

Trauma-informed practice: Practical strategies for Mental Health and Wellbeing services

Anne-Laure Couineau

October 16, 2025

Acknowledgements

Our Funders:

- Department of Health, Victoria
- Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Our partners:

- The Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local
- The Greater Geelong and Queenscliffe Local
- The Women's Recovery Network (WREN)

Session aims



Learn about how trauma-informed principles apply to critical aspects of care such as intake, risk-management and multidisciplinary support



Be provided with examples of organisational and team-based strategies to promote trauma-informed practice



Develop an understanding of how leaders can support trauma-informed practice and staff wellbeing



Explore service design challenges to trauma informed practice and potential solutions.

Trauma-informed care aims to:

- Minimise trauma related barriers to accessing and engaging with services
- Minimise harm from service delivery
- Support recovery and healing from impacts of trauma
- Support staff safety, wellbeing and retention.



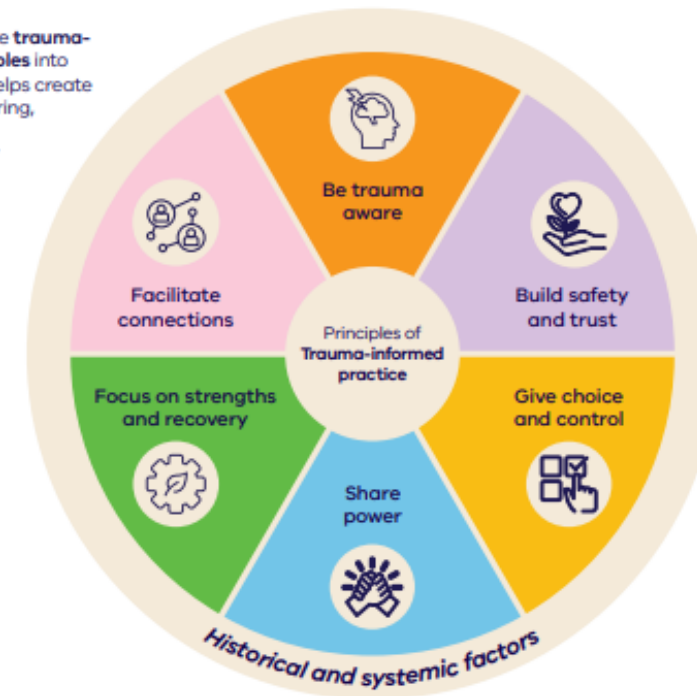
Includes **individual** and **organisational practices**

Service users, families and carers' voices central – having choice and control is not just about choice in care:

- Service improvement and Review
- Feedback and consent
- Lived and living experience expertise

6 principles of trauma-informed practice

Integrating these **trauma-informed principles** into daily practice helps create a safe, empowering, and supportive environment for every person we work with.



1. Be trauma aware

Understand the impacts of trauma and adversity on individuals, families, and community. Understand how trauma experience shapes needs, behaviours, and relationships.

2. Build safety and trust

Create physical and emotional safety, and minimise service-related harms. Build trust through a shared understanding of needs, identity, and culture. Support worker wellbeing.

3. Give choice and control

Support people to make informed choices by explaining roles, what to expect, and the options available. Wherever possible, involve service users, and the people they trust, in decisions about care.

4. Share power

Reduce power imbalances by working together with the service user. Value their experience, knowledge and input when setting goals and making decisions about care and risk. Involve service users, their families and carers in service improvement and review.

5. Focus on strengths and recovery

View people as resourceful and resilient. Encourage them to use existing strengths and focus on meaningful goals. Everyone has a role in supporting recovery from trauma.

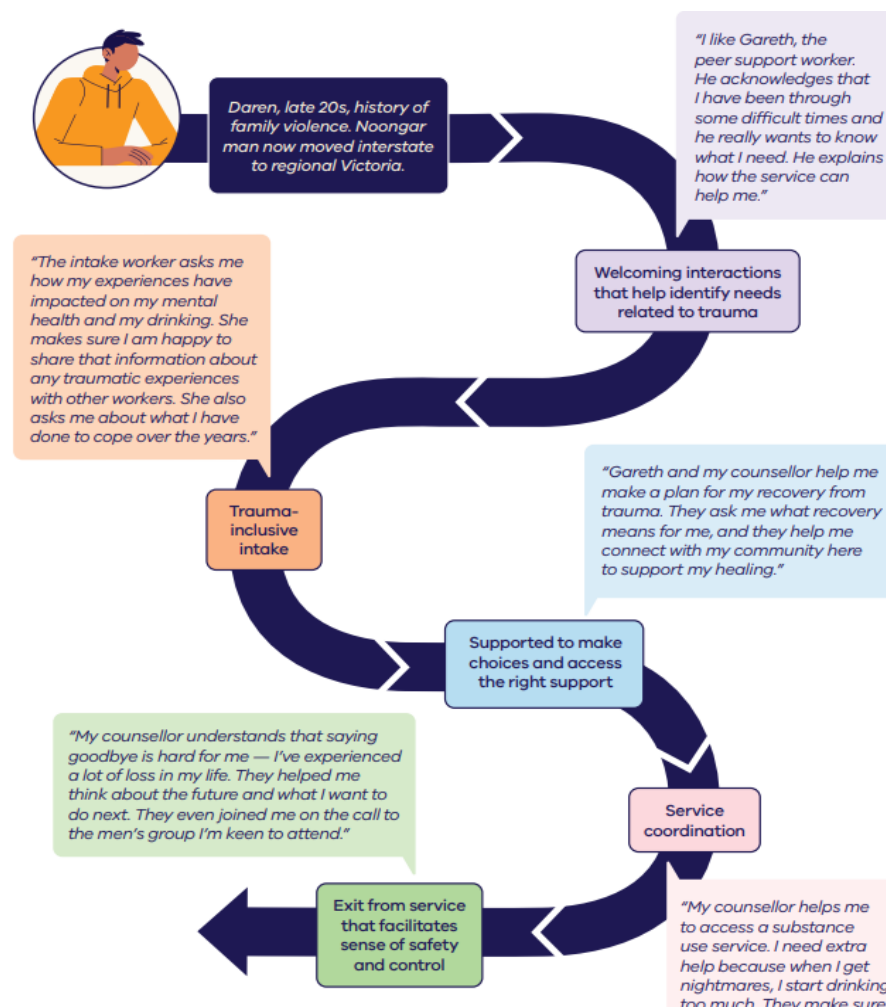
6. Facilitate connections

Take a holistic view of people's needs, taking into account their context and community. Provide integrated and co-ordinated care. Support meaningful connections.

A shared understanding of TIP

Trauma-informed practice operationalised across roles and stages of a service user's journey :

- Addressing barriers to access
- Identifying trauma and sharing own story
- Shared understanding of recovery from trauma and goals
- Approach to risk management



An organisational perspective

- Recruitment & staffing
- Service design
- Environment
- Capability support
- Team culture
- Policies & procedures (e.g. critical incidents)
- Partnerships
- Evaluation & service review



Trauma disclosure in practice

What is needed:

- Safe interaction that includes understanding purpose in sharing and associated needs or goals (e.g. understanding impacts, current risk, addressing recovery needs?)
- Clear role for staff – boundaries and purpose
- Clear information sharing to reduce repetition and create transparency – facilitated choice and consent
- Staff support and safety – skills and addressing vicarious trauma

How to get there:

- Part of orientation and role description for staff
- Skills development through training, mentorship, supervision
- Change/maintain culture – providing reflective cross-disciplinary spaces to review practice and role
- Service model and forms provides flexible ways to capture information
- Provide flexible avenues of support for staff affected by the work: debrief with peer & supervisor, wellbeing supports.

Leadership support for safe trauma disclosure

"At an organisational level, our role is to ensure policies and systems prevent harm. Opportunities for safe disclosure of trauma must be built into assessment and referral pathways, so people are not asked to relive trauma unnecessarily and the impacts of trauma are addressed"

In my team, I make sure staff know how to respond when trauma comes up. That means giving them training, space in supervision, and clarity about how much of a person's story they should engage with"



Reflective practice and TIP

- Create time and space for reflection, not just focus on case discussions, task completion or next steps
- Create formal and informal opportunities for team reflection
- Focus on experience of service user, worker or team
- Notice patterns in individual and team responses
- Hold complexity without rushing to fix, blame or label



How do my own values and attitudes, and those of my organisation support shared power?



Prompts:

- In what way does the person or family in front of me make decisions? How do I support them to make decisions?
- What has it been like for them when a person or organisation has had power over their life? e.g., parents, police, or government agencies like child protection.
- When was the last time I discussed consent with regard to risk or sharing information with the person or the family I support? Do I need to revisit this?
- Who makes decisions in our team? How do we support collaborative and inclusive decisions about the services we provide?

Embedding TIP in Organisation



1. Leadership drives the culture

- TIP principles are embedded in policies, values, and service model.
- Leaders speak to and model trauma-informed values in practice.
- TIP champions or working groups are in place to maintain momentum.



2. Build environments that feel safe

- Spaces feel warm, calming, and non-institutional.
- Procedures support privacy, confidentiality, and emotional safety.
- Feedback is regularly gathered on whether people feel safe and respected.
- Service is designed to minimise barriers to accessing support (e.g., streamline assessments to avoid duplication, reduce waiting lists).



3. Support and equip the workforce

- All workers receive regular training on trauma, its effects, and trauma-informed care.
- Reflective supervision and debriefing are routinely available.
- Workers wellbeing is prioritised through supportive policies and a culture that values self-care.



4. Promote choice and empowerment

- Service users are offered real choices and supported to make their own decisions.
- Processes and supports are put in place so workers can consider dignity and choice, as well as safety, when managing risk.
- Strategies are in place to minimise or eliminate restrictive practices (e.g., chemical or physical restraints, or isolation).



5. Embed trauma-informed practice in systems and partnerships

- Strong partnerships exist with external services to ensure seamless, wrap-around care.
- Feedback from people with lived experience is used to shape services.
- Data and quality improvement processes are used to monitor and strengthen TIP delivery.

Resources

Practical tools and resources:
phoenixaustralia.org/tip-tools/

Training for leaders and managers:
education.phoenixaustralia.org

Available Tools and Resources



Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice



Organisational Audit of Trauma-Informed Practice



Trauma-Informed Reflective Practice



Supporting Safe Disclosures of Trauma



Trauma-Informed Approach to Risk



Minimising Impacts of Vicarious Trauma



ONLINE COURSE

Trauma-informed Leadership in Mental Health Services

Build the skills to lead trauma-informed culture and service delivery, creating safer, more supportive environments for service users and staff.

Details →



Phoenix
A U S T R A L I A

CENTRE FOR
POSTTRAUMATIC
MENTAL HEALTH

phoenixaustralia.org

 [@Phoenix_Trauma](https://twitter.com/Phoenix_Trauma)

 [@phoenixtrauma](https://www.facebook.com/phoenixtrauma)

 [@phoenix-trauma](https://www.linkedin.com/company/phoenix-trauma)

