

Trauma-Informed Systems Change Model

Kathleen Guarino, LMHC

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW
Washington, DC 20007-3835
202.403.5000 | TTY 877.334.3499
www.air.org

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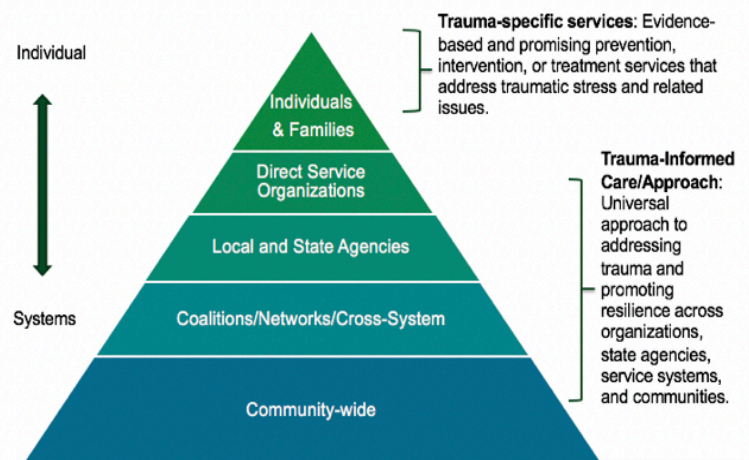
TRAUMA-INFORMED SYSTEMS CHANGE MODEL

What is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

*A trauma-informed approach refers to a universal strategy for addressing trauma that ensures a **shared understanding** of trauma and its impact, and a **collective response** to align practices and policies to promote healing and resilience-building across a service delivery system.*

Growing awareness of trauma and its impact on individuals, families, communities, and society, has challenged health and human service systems to consider the role they play in addressing this public health issue. Addressing trauma across health and social service systems takes many forms ranging from targeted screenings and therapeutic interventions that address trauma-related symptoms to adopting systemic approaches to ensure that all are equipped to recognize and respond to trauma. Consensus is growing that, in addition to evidence-based treatment for PTSD and other trauma-related responses, universal approaches are needed to address the effects of trauma. Interventions to address trauma must target the individual *and* the larger context in which support is offered.

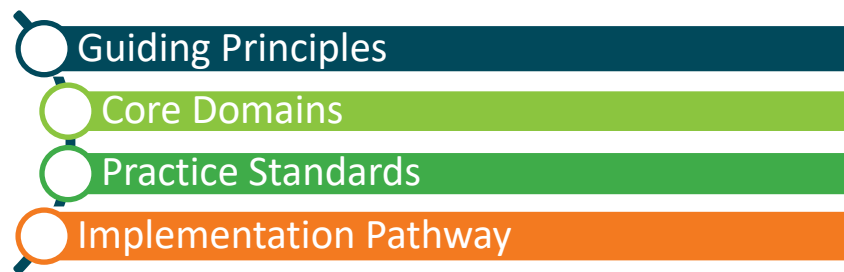
The terms “trauma-informed care” or “trauma-informed approach” may be used to refer to a universal approach that includes trauma-specific services as well as broader systemic strategies. Increasingly, the movement towards adopting a trauma-informed approach is expanding from single service sectors to cross-sector initiatives, and to larger efforts to build trauma-informed cities, counties, and states.



(American Institutes for Research; SAMHSA, 2014)

Trauma-Informed Systems Change Model

American Institutes for Research's Trauma-Informed Systems Change Model includes (1) guiding principles of a trauma-informed approach; (2) core domains of implementation; (3) key trauma-informed strategies and practices; and (4) an implementation pathway. Here we review each component of the model. This model provides a framework and process for adopting a trauma-informed approach that can be applied across health and social service organizations. How this approach is operationalized in daily practice will require tailoring by context.



Guiding Principles

The guiding principles that ground the trauma-informed systems change framework represent a set of attitudes, values, and beliefs about what it means to provide quality services for trauma survivors. Guiding principles reflect the underlying culture that drives organizational policy and daily practice. In some cases, these principles may be reflective of current culture and practice. In other instances, these trauma-informed principles may represent a significant departure from business as usual and both administrative and direct service levels.

Guiding Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach	
Trauma Awareness & Understanding	Recognize the scope and impact of trauma on individuals, communities, service providers and systems and adopt approaches designed to foster healing and resilience.
Safety	Ensure physically and emotionally safe service environments where basic needs are met; safety measures are in place; and policies and practices support consistency, predictability, transparency and respect for all.
Choice, Control & Empowerment	Adopt a person-centered and strengths-based approach that maximizes service-recipient voice, choice, and control over all aspects of their lives, builds competencies, and empowers providers to do their best work to support healing.
Cultural & Gender Responsiveness	Understand the relationship between cultural and gender-related factors and trauma exposure, response, healing, and experiences with systems, and implement culturally and gender responsive services, practices, and policies.
Recovery, Resilience & Growth	Believe that recovery from trauma is possible and aim to instill hope and promote self-healing, resilience-building, and growth through the use of diverse sources of healing, including beauty, the creative arts, contemplative practices, and related interventions that cultivate self-awareness, connection and meaning-making.
Integration	Maintain a holistic view of healing and health promotion and systems integration that considers the interrelated nature of emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual health, and broader factors such as social, political and economic context, and promote intervention at all levels.
Shared Power & Collaboration	Minimize power imbalances and promote collaboration, shared decision-making and partnership between service providers and service recipients and among providers.
Relationship-Based	Maintain a commitment to cultivating safe, authentic, and positive relationships as a critical vehicle for healing and resilience-building for all in the service environment.

Core Domains

Core dimensions or “domains” of a trauma-informed approach include: 1) Promote Trauma-Informed Policies and Procedures; 2) Build Trauma-Informed Workforce; 3) Provide Trauma-Informed Services; 4) Establish Trusting Relationships; and 5) Create Safe and Respectful Service Environments. Agencies may consider using the core domains as an organizing structure for assessing current practice and developing trauma-informed action plans.

1. Build a Trauma-Informed Workforce

Adopting a trauma-informed approach requires systems to expand on staff development efforts to include a range of trauma-related knowledge and skill-building activities. Training and education on trauma and its impact on service recipients and staff and supervision that reinforces these concepts are all essential elements of trauma-informed care. Organizations establish processes for monitoring staff knowledge and use of trauma-informed practices.

2. Establish Trusting Relationships

Across service organizations, establishing trusting relationships with service recipients is the cornerstone of a trauma-informed approach. A trauma-informed organization works to foster the necessary conditions for establishing trusting relationships where all service recipients are uniquely seen, heard, and valued.

3. Create Safe and Respectful Service Environments

Creating a safe, supportive, and respectful environments is essential in any service setting. For trauma survivors, issues of safety become even more prominent. Trauma-informed organizations strive to create the environmental conditions the promote healing.

4. Provide Trauma-Informed Services

Trauma-informed organizations consider *what* services are offered and *how* services are provided to best meet the needs of trauma survivors. Adopting a trauma-informed approach to service delivery means ensuring that screening and assessment tools and service interventions are informed by an understanding of trauma, healing, and resilience.

5. Promote Trauma-Informed Policies and Procedures

To fully adopt and sustain a trauma-informed approach, leaders must work to embed a commitment to trauma-informed care into organizational infrastructure. Adopting a trauma-informed approach means developing policies, procedures, and processes that aim to institutionalize trauma-informed care beyond one champion, department, or program.

Agency-Level Practice Standards

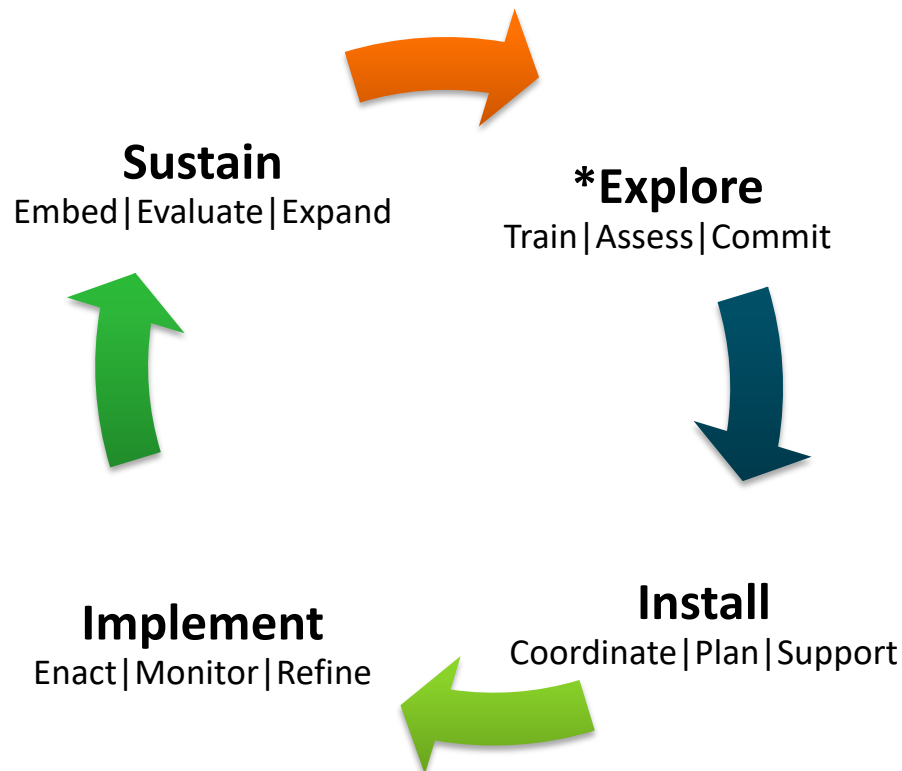
Agency-level practice standards reflecting the key elements of a trauma-informed organization are provided here as benchmarks to guide action planning and progress monitoring at the broadest level. How an agency takes steps to ensure alignment with practice standards will vary and should be tailored by context. These agency-level practices may be applied at a program-level, depending on the unit or focus of change efforts.

Core Domains of a Trauma-Informed Approach	
Build a Trauma-Informed Workforce	<p>Practice Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All agency staff receives ongoing professional development specifically related to trauma and the core elements of a trauma-informed approach. • Professional development related to trauma-informed care is built into existing structures (e.g., supervision, staff meetings). • Staff expectations related to trauma-informed care are built into employee-related structures and expectations (e.g., onboarding, job role description, performance evaluations, employee handbooks). • There are processes in place for identifying and addressing the impact of secondary trauma on staff. • There are organizational standards in place for supporting staff wellness and resilience. • The organization integrates a trauma-informed approach to supervision.
Establish Trusting Relationships	<p>Practice Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization has established standards of practice for engaging and building relationships with service users based on trauma-informed principles. • All agency staff receives ongoing professional development on the effects of trauma on attachment and relationships. • The agency embeds trauma-related concepts into relationship-building practices with service recipients. • The organization has a process in place for monitoring quality of engagement and collaboration with service recipients. • The organization has established standards for ensuring culturally and gender responsive practice.

<p>Create Safe and Respectful Service Environments</p>	<p>Practice Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical service environment is safe, well-monitored and well-maintained. • The physical service environment is welcoming to all service recipients. • The agency has established standard of practice for ensuring safe and respectful service environments that align with the guiding principles of a trauma-informed approach. • The extent to which service recipients feel safe in the service environment is monitored regularly. • The extent to which staff feels safe in the service environment is monitored regularly. • There is a process in place for regularly scanning and reducing potential trauma reminders (triggers) for service recipients in the service environment. • There is a process in place for regularly scanning and eliminated potentially retraumatizing practices for service recipients in the service environment. • Crisis prevention and intervention practices are informed by an understanding of trauma and trauma-informed principles. • Peer support services are available.
<p>Provide Trauma-Informed Services</p>	<p>Practice Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening tools and assessments consider the potential presence and impact of trauma for all service recipients. • Service plans are designed consider trauma-related needs of service recipients. • Service recipients have access to trauma-specific clinical interventions as needed. • Interventions are culturally and gender responsive. • Diverse strategies for supporting healing are incorporated, including the creative arts, body-based work, and contemplative practices. • The organization educates service recipients about trauma and its effects. • The organization helps service recipients build key skills for resilience, such as self-regulation and connection. • All services are provided in a trauma-informed manner • Service recipients are included in decision-making about the types of services provided and their delivery • There are processes in place for gathering regular feedback from service recipients about the services that they receive. • The organization collaborates with other agencies to promote a coordinated trauma-informed approach.
<p>Promote Trauma-Informed Policies & Procedures</p>	<p>Practice Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization has established a formal commitment to adopting and maintaining a universal trauma-informed approach. • Leadership and staffing structures are in place for supporting and sustaining a trauma-informed approach (e.g., committee/workgroup). • The organization has committed resources to adopting and sustaining a trauma-informed approach organization-wide. • There are processes in place for regularly assessing, monitoring and evaluating organization-level capacity in trauma-informed care. • Organizational policies, procedures, guidelines and handbooks are regularly reviewed for their alignment with a trauma-informed approach. • Staff and service recipients participate in developing and reviewing policies and procedures.

Implementation Pathway

The pathway for implementing a trauma-informed approach includes four main steps: (1) Explore; (2) Install; (3) Implement; and (4) Sustain. Each step has recommended practices. Organizations and/or systems who are new to adopting a trauma-informed approach begin in the explore stage and continue to subsequent stages. If organizations and/or systems have already progressed towards implementing and sustaining a trauma-informed approach, they may return to the exploration stage to reexamine current capacity and readiness to further enhance existing trauma-informed practice.



Considerations for Adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach

Adopting a universal, trauma-informed approach is a long-term process that requires ongoing time, resources, and effort to integrate and sustain new practices. Some considerations related to adopting a trauma-informed approach are included below.

- Adopting a trauma-informed approach involves comprehensive changes to programming and practice, including staff training, service environments, types of assessments and services provided, and types of policies and procedures adopted.
- Trauma-informed organizational change is multi-year process.
- Ideally, organizations embark on agency-wide change that affects all programs. An agency may consider piloting the approach in a subset of programs if change across all programs seems overwhelming. For this to work, organizational leadership must agree to support program-level changes to areas such as staff training and policies and procedures that may be dependent on larger agency forces.
- Leadership support and involvement is critical to the change process.
- Staff buy-in to adopting a trauma-informed approach is critical. Initial concerns about adopting this approach should be gathered and addressed as part of planning efforts.
- Ongoing professional development and skill-building is needed.
- A focus on staff resilience and self-care is an important aspect of a trauma-informed approach and may strengthen staff buy-in and motivation to integrate other changes.
- Aligning a trauma-informed approach with similar efforts (e.g., culturally responsive practice, survivor-centered and empowerment-focused models) is beneficial for all. Aligning similar approaches allows for an integrated approach and minimizes intervention fatigue and burden.
- Embedding trauma-informed practices into existing structures is critical for sustainability (e.g., mission, vision, policies, guidelines, meeting structures, paperwork, assessment and service planning templates).