

TRAUMA AND TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

One definition of trauma is that it “results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” (SAMHSA)

Trauma is defined by the impact that an experience has had on the individual rather than by the event itself.

Symptoms:

Insomnia	Anxiety
Depression	PTSD
Defensive	Demanding
“on edge”	Shame
Fear	Difficulty concentrating
Anger	Helplessness
Avoiding reminders of the past	
Damage to a person’s sense of safety and trust and can adversely affect relationships	



The words of Hymn 145 are very helpful for anyone dealing with trauma.

Trauma-informed approaches do not involve trying to distinguish “symptoms” from the impact of trauma – they recognise that “symptoms” are often responses to trauma.

There is shift in the way we deal with people when we assume there to be a background of trauma, from “What is wrong with you?” to “What has happened to you?”

We can also support people who do not want any trauma-specific referrals begin healing through faith and spirituality, exercise, nature, work, caring for people and pets, and other practices in which they find connection, comfort, and meaning.

Some people may not feel ready to engage in deeper trauma-specific discussion or interventions, but there are many approaches that do not involve directly processing trauma. These trauma-specific services can start the healing process by helping patients to connect with others and develop healthier coping skills/ communicate hope to patients that it is possible to heal from even the deepest wounds of trauma.

Supporting Traumatized Refugees

- **Understanding the Depth of Trauma:** It's crucial to remember that you cannot fully comprehend the extent of their trauma, but acknowledging its presence is a significant first step.
 - **Addressing Basic Needs and Challenges:** Refugees face numerous challenges, including financial difficulties, loneliness, isolation, racism, and navigating a new healthcare system. These factors can exacerbate their trauma and hinder their ability to heal.
 - **Emphasising Emotional and Spiritual Safety:** While providing physical safety is essential, it is equally important to address the refugees' emotional and spiritual well-being. This includes creating a supportive and welcoming environment where they feel safe, respected, and understood.
 - **The Importance of Connection and Belonging:** The sources stress the significance of human connection and a sense of belonging. Refugees often feel isolated and like they don't belong, which can negatively impact their mental health. Facilitating social connections and helping them integrate into the community can be incredibly beneficial.
 - **The Role of Faith and Spirituality:** Faith and spirituality can play a role in healing. Encouraging refugees to connect with our community and providing resources for spiritual support can be helpful. If finances prohibit involvement, perhaps subsidizing travel to and from the Meeting or to Bible Schools is helpful.
 - **Long-Term Support:** It's vital to remember that healing from trauma is a long-term process. Providing ongoing support through various means, such as counselling, support groups, and community integration programs, is crucial for their long-term well-being.
 - **Empowering Through Choice:** Trauma often leads to a sense of disempowerment. Providing choices, even small ones, can help restore a sense of agency. Involve the individual in decisions regarding the logistics of the conversation, such as time, location, and how it unfolds. Respect their preferences and recognise that they can act on their behalf.
 - **Collaboration and Understanding:** Approach the conversation as a collaborative effort, working "with" the individual rather than "for" or "to" them. Recognise that you may not fully understand their experiences but demonstrate a willingness to listen and learn. Acknowledge that additional support might be necessary and be prepared to offer resources or connect them with appropriate services.
 - **Trauma-Informed Communication:** Pay attention to the individual's non-verbal cues, such as changes in skin colour, dilated pupils, or fidgeting, as these can indicate stress. Maintain consistent, but not fixed, eye contact and avoid appearing distracted. Encourage them to take their time, take breaks if needed, and even resume the conversation later. Adopt a gentle approach, avoiding any sense of an "agenda", and validate their experiences without judgement or shame.
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Remember, healing from trauma is a journey. By embracing these principles, we can create spaces where individuals feel safe, heard, and empowered to share their experiences and begin their path towards healing with God's blessing.

A holistic approach to addressing their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs demands patience, understanding, and a commitment to providing long-term support.

What is trauma-informed care?

“Trauma-informed services do no harm i.e. they do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible. In trauma-informed services, trauma survivors are seen as unique individuals who have experienced extremely abnormal situations and have managed as best they could”. (Dr Cathy Kezelman)

Trauma-informed care is based on the understanding that:

- a significant number of people living with mental health conditions have experienced trauma in their lives
- trauma may be a factor to consider for people in distress
- the impact of trauma may be lifelong
- trauma can impact the person, their emotions and relationships with others.

Core trauma-informed principles:

- Safety – emotional as well as physical e.g. is the environment welcoming?
- Trust – are you sensitive to people's needs?
- Choice – do you provide opportunity for choice?
- Collaboration – do you communicate a sense of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to'?
- Empowerment – is empowering people a key focus of yours?
- Respect for Diversity – do you respect diversity?

Please at all times, remember we are not qualified trauma therapy professionals and since we only have a very dim understanding of what our brethren and sisters from trauma backgrounds have been through and are living with, please always have God at the front and centre of your love and compassion in helping. May our Father guide and bless us as we struggle together towards His Kingdom.

Cathy Strachan

