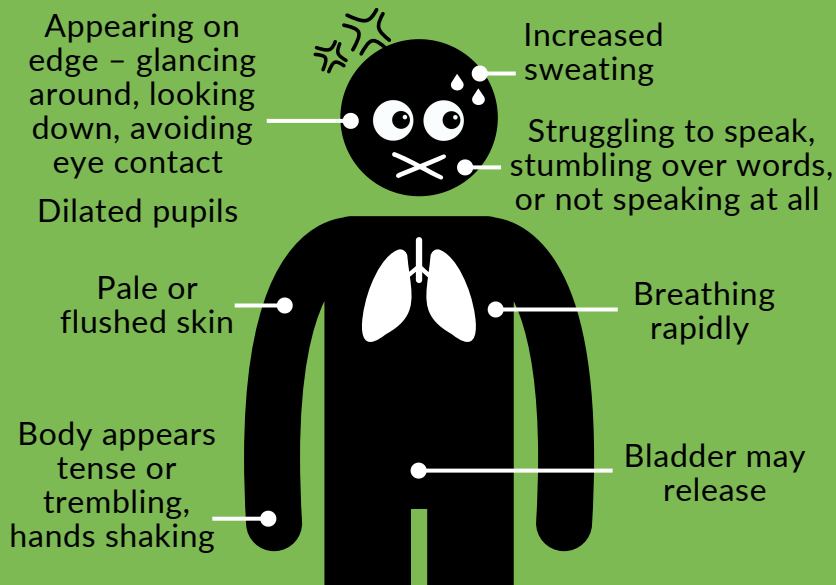
See PDF: Using a non-judgemental approach



UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS

SIGNS A PERSON IS TRIGGERED

& is activated into fight/flight/freeze



Less observable signs include:

- Increased blood pressure
- Quickened heart rate
- Compromised blunt pain response
- Memories of the event are either very vivid and clear or blacked out

Remember:

- It can take 20-30 minutes for the body to return to normal + calm.
- Many people accessing services are living in a chronic state of stress and activation. This can take months, even years to recover from, meaning these individuals are much more easily activated even once they find safety.

Sources: Harvard Health Publishing; Cleveland Clinic

HOW TO IMPLEMENT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF TRIGGERS

- Attend to immediate needs (food, water, clothing, housing, transportation) to help alleviate triggers - share resources; offer snacks, hot water, coffee
- Be as transparent, consistent, and predictable as possible
- Offer translation services - seek out volunteers
- Allow a support person to be present if the individual feels that would be helpful, like a veterinary social worker or volunteer counsellor - start with volunteers
- If a promise is made (to make a referral, or follow up with a phone call), follow through in a timely manner
- Acknowledge and take responsibility for miscommunication
- Clearly outline expectations + obtain informed consent
- Ask the individual to share their understanding of what has been said
- Notice body language, tone of voice - your own and clients'

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SIMPLE LANGUAGE CHANGES FOR A TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Starting the conversation:

"Hey, I hear you. This is a lot to manage, and I'm glad you came here for help. May I ask you a few questions?" Based on what you find out, you can share information with non-triggering language.



EXAMPLES OF TRIGGERING LANGUAGE

"They used to be an addict."

"What's wrong?"

"Have you tried anything yourself?"

"What I suggest you do is..."

"You are safe now."

"You can trust me."

Source: [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)



EXAMPLES OF NON-TRIGGERING LANGUAGE

"They are in recovery."

"What happened?"

"What have you found helpful?"

"Let's look at your options together."

"I care about your safety, and I am going to look into what is within the resources I have available to help provide safety."

Show that the person can trust your actions.

Other things to consider:

- Avoid technical language the individual may not understand.
- Prioritize staying connected vs providing information (don't "info dump").
- Your definition of safe may vary from the individual's. Don't make promises you can't keep.
- People who are placed-at-risk have been lied to many times. It's not easy to trust. Be honest about your capacity, expectations, and keep everything as confidential as possible.

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WORKING TOGETHER WITH VOICE + CHOICE

HOW TO CENTER VOICE + CHOICE

- Offer to work together to find solutions
- Ask the individual what their ideal outcome would be + what concerns they have
- Make a genuine effort to connect with the individual
- Allow the individual as much choice and control as possible in making decisions affecting them and their pet
- Examples: Offer choices for how they will be contacted, how and whether messages can be left, who will be involved in their pet's care, what the priorities and goals of treatment will be, time of day for appointments
- Equalize power imbalances: check in with the individual to ask how the process has been for them

Source: [Poole et. al.](#)

Use these statements to make collaboration and choice explicit :

- "I'd like to understand your perspective."
- "Let's look at this together."
- "Let's figure out the plan that will work best for you."
- "What's most important for you right now?"
- "It's important to have your feedback every step of the way."
- "Please let me know at any time if you would like a break or if something feels uncomfortable for you."
- "You are the expert or the driver. I can be your GPS or map to help guide you."
- "If there are questions you are not comfortable answering, that's no problem. Just tell me to pass and we'll move on."
- "I invite you to ask me questions."

Ask before offering information/resources, how they'd like to receive it, and when.

HOW TO BE TRANSPARENT WITH PROCESSES

- Be honest about situations and explain processes in a way that the person can understand
- Plainly outline the options the person has
- Avoid making promises you cannot keep

Example of approaching an encounter transparently:

"Thank you so much for bringing your pet in; I can tell you really care about her. We're going to take her to the back to have a look and see what we can do to help. Please take a seat and the vet tech will come chat with you as soon as we have more information."

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MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT

HOW TO MEET A PERSON WHERE THEY ARE AT

- Avoid placing expectations on the individual like, “You need to find a home,” or “You need to find a job,” before offering to help
- If the person uses substances, avoid placing judgement and use supportive language; avoid the terms “addict” and “substance abuse”
- Share resources if the individual would like them
- Talk with the person about what they hope to achieve, or their best hopes for the situation
- Be curious and ask questions, such as:

“What was it like for you to get here today?”

“What are you dealing with right now? What else is on your plate?”

“What would you like me to know about you?”

“What or who are your supports?”



USING A STRENGTHS- BASED APPROACH

- Ask the individual about their interests, so that you can develop a sense of their strengths based on what they tell you.
- Ask the individual what they think they are good at, or what has worked in the past when they’ve been in a tough situation.

Use statements like these as part of a strengths-based approach:

“It’s quite resourceful of you to have visited a pet food bank.”

“It’s great that you were able to get creative and put together an online fundraiser.”

“I hear that Jesse has helped you buy pet food in the past.”

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USING A NON-JUDGEMENTAL APPROACH

Shift the question from “what is wrong” to “what happened?”



EXAMPLES OF STIGMATIZED THINKING

They are being manipulative.
They are being resistant.
They don't care about their animals.
They are difficult.
They can't take care of these animals.



EXAMPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED THINKING

This person may have had previous negative interactions with social or animal services where they felt unheard, unsafe, and unsupported.

This person is trying to connect in the best way they know how.

They have survival skills that have allowed them to look after this animal so far.

We have not been able to engage them in a way in which they feel safe.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TO CHALLENGE BIASES

- What other stories could there be?
- Do I really know what this person has been through?
- Where did my knowledge come from?
- Ask for feedback: “How was this conversation for you?”

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