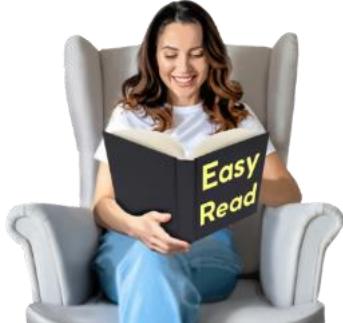




Foundations of Trauma-informed, Relationship- based Practice

Course - Section 2
Easy Read

About this document



This is an Easy Read document.

It is Section 2 of the Foundations of Trauma-informed, Relationship-based Practice course.

2

Section 2 is called Trauma and the trauma-informed principles.

2

Section 2 will tell you:



- what trauma means
- the different kinds of trauma
- how trauma can change the way we make relationships
- the different ways people react to trauma
- more about being trauma-informed

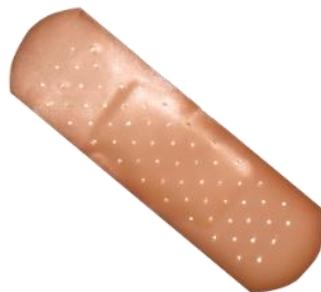
2.1 What 'trauma' means



Trauma is when something bad happens like:

- an accident
- losing someone you love
- being hurt
- seeing something that is upsetting

This can make the person feel sad, scared or even angry for a long time.



The word 'trauma' comes from an old Greek word for 'wound' or 'cut'.



When something traumatic happens to someone, it might not cause a wound or cut that you can see.

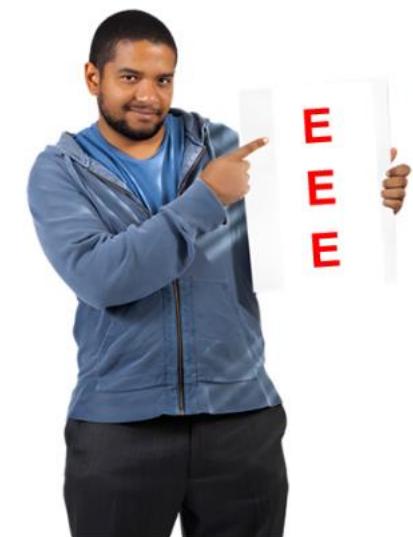
But it might wound or hurt their feelings and emotions.



Sometimes trauma can cause wounds that last just a short time.

But sometimes the wounds can last for years.

2.2 The 3 Es of trauma



There are 3 important words that each begin with the letter E.



Event

This is the thing that happened.



Experience

What someone thought about the event.

Did it feel too much for them or not?

Did they have support?

Did they have a safe place to go after the event?



Effect

How the person felt during the event and afterwards.

Not everyone experiences things in the same way.



Some people can be frightened or upset by something while other people are not.



Sometimes trauma happens straight away but sometimes it can take a long time after the event for it to show.



There is no part 2.3 in this Easy Read course version.

2.4 Types of trauma



Trauma can be:



- something which happens to ourselves – this is called **direct**
- something that we saw happening to another person – this is called **indirect**



Here are the 4 types of trauma:

1. **Type 1 trauma** – these are things that happen once and were not planned – like a car accident.



2. Type 2 trauma, also called **complex trauma** or **relational trauma** or **developmental trauma**

These are traumas that happen in relationships again and again – like bullying.



3. Vicarious trauma – this is indirect trauma that can happen when someone sees or hears about a traumatic event.

This can often happen in jobs like the police, firefighters and healthcare.



4. Collective trauma – this is trauma that affects a group of people who have shared the same traumatic event – like war or flooding.

2.5 The effects and signs of trauma



Everyone is different.

An event that 1 person finds a bit upsetting might feel traumatic to another person.



Type 1 traumas might affect someone for a short while.



Type 2 traumas will often:

- affect someone deeply
- affect someone for longer
- make it harder for that person to do day to day tasks



Here are 4 ways that trauma can show up:



1. **physical** – in the body

Things like:

- pain
- tiredness
- dizziness
- panic attacks
- sleep problems



2. **emotional** – our feelings

Things like:

- anger
- feeling numb
- shame
- anxiety
- loneliness



3. **behaviour** – the way someone acts

Things like:

- not looking after themselves
- panic attacks
- scary thoughts
- using alcohol or drugs to cope

- not wanting to change



4. relational – how someone gets along with other people in their life

Things like:

- not trusting other people
- not wanting to get close to others
- staying alone
- difficulty with friendships or family relationships

2.6 The 5 trauma responses



In this course, **responses** means the ways in which our minds and bodies react.



Over the years experts have found that there are 5 different responses to trauma.



1. Fight

The fight response means that someone faces the threat and tries to deal with it.



2. Flight

The flight response means that someone tries to get away to a safer place.



3. Freeze

The freeze response means that someone stops and does not do anything.



4. Friend

The friend response means that someone tries to end the threat by keeping others happy.



5. Flop

The flop response means that someone collapses or feels totally helpless.

An example



This example shows how our bodies can sometimes respond to frightening experiences,



Let's say you are at a friend's house party.
A fire starts in the kitchen.
What would you do?



A fight response could be:

- get a fire extinguisher
- try to put the fire out



A flight response could be:

- run to the nearest door and get out



A freeze response could be:

- to stare at the fire and not be able to move



A friend response could be:

- to help other people to get out
- to comfort other people



A flop response could be:

- to walk backwards and forwards without knowing what to do



It is important to understand that we do not choose which of these 5 responses we have.

The way our body responds is usually because of trauma we have experienced earlier in our lives.

2.7 The window of tolerance



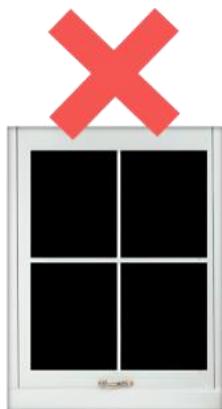
Dan Siegel is an American doctor who noticed that we all have a level in us where we can cope with things okay.



This level has an upper limit and a lower limit so we can think of it as a 'window'.

Tolerance means what we can cope with.

Dan Siegel calls this window our 'window of tolerance'.



If we experience something which takes us above our window of tolerance, we might experience fight or flight responses.

This is also called **hyper-arousal**.



If we experience something which takes us below our window of tolerance, we might experience a freeze response.

This is also called **hypo-arousal**.



When we are inside our window of tolerance we can:

- manage our emotions
- think clearly
- be open and understanding
- be patient



Everyone has their own window of tolerance, shaped by their life experiences.



Some people have a big window of tolerance.

Some people have a small window of tolerance.



You can watch a YouTube video to help you see how the window of tolerance works.

Click this [blue YouTube link here](#) to watch the video.

2.8 Childhood and the window of tolerance



Frightening events can affect children more deeply than adults.

This is because children are still developing.



Children can have any of the 5 trauma responses:

- if they are somewhere there is a feeling of upset
- if they are managing difficult emotions by themselves



These responses are normally a helpful way to manage life.

But if the same responses become a habit even when there is nothing frightening, the responses can be unhelpful.



Click [this blue YouTube link](#) to watch a video about how trauma affects children.

2.9 Trauma-informed principles



Trauma-informed means thinking about the effect that trauma might have had on people.



It means spotting signs of trauma and being able to deal with that person sensitively.



There are 5 important values which make us trauma-informed.

These values are also called **principles**.



1. Safety – this means having a space that feels safe.



2. Trust – this means building relationships that are clear, kind and reliable.



3. Choice – this means giving a person chances to choose how they join in.

4. Collaboration – this means sharing decisions and encouraging respect between everyone.



5. Empowerment – this means valuing people's strengths and accepting their behaviours.

2.10 Trauma-informed practice with children and young people



Think about people who work with children and young people.

Are they using the 5 trauma-informed principles with the children and young people?



See if you can spot trauma-informed principles in this video.

Click on [this blue Vimeo link](#) to watch the video.

2.11 The Learning Outcomes – what you have learned



In Section 2 you have learned:

- how we describe trauma and the different types of trauma
- how to notice signs and effects of trauma
- the 5 trauma responses and the window of tolerance
- the 5 trauma-informed principles and what it means to be trauma-informed



This is the end of Section 2.

In this Easy Read document, we got pictures from:





We listen.



We care.



We love.

staf.scot



@stafscot

Published July 2025

Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (known as Staf) is a registered Scottish Charity SC030522
and Private Limited Company registered in Scotland SC286432.
Registered Head Office: Edward House, 2nd Floor, 199 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3EX