

Trauma Informed Care Glossary

Introduction

This glossary was developed with the intention of creating an accessible resource where people can find definitions of terms related to trauma, violence, and trauma informed care. The goal is to build a shared understanding and language. Trauma informed care is usually something people associate with the clinical field, as something that only matters to mental health providers and their interactions with clients. The Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) believes that a trauma informed approach is important for everyone.

The experience of trauma is so common that we need to move beyond only providing education on trauma informed care for specific audiences and instead invest in a whole-community approach. People and their needs are complex and therefore trauma informed care must be community-led, healing-centered, and rooted in anti-racism in order to be successful. OVP hopes to provide tools that can enable everyone to practice being trauma informed because anyone we interact with could have potentially experienced a traumatic event. We invite everyone to practice interacting with each other in a way that is rooted in empathetic understanding. Everyone has a role to play in building a violence free and trauma informed community!

This glossary is broken up into four main sections. While some definitions could belong to multiple categories for ease of use, terms have been divided into the following sections:

- Trauma
- Trauma Informed Care
- Other Helpful Terms
- Grounding

Content warning:

This glossary includes descriptions of violence that some might find traumatic or triggering. We invite all readers to trust their instincts and proceed with caution. We support you in doing whatever feels right for you, as your physical, emotional, and spiritual safety are our number one priority. At the end of this glossary, there is a section on grounding techniques to bring you back into an okay, present place. If at any time while reading the glossary, you feel yourself experiencing shortness of breathing, rapid heart rate, overheating, or any other signs of panic related to being triggered, we recommended taking a break and turning to the end of this packet to practice some of these wellness techniques





Trauma:

A person's response to something (an experience, a sensation, an event) that is distressing, disturbing, or life-threatening.

***adapted from SAMSHA's definition**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): A landmark study conducted by the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente that examined the impact of childhood trauma on later-life health and wellbeing. The major findings of the study were: 1. the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (“Almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs”), and 2) “as the number of ACEs increases so does the risk for negative outcomes.”

Examples: childhood abuse, neglect, losing a parent to separation, incarceration, and/or divorce, living with a family member who is addicted to alcohol or other substances

Carceral trauma: Trauma that occurs from being incarcerated, detained, or forcibly separated and isolated from family and community.

Chronic trauma: Ongoing, repeated, and/or continued experience of trauma and/or multiple experiences of different kinds of trauma.

Examples: child sexual abuse, domestic violence, war, and/or displacement

Collective trauma: A group experience of pain, loss, or catastrophe that shatters the social bonds that form a community, resulting in loss of trust, dissolution of roles and boundaries, and breaking of group identity. (Kai Cheng Thom)

Examples: slavery, Holocaust, war, incarceration, COVID 19 pandemic, 9/11, refugee crisis, school shootings, mass shootings

Complex trauma: Ongoing abuse in the context of family or intimate relationships. Intentional acts perpetrated by one human being on another, usually beginning in childhood. Complex trauma typically involves a fundamental betrayal of trust in primary care relationships.

Examples: domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and trafficking

Historical trauma: Intergenerational/multigenerational collective trauma that a specific ethnic or cultural group of peoples experienced both because of their status of being oppressed and from the violence of being oppressed.

Examples: colonization, genocide, slavery, the holocaust, internment camps, medical racism, police brutality



Trauma

Immigration trauma: Trauma that stems from the experience of forced or voluntary migration, and/or being a refugee.

Intergenerational trauma: Pain, suffering, or stress that is passed on from one generation to another through behavioral modeling, re-enactments, and epigenetics. (Rachel Yehuda)

Examples: experiences of trauma such as slavery, the holocaust, domestic violence that impact future or subsequent generations

Lived experience: Describes the direct, personal, first-hand knowledge that an individual has obtained through their own “involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.”

Physical trauma: Any harm or injury to the body. Trauma caused through experiencing pain, if the injury was sudden or caused by an act of violence, or if there is long term bodily damage.

Examples: car accidents, falls, gunshot wounds, being hit or stabbed, sport injury

Psychological trauma: Any harm done to the psyche or emotional self. When someone is made to feel small, and their sense of self is threatened.

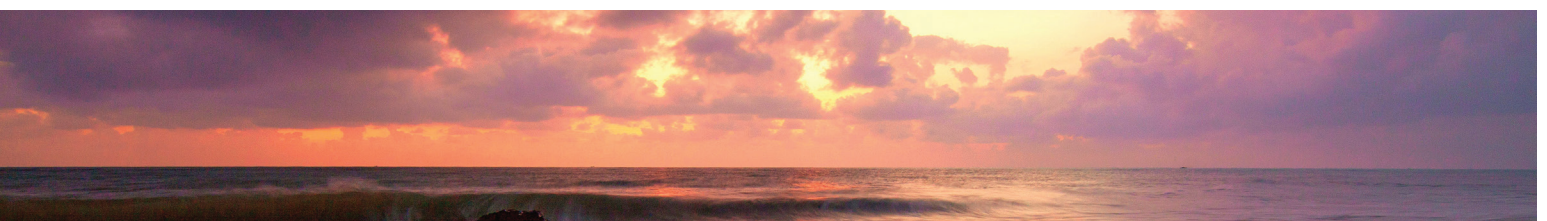
Examples: emotional abuse, gaslighting, harassment, abusive relationships, verbal abuse, exploitation, controlling behavior, torture

Racial trauma: Trauma experienced from the ongoing violence and abuse of interpersonal and systemic racism, prejudice, and bias. Includes exposure to (especially when repeated) of racist narratives and representations in the media.

Survival response: A biological nervous system reaction that is activated unconsciously when we feel like our lives are threatened. There are three main survival responses: fight, flight, or freeze.

Vicarious or secondary trauma: “Is the debilitating emotional and psychological impact of connecting with the traumatic and disturbing life events of other people. It is an insidious form of stress and is pervasive among people working with those who have experienced trauma. It often occurs without awareness, accumulates over time, and can change a [person’s] overall view of the world and the people around them. It can affect cognitive functioning and values and can be as debilitating as primary trauma.”

Examples: hearing about someone else’s trauma can cause your body to react in similar ways as the person who directly experienced the traumatic event



² Available from: <http://www.culturalsafetytraining.com.au/home8/what-is-cultural-safety-ed.> New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

³ TICPOT



Trauma Informed Care

Cultural humility: “A lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing power imbalances . . . and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations.”

Cultural safety: “An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.”

De-escalation: “To decrease in extent, volume, or scope.” Trauma informed de-escalation practices are people-first practices that individuals or groups can use to pre-emptively reduce harm and violence.

Front line staff: Refers to those who work directly with or provide active services to a client/clients. They are distinguished from staff functions or organizational functions that occur behind the scenes.

Personal pronouns: Short words used to substitute someone’s name when speaking of a human in the third person. Because of limitations in some languages, pronouns usually imply a gender. For example: “he” to refer to a man/boy or “she” to refer to a woman/girl. These associations are not always accurate or helpful.

A **gender neutral or gender inclusive pronoun** is a pronoun which does not associate a gender with the individual who is being discussed. Because the English language does not have a gender neutral pronoun readily available, **they/them pronouns** are the most commonly used gender neutral pronouns. Everyone has a right to use and be referred to with the pronouns they are most comfortable with. “Using someone’s correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment.”⁷

Psychological/Emotional Safety: Acknowledges dimensions to safety outside of physical security. “A condition in which human beings feel included, safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo – all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished in some way.”⁸

Resilience: “The capacity of individuals, families, and communities to heal from trauma, and to strengthen their wellbeing and adaptability in ways that can mitigate or prevent future trauma.”⁹

Self-care: Term developed by Audre Lorde; “the preservation or improvement of one’s own mental and physical health, well-being and happiness.”¹⁰ There are multiple dimensions of self-care that include physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, etc. “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” – Audre Lorde

Examples: exercising, eating healthy, taking a bath, going to therapy, watching a comforting movie or tv show, dancing

⁴ Danso, R. (2018). Cultural competence and cultural humility: A critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts. *Journal of Social Work*, 18, 410-430

⁵ TAFE Courses Online n.d., What is Cultural Safety, archived, TAFE. Available from: <http://www.culturalsafetytraining.com.au/home8/what-is-cultural-safety>

⁶ TAFE Courses Online n.d., What is Cultural Safety, archive

⁷ <https://www.mypronouns.org/>

⁸ Clark, Timothy R (March 2020). *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation*. Berrett-Koehler. ISBN 9781523087686.

⁹ Center for Collective Wisdom



Trauma Informed Care

Sensory or Comfort Rooms: “An umbrella term used to categorize a broad variety of therapeutic spaces specifically designed and utilized to promote self-organization and positive change. When used appropriately, sensory rooms: help to create a safe space, facilitate the therapeutic alliance, provide opportunities for engagement in prevention and crisis de-escalation strategies, as well as a host of other therapeutic exchanges (to teach skills, offer a variety of therapeutic activities, etc.), promote self-care/self-nurturance, resilience & recovery.”¹¹

Strengths-Based Approach: An “approach... that concentrate[s] on the inherent strengths of individuals, families, groups and organizations, deploying personal strengths to aid recovery and empowerment.”¹²

Trauma Informed Care (TIC): Trauma informed care is an adjusted approach based on the acknowledgment of the prevalence of trauma. Traditionally, we ask “what is wrong with this person?” In a trauma informed approach, we have a changed perspective and would instead ask “what happened to this person?” This shift is an invitation to consider that their behaviour may be a deeper root cause to a person’s displayed behaviour. It is a renewed commitment to curiosity and empathy for another person’s life experiences.

Examples: learning about what might trigger someone who has experienced a form of violence and going out of your way to avoid allowing any of these triggers to occur

Trauma Informed Organization: In a trauma informed approach, the company, and all employees in the company, understands the role that trauma can play in each person’s care and recovery. The organization develops safeguards to ensure that the setting in which services are delivered, and the particular services offered are competent, safe, evidence-based, patient-centered, and do not re-traumatize individuals with histories of trauma. The input of those with lived trauma experience is essential in the development, delivery, and evaluation of services.¹³

Trigger: A trigger can be anything that resembles, symbolizes, or is associated with the traumatic event. Common triggers include: smells, sounds, objects, movements, anniversaries, or significant life events. When we are triggered, it means we have experienced something associated with the traumatic event that sets off our memory of the experience. Sometimes, we may not be aware of our own triggers: the brain stores memories differently during a traumatic event so we may not have the clearest memory of the experience. Events or situations that might otherwise be insignificant become associated with the trauma in a survivor’s mind and body and become “triggers” that indicate danger to a survivor.

Warm handoff: a referral or patient transfer “that is conducted in person, between two members of the health care team, in front of the patient (and family if present.”¹⁴ “A warm handoff between physicians in a referral relationship reinforces the patient’s trust in our judgement, helps build the patient’s relationship with the referral physician, and sets the stage for more effective care.”¹⁵

¹⁰ <https://www.dissolvingmargins.co/post/self-care-audre-lorde-and-black-radical-activism>

¹¹ <https://www.ot-innovations.com/clinical-practice/sensory-modulation/sensory-rooms-in-mental-health-3/>

¹² <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/strengths-based-approaches-working-individuals>

¹³ <https://zerosuicide.edc.org/resources/resource-database/zero-suicide-and-trauma-informed-care>

¹⁴ <https://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/professionals/quality-patient-safety/patient-family-engagement/pfprimarycare/warm-hand-off-guide-for-clinicians.pdf>

¹⁵ https://www.aafp.org/journals/fpm/blogs/inpractice/entry/warm_handoff.html



Other Helpful Terms

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): An umbrella term for any relationship violence or abuse that occurs when one intimate partner exerts power and control over their partner. Can include domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, stalking, and teen dating violence.

Non-binary: “An umbrella term to describe people who identify with a gender outside of the gender binary (i.e., male and female)...can be categorized under the transgender umbrella term [although] not all non-binary people identify as transgender. The word non-binary describes a wide array of different identities which fall outside of the gender binary, and can be related to, or completely separate from male and female gender identities.”¹⁶

Privilege: “Unearned access to resources that are only readily available to certain people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.”¹⁷

Violence: “Use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”¹⁸ Violence can be physical, mental, emotional, sexual, or verbal.

Transgender: a person whose gender identity differs from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people, especially those that are black, are uniquely vulnerable to violence.¹⁹



¹⁶ https://www.lgbthero.org.uk/being-non-binary?gclid=Cj0KCCQjw6s2IBhCnARIsAP8RfAjRGf3aZKebyASx_AgZGeTHcpNXOuwer1PM5Cv7kOkPHjziMTALK-8MaApb4EALw_wcB⁵ TAFE Courses Online n.d., What is Cultural Safety, archived, TAFE. Available from: <http://www.culturalsafetytraining.com.au/home8/what-is-cultural-safety>

¹⁷ <https://www.nccj.org/resources/social-justice-definitions>

¹⁸ WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health. Violence: a public health priority. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1996 (document WHO/EHA/SPI.POA.2).

¹⁹ <https://harvardcrcl.org/americas-war-on-black-trans-women/>



Grounding Techniques

Grounding exercises are **short activities that can help us manage intrusive thoughts when we are reminded of our traumatic experience.** The purpose of doing a grounding exercise is to bring us to the present moment and to distance ourselves from the negative thoughts, memories, or flashbacks.



1. Drink a glass of water



2. 4-7-8 breathing:

Breath in for 4 seconds. Hold the breath for 7 seconds. Exhale for 8 seconds. Repeat.



3. Five-finger breathing:

Hold one hand in front of you, with your fingers spread out. Trace the outside of your entire hand with the index finger on your other hand, taking your time, and breathing in when you trace up a finger, then out when you trace down. This exercise helps ground people in their direct physical experience, while slowing down their breathing.



4. Count backward from 3:

Slow your racing thoughts by counting backwards by three in your mind from 100 (100, 97, 94, etc.).



5. Mindfulness Walk:

If you have time for a break and if is safe to do so, go outside and walk around. Concentrate on the physical sensations of walking. Notice your breathing. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Feel the temperature or air. What do you hear?

This glossary was designed to be a living document because just like our learning, our language too is always evolving. Do you have a term or definition you would like to see included in this glossary? Please feel free to reach out with any suggestions:

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