



About Trauma Informed Care

It is safe to assume that any older person is more likely than not to have experienced trauma in their life. Sometimes, aged care can trigger memories of traumatic incidents that lead to a trauma response from the client. The best way that support workers and volunteers can respond to this is by working in a trauma informed care way with all clients.

WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE?

Trauma informed care (TIC) is an approach that understands how trauma can affect people and creates physical and emotional safety when working with trauma affected clients. TIC encourages support staff to take the time to understand the client's life experiences as the key to delivering safe, caring, inclusive and effective support. This involves an important shift from asking, "What is wrong with this person?" to "What has happened to this person?"

TIC is not about therapy or treatment but rather about providing appropriate support to people who have experienced trauma. The idea is that the support provided doesn't trigger or increase reactions associated with the trauma and thus re-traumatise the person. So, trauma informed care is a natural part of the way we work in aged care in much the same way that taking universal precautions is an established norm of infection control.

WHAT ARE THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA INFORMED CARE?

Principle 1 – Understand trauma and its impact

It is very important that you understand what trauma is; how common it is; how trauma can affect survivors' beliefs, emotions, behaviours, sense of wellbeing and their lives; and how the aged care experience can re-trigger traumatic memories. This means that you should:

- understand trauma and its effects on clients
- be told what you need to know about any client's history of trauma and triggers to avoid.

Principle 2 – Promote safety

Safety involves treating clients with dignity and respect at all times while also creating a safe environment for the client. That environment may be in the client's home or while out in the community or a centre. Safety is physical, minimising the risk of avoidable accidents or trauma triggers. Safety is psychological and emotional (e.g. avoiding a small elevator for a person fearful of confinement)). Safety is social and may involve fear of certain social situations or people (e.g. person in a uniform). This means you:

- take time to build connections and trust with each client
- follow through on what you tell a client that you will do
- ask for extra support from supervisors, managers and co-workers when you need it.

Principle 3: Maximise client control, choice and autonomy

Having both a sense of and real control can be very important to people who have lost control and power in traumatic situations. It is essential that clients feel that they have been valued, asked for their input, been listened to and heard and encouraged to make their own decisions over matters that have meaning for them. This means you need to ask permission and direction at every opportunity with clients.

Principle 4: Collaborate on support strategies

Person-centred practice and TIC sees the client as an active partner in support planning, implementation and delivery. This means reporting back to your supervisor when support arrangements are or are not working for the client who has experienced trauma.

Principle 5: Respect diversity in all its forms

Aged care clients come from a range of diverse backgrounds. Diversity is reflected in the religion, spirituality, sexuality, culture, socio-economic background, geographic spread and personal experiences of the older population. One common factor is that many people from diverse backgrounds have experienced trauma in their lives. This means:

- learning about the additional and different needs of clients from diverse backgrounds
- asking clients about any needs and preferences they have that arise from diversity.

Principle 6: Equip clients with the tools to empower themselves

Trauma survivors often report the loss of personal power through their traumatic experience. While some survivors will challenge and respond strongly to any feeling of loss of control, others may fall quickly into a passive role, not questioning or challenging actions or decisions. This means:

- not taking over tasks or decisions that clients can do or make for themselves
- always asking for the client's opinion and input
- noting what motivates and de-motivates individual clients.

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN TRAUMA IS DISCLOSED OR IDENTIFIED

- Affirm that it is okay to tell someone. (e.g. I'm so sorry that it happened to you. I am glad you were able to tell me. It is important for us to know)
- Do not interrogate the person by asking lots of questions. Let them tell their story and reveal the details they are comfortable telling you
- Debrief with your supervisor and ensure that you discuss self-care strategies for yourself as needed.

