

Guidance for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice

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Introduction

Please note: this guide assumes a basic awareness and understanding of adversity and trauma and the impact it may have and should be used as part of the [ACE Hub Wales TrACE Organisational Toolkit](#)

This guidance document aims to offer support for organisations working to become trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences¹ (TrACE) informed. Although the document addresses issues broadly, it recognises that structures across organisations may vary, thus, may require adaptation to suit the needs and personality of each individual organisation. This guide is based on the '[Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity' 2022 Framework](#) and the [ACE Hub Wales Trauma and ACE \(TrACE\) Informed Organisations Toolkit](#).

It is recognised within the TrACE Informed Organisations Toolkit that there are six domains which should be considered by organisations on their trauma-informed journey:

- Governance, Leadership and Organisational Culture
- Policies and Procedures
- Workforce Training and Support
- Physical Environment
- Service Design and Delivery
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Each area is addressed in turn within the TrACE Informed Organisations Toolkit. This document focuses on the second domain 'Policies and Procedures'.

¹ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences occurring during childhood that directly harm a child (e.g sexual or physical abuse) or affect the environment in which they live (e.g growing up in a household with domestic violence). (Bellis et al 2016)

Within Wales, a trauma-informed approach is defined as follows:

'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 the 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).

Core Principles

A Wales trauma-informed approach is underpinned by a set of five practice principles as explained within the 'Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity' 2022 Framework:

- **A universal approach that does no harm** – This means that various suitable approaches and initiatives are encompassed in order to support individuals
- **Person centred** – This means that the individual is always at the centre and there is a promotion of choice and collaboration. Transparency with the individuals helps to promote physical and psychological safety.
- **Relationship-focused** – This means that relationships are safe, compassionate and nurturing
- **Resilience and strengths-focused** – This means that strengths and resilience are recognised and developed where possible
- **Inclusive** – This means that a trauma-informed approach understands the impact of inequalities (including cultural, gender and historic), diversity and discrimination and aims to be inclusive to all

Developing a trauma-informed lens for your setting

Placing the relationship at the centre

In order to create a culture of understanding and compassion, the development of positive and nurturing relationships within organisations should be a priority. This includes relationships between staff and volunteers across the organisation and students. Placing the relationship at the centre of all we do will help to create a sense of belonging and help to ensure everyone feels safe.

Things to consider: Does the policy place the relationship at the centre? If so, how? If not, how can it be adapted? Does this policy enable the employee to seek help from the relevant support and build relationships once its completed?

Nurturing strengths

Trauma-informed approaches are underpinned by strengths-based philosophy which involves considering an individual's strengths and attributes. It is person-centred and promotes the relationship between an individual and a service. This includes acknowledging what each individual may bring to themselves and the community surrounding them. It also involves thinking about how strengths can be harnessed and developed to allow individual growth.

Things to consider: Does the policy nurture strengths? If so, how? If not, how can it be adapted? Does the policy enable clear feedback to focus on solutions which are clearly and meaningfully communicated?

Remaining non-judgemental

In order to ensure a non-judgemental, thoughtful culture, organisations must take time to reflect on thoughts, attitudes and language. In order to embody being non-judgemental, the right environment needs to be created in order for individuals to feel safe to initiate discussions. Care must be taken to ensure empathy is shown in all interactions and responses are sensitive, respectful and based on active listening.

Things to consider: Is the policy non-judgemental? If so, how? If not, how can it be adapted? Does the policy outline the rationale for the format of meetings and the protocols around formal correspondence? Is there guidance for staff on the empathy in difficult situation? How will the policy enable feedback if a policy response lacks empathy?

Considering the context of behaviour

Behaviour and responses to interactions should be viewed within the context of potential past/current experiences and relationships. This view should be taken opposed to viewing such responses and behaviours through a deficit lens which suggests there is something wrong with an individual. Context is important in how we frame our interactions, responses and subsequent behaviour.

Things to consider: Does the policy consider the context which may be underlying behaviour? If so, how? If not, how can process steps be adapted in exceptional circumstances to meet individual needs, with their consent? How does your organisational culture promote trust so that people feel able to share their past/current experiences and relationships? How does your organisation incorporate felt safety so that individuals feel comfortable and secure in disclosing?

Exploring the communicative aspect of responses and behaviour

Behaviour is often a form of communication which can stem from emotions. Where possible, policies and procedures should consider responses to interactions and behaviour as a communicative tactic and consider what the individual might be trying to tell us. This approach can help ensure individuals are supported in a safe and gentle way where signposting is used if needed.

Things to consider: Does the policy consider the communicative aspect of responses and behaviour? If so, how? If not, how can it be adapted? Does the manner of communication reflect the usual organisational culture and norms? If not, how can the policy support communication that is inline with usual interactions to reduce unfamiliar experiences e.g. how are organisational values visible in your communications? Formal communications do not need to be disconnected from your values

Boundary Maintenance

The presence of clear and consistent boundaries can instil a sense of felt safety and trust which are key principles of a trauma-informed approach. Boundaries should be maintained compassionately which means that if a boundary is crossed, the response is thoughtful and based on reflection and care rather than initial emotion.

Things to consider: Does the policy articulate the maintenance of clear boundaries? If so, how? If not, how can it be adapted? Does your organisation provide training and guidance around effective boundaries and are there policies in place to safeguard individuals with safe and effective boundaries?

What should policy encompass?

Language

Positive and person centred language should be used throughout policies. Language should avoid othering and labelling and, instead, terms should be adopted which are compatible with trauma and ACE informed approaches. Language should point to the collective ownership of all employees, rather than singling out individuals. This extends to associated written material of the policy such as minutes of formal meetings or case notes for people benefitting from your services. It is also vital that language is culturally appropriate and inclusive, reflecting and respecting cultural differences throughout all written communications. *For example, use words such as 'implement' instead of 'enforce' or 'connection-seeking' rather than 'attention-seeking'.*

Other examples include using 'person with a mental illness' rather than 'mentally ill' and 'person who uses substances' instead of 'addict'.

Communication

Policies should also be easily accessible and written in a way which can be digested during periods of distress and whilst some language considerations need to be given to comply with certain legal frameworks (for HR purposes), there will be opportunities to reduce the overuse of complex and legal language which can often overwhelm.

Things to consider: The use of an easy read document to support staff and service beneficiaries who are involved in a process that could impact on their emotional wellbeing and guidance for staff who are carrying out the process to promote trauma-informed principles.

A trauma-informed approach to communication recognises that any formal communication may cause additional distress on people, particularly in relation to circumstances of performance or change which is outside of the control of an individual (e.g probation period; risk of redundancy). The impacts of these can be reduced by effectively and sensitively communicating not only through language but also in terms of practical delivery of the communication.

Examples to consider:

- Committing wherever possible to delivering the communication in person, using empathic communication skills, following up with the written communication where needed
- Consider the physical environment when meeting to communicate potentially upsetting information i.e is it private, is it comfortable, how is the room set out reduce feelings of intimidation and isolation
- Committing to not sending such communication outside of hours where there is no support available e.g not sending letters/emails of such nature at 4pm on a Friday where there is no support over the weekend
- Having a named individual to contact for support who sits outside of any formal process (linked to the clearly defined roles and boundaries)
- Always following up on agreed actions and timeframes to manage expectations and not cause additional unnecessary distress by prolonging the process
- Aftercare – always ensuring people have access to support after any communication, consider asking about support systems at home, signposting to wellbeing resources and organisations

Connection to other lenses

Consider how policy relates to other important lenses such as equality and diversity and mental health and wellbeing. Some lenses will naturally overlap whereas others may require further consideration as to how the lenses can interconnect and complement each other. There may already be processes in place for other policies that can be adopted wider to include the TrACE approach for example, consideration of the use of a 'buddy' to provide additional support and perspective than representation within formal meetings.

Things to consider: How might the TrACE approach be considered alongside, rather than an additional process, to complying with statutory requirements for equality and diversity? How can an organisation consider the impacts of equality and diversity intersecting with trauma experiences?

Consideration of training needs

Language is mentioned above as being vital to communicating sensitive information and this may be new to staff who are involved in the implementation of policies and procedures. This may require additional training to ensure consistency, fairness and to fully embed the approach across the organisation.

Things to consider: The creation of TrACE Champions within an organisation may assist by being a point of contact to consider appropriate action. This should not undermine any processes being followed, rather this role could support with regular review of processes, including feedback.

Opportunities for Co-Production

Co-production should encourage participation which values experiences, skills and expertise of each individual. Co-production should embody cultural humility, be transparent in approach and consider the systemic and physical environment. It is important that everyone's voice has equal platform to be listened to and responded to. An important consideration to make is whether there is an opportunity to co-produce in an appropriate way that gathers wisdom and allows for reflection.

An example for consideration may be involving staff and service beneficiaries in reviewing a policy, gathering feedback and meaningfully responding by implementing appropriate changes.

Power dynamics need to be considered in policies and procedures, whilst there will be natural hierarchy in some processes there are ways that the negative impacts of unequal power distribution can be addressed through actions and approaches. A trauma-informed organisation would recognise and reduce wherever possible the unequal power distribution and promote accessibility by removing unnecessary barriers.

Things to consider: How do leaders and those with hierarchal influence embed a trauma-informed culture? Are there training needs?

Trauma, Adversity and Relationally Informed Organisations



Clarity on roles

Process steps should ensure that manager and employee duties are clearly labelled, to empower individuals to engage with aspects of the process they can take a lead in. Formal meeting outcomes should be clearly distinguished and representation be enabled in the informal where possible not just the formal.

Evaluating Pre-existing Policy

All organisations will have an overwhelming number of policies to consider and apply the TrACE lens to. The TrACE Toolkit process encourages a long term commitment to constantly reflect on practice and this is also true of policies and procedures. Prioritisation is key to this approach, there will be policies and procedures that will have greater impact on people and will therefore require more urgent attention.

One way to think about the task at hand is to consider highlighting urgent policies that have previously **Traumatised** or are currently **Traumatising**.

Traumatised – Previous policies/procedures which may have traumatised and left a cultural hang-over

Traumatising – Risk of re-traumatisation or introduction of primary trauma

Organisations could also consider aligning the policy levels with practice levels within the Wales Trauma Framework which can help to categorise the level of depth each policy needs addressing with a trauma-informed lens:

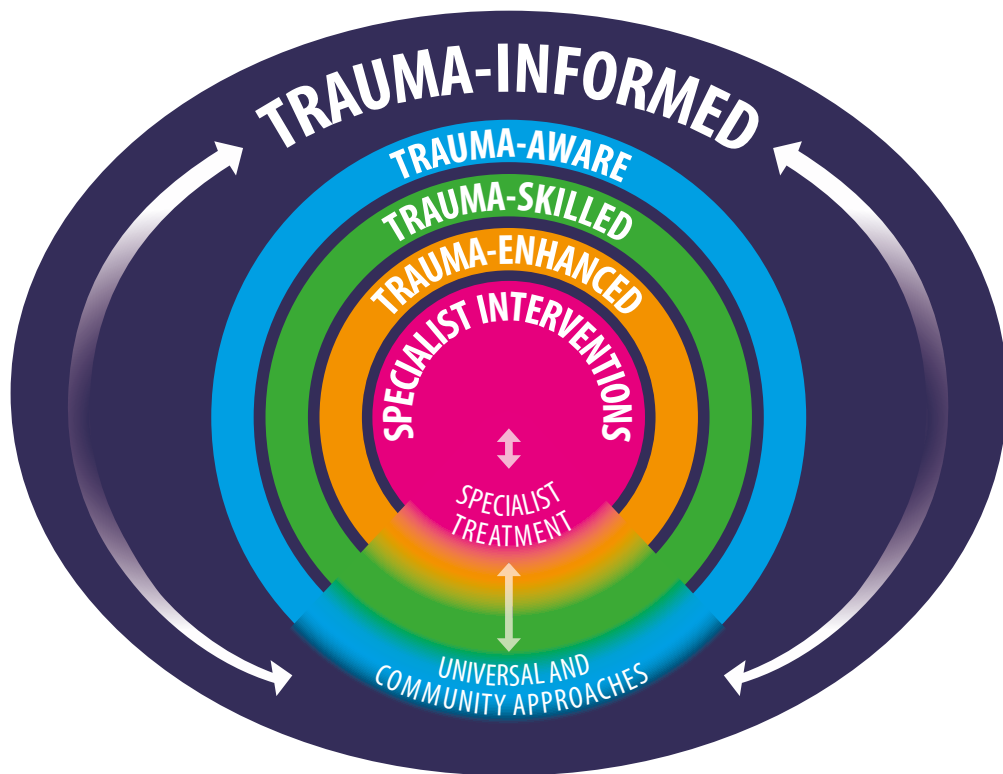
Trauma Aware – Universal approach which involves raising awareness and understanding the impact of trauma and provides community-led responses

Trauma Skilled – Embedded within practice, allowing individuals to support those who have experienced trauma

Trauma Enhanced – Involving direct/intensive support to those who have experienced trauma and helps them to cope with impact of trauma

Trauma Specialist – 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.

[Trauma Practice Framework Model – the relationship between universal and specialist approaches all working in a trauma-informed way.](#)



Additional Resources

[Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impact of Trauma and Adversity](#)

[Navigating the Storm Animation](#)

[Trauma-Informed Organisation Training](#)

The ACE Hub Wales was set up in 2017 to support professionals, organisations, and the community to help create an ACE aware Wales. Their mission is to tackle, mitigate and prevent ACEs by sharing ideas and learning, and to challenge and change ways of working, so together we can break the cycle of ACEs. The ACE Support Hub is funded by Welsh Government and works closely with leaders across public and third sector organisations to develop and deliver the ACEs agenda, including youth justice, housing, local authority, health, education and sporting bodies, as well as the local community. The ACE Support Hub is hosted by Public Health Wales and is part of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Investment in Health and Wellbeing.

For further information please contact The ACE Support Hub

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