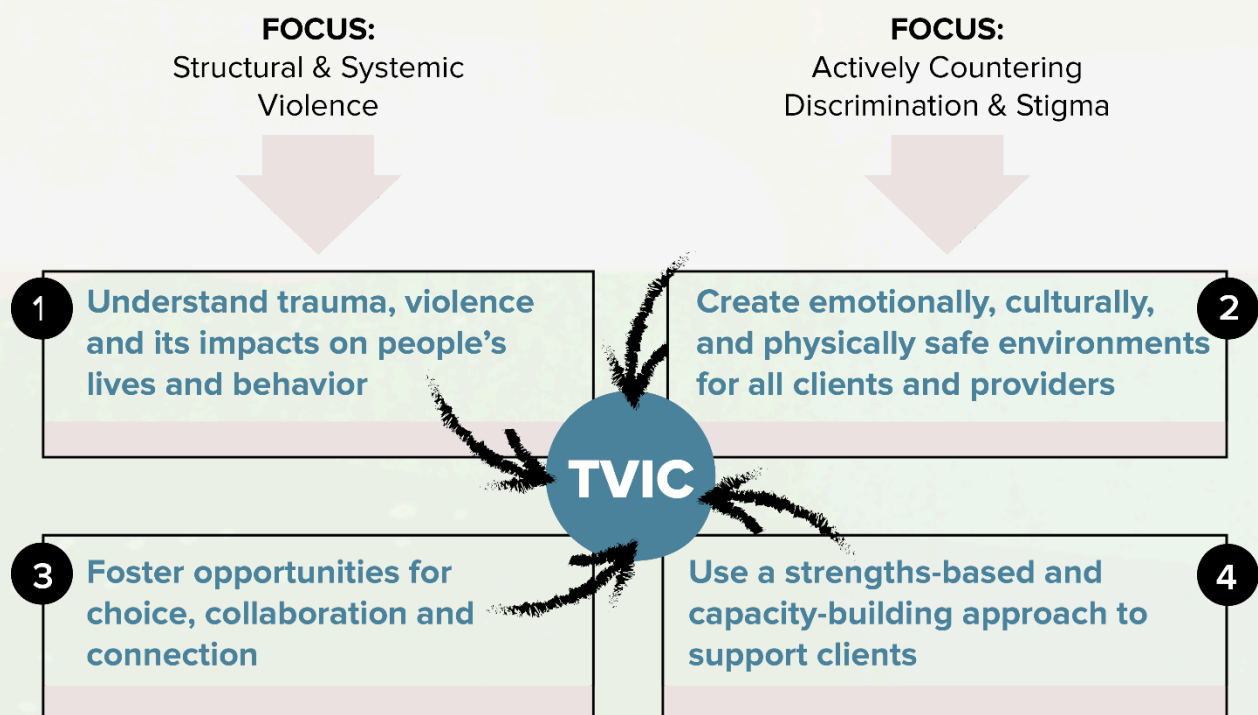


## Becoming Trauma -and Violence- Informed (TVI)

# Wildflower Self-Reflection Tool

The self-reflection tool has been developed for professionals working in any field of human services who want to improve their practice in working with older women who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) through the integration of trauma -and violence- informed principles. It can also be used to open discussion among staff in an organization about how to create a positive and safe environment for older women. The self-reflection tool can be integrated into an organization's ongoing quality improvement process.

**Trauma -and violence- informed principles** recognize the connections between violence, trauma, outcomes and behaviours. Applying the principles can help create mutuality and genuine connection, both of which are fundamental to developing cultural safety and humility.



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**Reflect on your practice:**

**1. When I meet an older woman for the first time at my organization, I can describe the steps I take to connect with her to be warm and welcoming:**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

**2. I recognize when I have first impression judgments about a person's appearance or manner:**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

**3. I recognize that I automatically have judgment about certain groups or individuals:**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

**4. I have developed effective strategies to challenge or shift my judgments:**

- ☐ Yes, most of the time
- ☐ Yes, sometimes
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ I need strategies

**5. I have limited time to spend with a person. My time is tightly scheduled:**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ I have flexibility to take the time I need with the person

**6. I believe I 'know better' than the person seeking service:**

- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ I'm not sure

**7. I can name the ways I use my position to make the system work for individuals, including bending rules:**

- ☐ Yes, I make deliberate choices
- ☐ I am sure that I do, but I am not sure of examples
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ Rarely, rules need to apply to everyone

**8. I listen carefully to understand the context, to get the story:**

- ☐ I want to, but there is usually not time to get into the story
- ☐ I stay focused, or am encouraged to stay focused on resolving the issue at hand
- ☐ I think it is important to deal with the presenting issue

**9. I listen for the ways that older women keep themselves safe:**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

**10. I have had training to recognize the warning signs and risk factors of gender-based violence**

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, once
- ☐ Not that I can recall
- ☐ I have educated myself

The next section explores the 10 questions in relation to the TVI principles with further information and to offer examples and ways to think about how you can deepen your understanding and your practice. The examples are offered simply to help you think about your responses and what the principles mean to you. The questions have been grouped with applicable principles.

## Principle 1 is Key to Integration:

**P1: Understand trauma and violence, especially structural and systemic violence, and the impacts on people's lives and behaviours.**

Adding “violence” to being *trauma-informed* expands our understanding of the causes of trauma from strictly individual experiences, to include *the impacts* of structural violence, social inequities and discrimination as root causes. This first principle is foundational because it grounds all other TVI practices in an awareness that people's struggles are not only personal but also shaped by systemic conditions.

For example, sexism has lifelong economic consequences for women. Although sex is recognized as a protected human right, women experience economic sexism across the lifespan. The gender-wage gap means that women earn less. This disparity can determine whether an older woman will be able to live independently or will be forced into poverty. Financial dependency is a known risk factor for gender-based violence. The wage gap is not an individual shortcoming but an expression of *structural violence*, harm produced by the very systems and institutions that organize society. As a result, women are [disproportionately likely to live in poverty](#) as they age, making them more vulnerable to harm and exploitation.

As you reflect on your practice, hold P1 in your awareness. Consider: how has your training, your organization, the community and society shaped and informed your practice?

**Q1. When I meet someone for the first time at my organization, I can describe the steps I take to be warm and welcoming.**

The status quo in many human service settings can be institutional and sterile. It takes effort and creativity to overcome the first impressions of an unwelcoming physical space.

- ✓ Make conscious choices to create warmth and welcome. Becoming aware of your specific actions will help you be more intentional and thoughtful about the steps you take to create the conditions for an exceptional service experience. This can be especially useful with someone you may initially struggle with, or have judgement about. Genuine interest and curiosity about the person is a good start to creating safety.

Tip: Learn more about creating a welcoming environment.

See: Equip Health Care: [equity-walk through](#)

**Applicable TVI Principle:**

- **P2: Create cultural safety in emotionally and physically safe environments**

**Q2. I recognize when I have first impression judgements about a person's appearance or manner.**

**Q3. I recognize that there are certain groups, or a type of person that I automatically have judgement about.**

**Q4. I have developed effective strategies to challenge or shift my judgement.**

Making judgements is human. First impressions that are harsh are not uncommon. What matters is being able to recognize your response as a judgement so that you can take steps to shift toward seeing *this* (and every) person with humility. Shifting to see the person will help you provide the same level of care and support for everyone.

- ✓ Implicit bias is common. Learn about the experiences and histories of marginalized groups.
- ✓ What implicit biases do you carry about aging and older women?
- ✓ What implicit biases do you carry about older trans and nonbinary people?
- ✓ Understanding systemic discrimination and its impact can provide context and reduce biases.

Tip: Instead of asking why a person is 'like that', change your question to "I wonder what has happened to this person?"

Watch [Dr. Colleen Varcoe](#) talk about how and why to shift your practice to TVIC.

**Applicable TVI Principle:**

- **P1: Understand trauma and violence, and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours environments**

**Q5. I have limited time to spend with a person. My time is tightly scheduled.**

The business model values of human services can feel like moving people along an assembly line of services. Professionals are often encouraged to focus on the presenting situation or symptom and not take time to explore context or history.

The issue of time is at the heart of the transformation that is being called for. You can hear it in language such as, 'person-centred' or 'holistic'. However, it is contradictory to suggest that anyone can be person-centred if the schedule strictly dictates the interaction. Think about it.

- ✓ If the limited time is your decision, consider the ways in which not taking the time to be present with the person or understand the context of the presenting issue can undermine safety.
- ✓ If the limited time is because it is the policy of the organization, or is limited funding or resource related, consider engaging your leadership in discussion about practicing TVI principles and the different kinds of safety. Include yourself in considering the impact of what it costs you to participate in a system that is more transactional than holistic. Moral distress is a common reason why professionals leave the work.

We all have to work within the constraints of the existing system. If there is no possible way to increase time or to be flexible with time with people you serve, then find other ways to connect. Meaningful, genuine connection can be a powerful ally and can happen in a moment.

Read: [Reclaiming Power and Place](#): The call for a new framework (pgs. 89-101)

**Applicable TVI Principle:**

- **P2: Create cultural safety in emotionally and physically safe environments**

**Q6. I believe I 'know better' than the person seeking service.**

If you feel this way, it's not without reason. Assuming you "know better" reflects a traditional power dynamic in human services, where professionals are seen as experts, and service users are expected to follow their guidance. This mindset can undermine trust, limit meaningful connection, and obscure the person's lived expertise.



**P2.** To practice cultural safety, it's essential to recognize and actively work to soften these power imbalances. Seeing this person as a full human being, not a case to manage, creates space for dignity, autonomy, and mutual respect.

Victim-survivors have been called context experts in the sense that each person is the expert in their own life. The context is their story. Listening will allow your professional acumen to be used most effectively. Professional expertise is in service to context expertise.

- ✓ Learn about cultural safety. Reflect on each encounter to strengthen your practice
- ✓ Learn about the different kinds of power and how you may use, misuse and/or avoid power

**P3.** What seems like a reasonable option or choice to you may not be realistic or safe for the other person based on their lived realities. Take care not to project your values or assumptions onto their decisions. By fostering choice, collaboration, and connection, professionals can shift from “fixing” to walking alongside. Curiosity, humility, and open-ended questions help ensure that decisions are shaped by the person’s context, not professional or personal assumptions.

**P4.** A strengths-based approach begins by listening carefully for how a person is already making strategic, often courageous decisions to stay safe within their constraints. Reflect back to the person what you see and hear to show you are listening and honouring what the person is sharing. Not word-for-word, but more to offer back the heart of what is said. This can also help a person hear their own truth more clearly.

A core part of shifting toward trauma -and violence- informed, rights-based, and relational work occurs when a service provider sees this person as a whole person navigating complex realities. The shift begins to unravel the traditional hierarchy embedded in most service systems. It becomes possible to:

- ✓ Centre self-determination, not compliance. Power is shared, not imposed.
- ✓ Validate lived expertise alongside technical knowledge to support mutual respect



- ✓ Challenge the assumption of neutrality. Power is always at play in your position, privilege and assumptions. The provider becomes more self-aware and accountable.
- ✓ Shift the focus from intervention to relationship. This way of seeing invites connection over control and recognizes healing and safety grow in relational space, not through checklists or compliance. Trust is the ground for meaningful support.

Even when time is limited or systems are rigid, small shifts in how we hold power, connect, build trust, and reflect back our respect can transform the service experience.

#### Applicable TVI Principles:

- **P2: Create cultural safety in emotionally and physically safe environments**
- **P3: Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection**
- **P4: Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience**

#### **Q7. I can name the ways I use my position to make the system work for individuals, including bending rules.**

The status quo in many human service settings has been described as ‘one size fits all’, programmatic and/or siloed. You probably do things that make the system work for the people you serve or work alongside. You might think of it as a ‘work around’ or bending the rules. You might think they are small actions of little consequence. Instead of thinking about them as unusual, think about them as a *new normal*, using your skills and abilities in a trauma -and violence- informed way. With TVIC, the exception is the rule because every person is unique.

- ✓ Keep track of the innovative ways you make the system work for a person. Becoming more conscious about the choices you make will help build this muscle.
- ✓ Recognize that when you act to bend the system to the unique needs of a person, you are also supporting your values and why you work in human services.

### Applicable TVI Principles:

- **P3: Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection**
- **P4: Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience**

### Q8. I listen carefully to understand the context, to get the story.

Listening helps to create safety because it conveys your understanding that 'context is everything' for you to be able to provide the best possible service that is tailored to the person. With careful listening, you convey that the person and their story is important to you.

- ✓ If there are barriers to listening that can get in the way. Learn to identify your listening challenges by naming them:
  - o Tick Tock: Are you done yet?
  - o Jumping Ahead: I already know what you are going to say.
  - o Me Me Me: I look like I am listening, but I am thinking about me.
  - o La La La: I don't want to hear what you have to say.
  - o No Can Do: I can't hear you, my head is way too busy.

Tip: Learn about mindfulness as a strategy to become more present with yourself and others.

### Applicable TVI Principle:

- **P2: Create cultural safety in emotionally and physically safe environments**

### Q9. I listen for the ways that older women keep themselves safe

Listen to how a person takes steps to keep themselves safe. This reflects your respect and genuine desire to learn about this person and their specific situation. Look for the choices they have made that show strength, endurance and creativity. Validate them. This will provide a foundation to build upon.

### Applicable TVI Principle:

- **P4: Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience**

### **Q10. I have had training to recognize the warning signs and risk factors of gender-based violence**

Given the prevalence of GBV, every professional should have knowledge of it, no matter the sector. This is because individuals can come through any service door for reasons that may not appear to be related to GBV, and yet GBV is present in their lives and may be directly related to the presenting issue.

- ✓ Learn about GBV as a societal issue that disproportionately impacts women and specific populations due to social inequities, a history of oppression and colonization and discrimination.
- ✓ Learn more about the gendered dimensions of elder abuse. Elder abuse and GBV are often treated as separate, but older women's experiences show how deeply they intersect.
- ✓ Speak with your organizational leaders about the need to train all professionals on GBV, with attention to the experience of older women and gender diverse people. If training is not supported, take steps to inform yourself.

#### **Resources:**

EQUIP Health Care has many resources to support individuals and their organizations in developing equity-oriented care: <https://equiphealthcare.ca>

- EQUIP provides online training on TVI principles:  
<https://equiphealthcare.ca/online-courses/>
- TVIC and GBV:  
[https://gtvincubator.uwo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TVIC\\_Backgrounder\\_Oct24.pdf](https://gtvincubator.uwo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TVIC_Backgrounder_Oct24.pdf)

#### **Applicable TVI Principles:**

- **P1: Understand trauma and violence, and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours**
- **P2: Create emotionally and physically safe environments**