



Hyb ACE Cymru
ACE Hub Wales

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE)-Informed Organisations Toolkit Guidance Document

**A practical guide to start the journey towards
becoming a Trauma-Informed and
ACE-Aware Organisation**

Version 2e November 2023

This guidance has been informed by strategic and operational leads within organisations who have used the TrACE Toolkit and work in sectors such as Housing, Education and Substance Misuse. We would like to give special thanks to the following organisations, who have piloted this approach, for their feedback: Coleg Gwent, Coleg Cambria, Pembrokeshire College, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Caredig, GDAS and Clywyd Alyn Housing Association.

This guidance is reviewed regularly by the ACE Hub Wales team and is informed by feedback as an ongoing process.

We welcome any comments - please email us on ace@wales.nhs.uk.

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1. Introduction

[‘Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the impacts of Trauma and Adversity’](#) (also known as the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework) sets out an all-society framework for Wales to become a trauma-informed nation, and everyone has a role to play.

The Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE) Toolkit has been developed by the ACE Hub Wales in collaboration with partners and trailblazer organisations that have piloted this approach. It is a resource to support people, organisations, sectors and systems to become trauma-informed.

The TrACE toolkit operationalises a trauma-informed and ACE-aware approach and focuses on building into, not onto, existing good practice. The Toolkit supports organisations in identifying where they have existing, embedded ways of working that are already trauma-informed and where improvements and changes can be made. A trauma-informed approach must be embedded and sustained through policies that support a compassionate, relational way of working, and an organisational and workplace culture and practice that makes this a way of being. The TrACE Toolkit aims to support organisations to reflect on current culture, practice and process and identify activity to implement more trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approaches, resulting in increased ownership for transformational change within their setting.

The TrACE Toolkit is not a prescriptive ‘model’ or an ‘intervention’. This is not about adding “TrACE” to a list of things to do. The Toolkit requires us to assess whether our strategies, policies, processes, services, and people are trauma-informed and ACE-aware. We must integrate the knowledge of trauma-informed practice and ACE awareness into everything we do, and the way that we do it. We are supporting a human and children’s rights-based approach to preventing, tackling, and mitigating the impact of trauma, ACEs and/or wider adversities.

We recognise that for many this is not something new and that there is already good practice and key building blocks in place across Wales. This Toolkit is a key component of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework, and there are a range of other resources available to support the ambition of Welsh Government, ACE Hub Wales and many other stakeholders achieve their vision for a trauma-informed Wales. These can be found on our website www.acehubwales.com.

The Toolkit aims to support organisations on this journey through reflecting on current culture, practice and process, and identifying activity to implement more trauma-informed approaches, resulting in increased ownership for transformational change within their setting.

2. Aims of the Guidance

This Guidance and the subsequent tools have been designed to support organisations to become trauma-informed and ACE-aware and to embed this using a whole organisation approach. This guidance assumes basic knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practice and ACEs and should be read alongside other resources such as those found on www.traumaframeworkcymru.com and www.acehubwales.com.

The aim of this guidance document is to support the implementation of the Toolkit by outlining the four stages of the TrACE Toolkit process. As with any transformation programme or improvement activity, a change management process should be followed, and project management principles should be adhered to.

The intention of this guidance is for organisations to understand the recommended 'process' or 'steps' to take to begin this journey. It will also give reference to the relevant links / resources that have been co-produced to assist organisations to take a more integrated approach from the foundation of the process.

3. Trauma-Informed Approach

In Wales, the overarching definition of a trauma-informed approach is provided by 'Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the impacts of Trauma and Adversity' 2022 Framework:

"A trauma-informed approach recognises that everyone has a role in sensitively facilitating opportunities and life chances for people affected by trauma and adversity. It is an approach where a person, family, community, organisation, service or system takes account of the widespread impact of adversity and trauma and understands potential ways of preventing, healing and overcoming this as an individual or with the support of others, including communities and services. It is where people recognise the multiple presentations of being affected by trauma in individuals, families, communities, staff, and others in organisations and systems across all Welsh society. In this approach knowledge about trauma and its effects are integrated into policies, procedures, and practices. It seeks to actively resist traumatising people again and prevent and mitigate adverse consequences, prioritising physical and emotional safety and commits to 'do no harm' in practice and to proactively support and help affected people make their own informed decisions."

(ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022, p. 10)

At its most simple level, a Wales trauma-informed approach recognises and understands the adverse and traumatic experiences that people of all ages can be exposed to and affected by.

a. The Five Practice Principles


The Wales trauma-informed approach is underpinned by a set of five practice principles as explained within the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework:

THE 5 PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

A universal approach that does no harm, proactively supports and encompasses community-led approaches, prevention initiatives and specialist therapies to enable transformation within systems.



Person centred: the person is always at the centre of a trauma-informed approach. It takes a co-productive, collaborative cross-sector approach to identifying, understanding and supporting the person's needs. It promotes psychological and physical safety by promoting choice, collaboration and transparency.




Relationship-focused: safe, supportive, empathic, compassionate and trusting relationships are central to a trauma-informed approach.



Resilience and strengths-focused: a trauma-informed approach builds on the natural resilience of individuals, families and communities.



Inclusive: a trauma-informed approach recognises the impact of diversity, discrimination and racism. It understands the impact of cultural, historic and gender inequalities and is inclusive of everyone in society.



b. The Four Practice Levels

The Trauma-Informed Wales Framework sets out four practice levels:

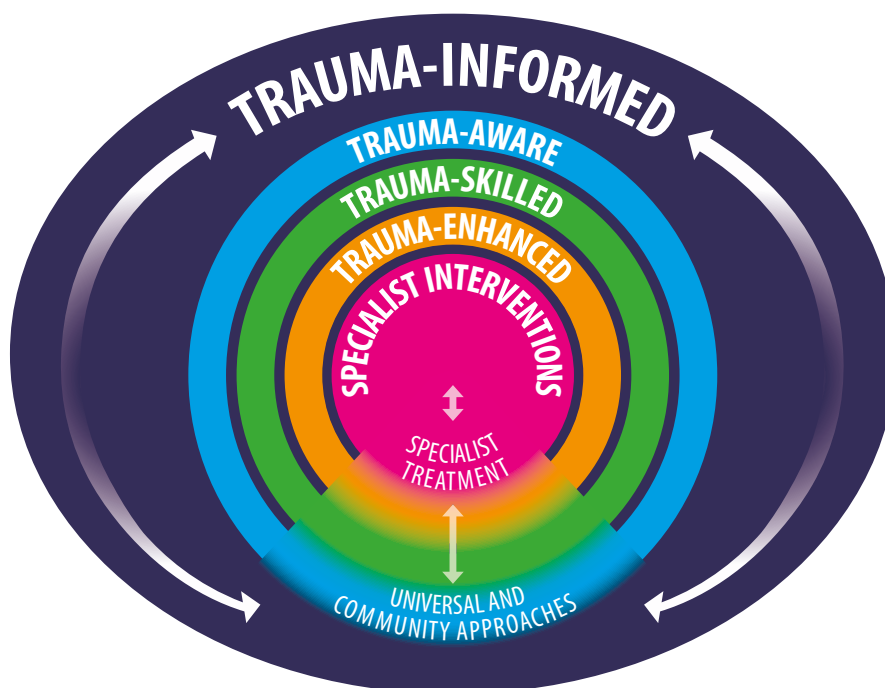
Trauma-aware is a universal approach that emphasises the role that we all have as members of Welsh society, personally and professionally, and seeks to raise awareness and understanding. It challenges perceptions that maintain oppression and inequality, and highlights that people in all communities have a role to play in preventing ACEs, adversity and traumatic events, providing community-led responses to the impact of ACEs and trauma, and supporting resilience through connection, inclusion and compassion.

A **trauma-skilled** approach is embedded within the practice of everyone who provides care or support to people who may have experienced trauma, whether or not the trauma is known about. This applies to most organisations and services in Wales, and many working in and with the community.

A **trauma-enhanced** approach is used by frontline workers who are providing direct or intensive support to people who are known to have experienced traumatic events within their role, and encompasses ways of working to help people to cope with the impact of their trauma.

Specialist interventions may be formal personalised and co-produced interventions that are offered within a range of settings, or specialist input to support organisations and systems to be trauma-informed.

Together, these four practice levels provide an integrated, Trauma-Informed Practice Framework that provides a coherent and joined-up way of working within organisations, systems and the community.



Organisations undertaking the TrACE Self-Assessment will be trauma-aware but may also undertake work that requires more additional knowledge and skills found in the other practice levels. All organisations, regardless of their purpose or service delivery or whether they are public or private, should be trauma-informed in their approach. Organisations' self-assessment of what is required for their own work force and service delivery model will inform what other practice levels are specifically delivered within that organisation.

c. Trauma-Informed Organisations

As described within the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework, trauma-informed organisations:

- understand that adversity, trauma and distress can occur to anyone and at any point across their life course.
- create environments that are trusted, compassionate and safe for both the workforce and people they support to minimise exposure to adversity, trauma and distress.
- are confident in understanding what interventions and supportive factors someone may need in place to prevent and mitigate the long-term impact on physical health, mental health and wellbeing.
- consider their role in preventing, mitigating and tackling adversity, understanding traumatic events and what this can mean for those who experience them and staff who interact with them, particularly if individuals do not have access to the protective factors that enable positive coping strategies.
- work most effectively when they facilitate time and resources where they are needed most. They are integrated, person-centred and embody the five ways of working of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015

"To be able to embed trauma-informed practice into an organisation requires good leadership, continuous reflection on current culture, practice and process and the identification of opportunities to develop and implement approaches that reflect the five principles of the Wales trauma-informed approach. All organisations, regardless of their purpose or service delivery or whether they are public or private, should be trauma-informed in their approach. But the practice levels that are specifically delivered within that organisation will depend on their self-assessment of what is required for their own work force as well as their service delivery model.

In any organisation, access to support at all practice levels should be facilitated for the workforce itself based on need, including practice levels delivered by the same workforce as part of service delivery. Organisations must ensure they practice an integrated and innovative approach to health and wellbeing generally and support prevention and early intervention. It is imperative that organisations and staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to consider their impact on future generations living in Wales, and do so taking account of the five ways of working as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.”

(ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022, p. 20)

4. Using the TrACE Toolkit

This guide supports the implementation of a whole organisation approach to becoming trauma-informed and ACE-aware and therefore has different sections that may be relevant to different people/teams within an organisation. This is a cultural change process and requires a long-term commitment across the organisation to truly embed a trauma-informed and ACE-aware approach at an organisational level.

Organisational culture grows from its founding values, its experiences, history and norms, as well as the behaviours and tone set by its leaders. To embed trauma-informed practice into an organisation requires compassionate leadership, which is a leadership style that takes a collaborative approach to create and enable innovating, caring and compassionate cultures within an organisation. Compassionate leadership also takes a collective approach, so every staff member takes responsibility for the organisation’s TrACE journey. The organisation is encouraged to create a Statement of Commitment, which demonstrates their recognition of, and commitment to adopting trauma-informed practice. Embedding trauma-informed practice involves continuous reflection on current culture, practice and process and the identification of opportunities to develop and implement approaches that reflect the five principles of the Wales trauma-informed approach (as outlined on page 4 and within the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework).

To support this process, there are four steps to consider, as shown in the table on page 8. Within the table, there are links to follow to download the supporting resources.



| STAGE | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Preparation | Completion of the Self-Assessment Tool | Action Planning and Implementation | Monitoring, Evaluation and Review |
| SUPPORTING RESOURCES | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research reports / Infographics • Navigating the Storm video • TrACE Toolkit Implementation Readiness Review <p>Coming soon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma-Informed Wales animation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TrACE-Informed Organisations Self-Assessment Tool • <i>Becoming TrACE Informed Guidance and Toolkit for Organisations (this document)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation / Improvement Action Plan- see <i>page 11</i>. • Guidance for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice • Trauma-Informed Communication Guidance <p>Coming soon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of Reference Template • Statement of Commitment Guidance • Reflective Practice Guidance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Becoming TrACE Informed Guidance and Toolkit for Organisations (this document)</i> • Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) Evaluation Toolkit <p>Coming soon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success Indicators Guidance |
| OUTPUTS | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete TrACE Toolkit Implementation Readiness Review • Complete actions where possible to improve readiness and/or mitigate risk if certain actions are not completed • An internal TrACE steering group has been identified – a cross section of those experiencing organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed TrACE-Informed Organisations Self-Assessment Tool • Established internal TrACE steering group – a cross section of those experiencing organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation/ Improvement Action Plan • Organisation Statement of Commitment • Policies and procedures that reflect ACE awareness and trauma-informed practice • Organisational Terms of Reference • Established TrACE governance structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Implementation/ Improvement Action Plan • Formal governance and reporting structure. • Case studies of impact • Regular internal meetings to steer and advise and continuously reflect on progress and direction. • Established mechanism for long term monitoring. |
| | | | |

The preparation stage is a vital stage that is not to be missed or overlooked. The TrACE Toolkit Implementation Readiness Review will help with this stage. It will help establish where the organisation is currently and the preparation and planning of the next step, which will be a collaborative organisation-wide approach to completing the self-assessment. Click [here](#) to access a downloadable copy of the readiness review.

The Readiness Review is important as it will help the organisation to be clear about the purpose of the exercise and understand how a trauma-informed and ACE-aware approach fits with their values and strategic vision. For a trauma-informed approach to be successful the organisation needs to understand, at every level, what benefit this approach brings. A helpful way to show this is to map the organisation's vision or mission statement to the principles of trauma-informed practice.

Setting the foundations of this work requires dedicated time from different levels of the organisation and the people within them. An internal steering group to bring these people together is the most effective way of achieving this. Below are some reflective questions which will help begin the conversations internally:

- What existing work or projects fit with the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework?
- Do the organisation's values, goals and/or strategic aims resonate with the principles of trauma-informed practice (as outlined on page 4)?
- Who are the willing people in the organisation who would help get this journey started and who might the organisation need to make the case to? (See the Readiness Review for suggestions of roles that might be helpful.)

Reflecting on the above questions will support the development of the narrative that makes the case for embedding a trauma-informed and ACE-aware approach. The process will need to articulate the benefits to the whole organisation, the people who work for the organisation at all levels and the people who they provide a service to.

Before the organisation moves to the next step, we advise that the organisation:

- ✓ Completes the TrACE Toolkit Implementation Readiness Review and complete actions where possible to improve readiness and/or mitigate risk if certain actions are not completed.
- ✓ Is open-minded, ready for the deeper reflective process ahead.
- ✓ Identifies an internal TrACE steering group which consists of a cross section of those experiencing organisation.

Once the Implementation Readiness Review has been carried out and a steering group has been identified, it will be time to start the self-assessment process using a collaborative leadership approach. Engagement is an important part of being trauma-informed and ACE-aware and includes involving those who experience the organisation or service, as staff and as customers/service users/clients/learners.

The self-assessment process serves as an opportunity to **reflect** on existing good practice as well as **consider** where things might be done differently to embed the foundational values and principles of trauma-informed practice.

The TrACE-Informed Organisations Self-Assessment Tool (informed by the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework) consists of six domains which should be considered by the organisation on their TrACE journey:

- 1. Governance, Leadership and Organisational Culture** - this domain relates to the overall support for and investment in implementing and sustaining a trauma-informed approach.
- 2. Policies and Procedures** - this domain relates to how organisational policies and procedures demonstrate commitment to, and enable internal systems to, reflect the foundational values and principles of trauma-informed practice.
- 3. Workforce Training and Support** - this domain relates to ensuring knowledge and skills within the workforce, enabling trauma-informed principles to be embedded in an ongoing supportive, learning cycle that recognises the importance of the wellbeing and safety of the workforce as set out in the four practice levels.
- 4. Physical Environment** - this domain relates to what the physical and social environments provide to promote safety and the provision of appropriate resources to achieve this. This is about more than one room being used as a calm space, it considers every space that is used from walking in the front door to the toilets and considers things like promotional materials displayed and accessibility requirements.
- 5. Service Design and Delivery** - this domain relates to ensuring trauma-informed principles are incorporated in all aspects of service delivery and that there is commitment to sustain this approach in things like funding strategies.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation - this domain relates to an ongoing monitoring and evaluation process to support the embedding of TrACE approaches, using reflective practice as the underlying principle. Adequately demonstrating impact will be key to ensuring sustainability. Understanding and creating success indicators to record outcomes and encourage momentum of this approach is important. This should be part of the process as it is important to set a baseline at the outset to understand how far the organisation has come on this journey and the impact that this is having in the organisation. Considering how to involve those who experience the organisation in this process is also important, inclusive of those who deliver the service as well as those who receive the service. Remember that good quality case studies can be as effective as data when demonstrating impact.

Click [here](#) to access a downloadable copy of the TrACE-Informed Organisations Self-Assessment Tool.

STEP 3

Action Planning and Implementation

The next step is bringing the Preparation and Self-Assessment together by creating and implementing an Action Plan. The actions identified are determined by the Self-Assessment process using the tools above which will help to strengthen the TrACE approach across the organisation.

A strong action plan will:

- Meet the overarching, strategic commitment, and defined strategic goals of the organisation of being TrACE-informed.
- Incorporate short-, medium- and long-term goals agreed by the working group/steering group that has been set up at the first step of the process.
- Focus on the activities that will support the organisation to deliver against the agreed goals to become a TrACE-informed organisation.
- Be regularly reviewed by the internal steering group.

The below template is an example of high-level action plan which considers the overarching commitments and is a good place to start with this process. Some people may prefer to have a more detailed action plan which breaks down the detail of activity involved with each domain, but this is personal preference and the approach to this stage is personal to the style of working.

| Domain | Action | Responsibility | Timescale for Completion | Resources Required | Outcome | Measurables |
|---|--------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------|-------------|
| Governance, Leadership and Organisational Culture | | | | | | |
| Policies and Procedures | | | | | | |
| Workforce Training and Support | | | | | | |
| Physical Environment | | | | | | |
| Service Design and Delivery | | | | | | |
| Monitoring and Evaluation | | | | | | |

Having developed the action plan, with engagement and involvement of those who experience the organisation or service (as staff or customers/service users/clients), the next step is about delivering it. There is always the potential for challenges and changes in direction, despite how much preparation has been done, so the plan is monitored and reviewed regularly and may need to be routinely adapted. This links us to Step 4.

The action plan will evolve as the process develops. By adopting project and change management methodologies, the journey through the process becomes more manageable. To understand the impact that the TrACE Toolkit has made, the organisation needs to think about the measures required to monitor, review and evaluate any changes made.

Organisations would benefit from undertaking an activity which looks at what data it already collects which could establish baselines to monitor progress against. Examples might include:

- Data on staff wellbeing, to measure if this improves as a result of the things the organisation is putting in place. Ideas include HR data on absence, sickness or stress related issues, or a survey of staff wellbeing (how they are feeling, how they feel supported etc.).
- A survey on the existing skills and knowledge in an organisation which could be useful in forming the assessment of what is needed.

Other key activities at this step may include:

- Establishing how progress will be monitored and what data is needed, ensuring that feedback is obtained as part of this.
- An ongoing review of how the work is communicated and received internally and externally.
- Periodical review of the self- assessment tool.

These parts of the process help the organisation to evidence how far they have travelled on their TrACE journey. This will be essential to ensuring that the organisation knows 'what works' and what more there is to do to sustain and support the approach into the future.

Some questions to think about may include:

- How can the organisation build this into service user feedback?
- How will the organisation capture staff feedback?
- How can the organisation monitor culture change?
- How is the organisation embedding reflective practice at every level?
- How will the organisation record learning (including what has worked and what hasn't worked)?

5. Wellbeing of Future Generations Act - Five Ways of Working

The TrACE Toolkit embodies the Five Ways of Working set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. The five ways of working establish an integrated and innovative approach to health and wellbeing generally and support prevention and early intervention. Organisations and their staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to consider their impact on future generations living in Wales by adopting this approach.



Long-term

The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

The TrACE toolkit assists organisations to review current practice, using a strengths based approach to analyse what they currently do and what they aspire to do in the future. Using a trauma lens this informs action planning whilst recognising the complexity of the task at hand and the need for a long-term commitment.



Integration

Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.

The TrACE approach recognises that trauma-informed organisations operate within a system that can be complex and complicated. The TrACE approach encourages organisations to look inwardly and outwardly at their practice and how they integrate with the wider system.



Involvement

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

The TrACE approach recognises the impact of cultural, historic and gender inequalities and is inclusive of everyone in society. Involvement is important however this needs to be done in a safe and secure way.



Collaboration

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

The TrACE toolkit requires organisations to take a holistic approach, working across the whole organisation, the workforce and those who come into contact with the service. This could include service users, visitors, people with lived experience, internal or external communications, in person or online.



Prevention

How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

The TrACE approach recognises that we all have a role to play in preventing and mitigating the impacts of ACEs and trauma. It also recognises the impacts of wider factors which affect our health like poverty, housing, employment, environment, and education. A TrACE informed service addresses the root cause and not the symptoms.

Source: [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015 - The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#)

We hope organisations enjoy the challenge and the opportunity that using the TrACE Toolkit brings but remember that no organisation is alone on this journey.

The ACE Hub Wales has established a cross-sector network of other organisations working together to support each other as we learn. The TrACE National Community of Practice encourages and promotes reflective practice throughout the journey.

To join the National Community of Practice, please email ace@wales.nhs.uk

To access further resources on the TrACE toolkit on our website, please click [here](#).

For further information please contact ACE Hub Wales

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