



CTRI

A LITTLE BOOK ABOUT
**Trauma-Informed
Workplaces**

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*We Envision a World Where
Everyone Is Trauma-Informed*

A project of the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute

A LITTLE BOOK ABOUT

Trauma-Informed Workplaces

*We Envision a World Where
Everyone Is Trauma-Informed*

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*To everyone who wants to make their
workplace more trauma-informed,
this book is for you.*

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INTRODUCTION

Trauma is prevalent in our world and impacts all of us, including our staff, colleagues, and clients. The effects of trauma can ripple across all areas of a person's life. Trauma often shapes our interactions and relationships at home and at work. It even affects whole organizations by impacting the ways in which we do our work, serve our clients, and achieve our missions.

Our workplaces can be negatively influenced by the pervasive power of trauma, and they can also unintentionally amplify its impacts. However, by embracing trauma-informed principles, our organizations can also contribute to the positive transformation of individuals and relationships affected by trauma.

Trauma-informed workplaces understand the presence of trauma, acknowledge the role trauma can play in a person's life, and promote work environments that support the individual and collective well-being of all staff and clients. They create a sense of belonging, connection, and safety through their attitudes, policies, and

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Every workplace, from any sector, can benefit from becoming trauma-informed.

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practices. As a result, organizations that are trauma-informed are more resilient and better able to achieve their missions.

On the other hand, workplaces that don't embody trauma-informed principles are often home to disrespectful behavior, a lack of safety, and feelings of disconnection. People can become isolated and may be influenced by an element of fear. Staff, clients, students, and customers are at a higher risk of having negative experiences.*

When organizations fail to consider the impact of trauma in their decisions, communications, and interactions with staff and clients,

* A note about language: While this book is for all types of workplaces, going forward we use the term “client,” which could also refer to a student, customer, or any other recipient of your services.

they risk affecting others in negative and sometimes harmful ways. Words that are meant to inspire may actually be deflating, and unthoughtful decisions or interactions may lead to unintended interpretations.

To establish more trauma-informed workplaces, we need to assess and, in some cases, adjust our ways of interacting, making decisions,



Key Trauma-Informed Principles

and communicating. We need to become vigilant about the *how*: How do we communicate in trauma-informed ways? How do we make decisions from a trauma-informed perspective?

Becoming trauma-informed is not a simple, straightforward process – it may take an organization in multiple directions instead of on a linear path. It takes hard work, and there may be successes in one area followed by setbacks in another. Just as the impacts of trauma are complex, the implementation of trauma-informed principles can be complicated. But by working intentionally and asking thoughtful questions, the process can be navigated with care and consideration.

Our organization, the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI), offers training and resources that provide people with the knowledge and tools needed to create trauma-informed workplaces and communities. We envision a world where everyone is trauma-informed, and given the amount of time many people spend at work, we believe that embracing trauma-informed principles in our

workplaces is a crucial step toward bringing about this reality. We have worked hard to embody these principles in our own organization and are committed to helping others create trauma-informed workplace cultures.

Our goal in providing this book is to help individuals, organizations, and communities become more trauma-informed because we believe that will make the world a better place. It's important to highlight that we wrote this book for *all* workplaces, not just social service and health care organizations. *Every* workplace, from any sector, can benefit from becoming trauma-informed.

Perhaps your organization already embraces trauma-informed principles and you want to be intentional about helping it remain that way. Or maybe your workplace has room to improve, but you are looking for a place to start. In our own experience, and in our work with others, we have identified five key principles that trauma-informed organizations embody:

- Promote awareness
- Shift attitudes
- Foster safety
- Provide choice
- Highlight strengths

After providing a general introduction to what trauma is, the rest of this book explores each of these areas in more detail. While we've written about these five principles in distinct sections, there is much overlap between them in the real world of trauma and complex human interaction, so it's helpful to remember that they interrelate. Reflection questions are provided at the end of each chapter, which we encourage you to explore on your own and with others in your organization.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

The word *trauma* is associated with many different experiences. These can include distinct threatening or distressing events such as accidents, wars, natural disasters, or devastating losses. Broader and recurring experiences of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and persistent doses of fear and stress within negative relationships or toxic work environments can also have a traumatic effect on people.

Trauma occurs when a person or group is confronted with a threat to themselves or others and that threat overwhelms their coping resources, evoking responses of intense helplessness, distress, or fear for personal safety. Defensive and protective responses are controlled by survival instincts, resulting in recurring patterns of fight, flight, or freeze behaviors. As a result, there is an interference in the person's, organization's, or community's ability to function well or adapt effectively.

The impact of an overwhelmingly threatening experience can be incredibly pervasive and

Trauma is a wound –
often an invisible wound.

affect a person's physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual health. The pervasiveness of trauma and its widespread impact on a person's life may be hidden under physical, emotional, or behavioral symptoms that don't get recognized for what they are. At first glance, it's not always clear that someone's current perspective or life choices are being influenced by past traumatic experiences.

It can be helpful to think of *trauma as a wound – often an invisible wound* – that requires active attention. If not recognized or directly attended to, the injury can deepen and become multilayered, which may lead to deepening symptoms and, in some situations, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Without recognition and proper care, the complex impacts of trauma can be mistaken by others for inherent characteristics of a person or group.

It is important to note that the perception of any event is unique to each individual who experiences it. For example, two people may witness the same tragedy but experience very different effects, with one being affected by lasting trauma and another not. The specific impacts can vary in type and intensity, manifesting across multiple areas of a person's life in ways that might not seem connected to the original experience.

Physical manifestations of trauma can include body fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and an exaggerated startle response. It may show up cognitively through responses such as negative and self-critical beliefs, difficulties with concentration, and recurring memories. Fluctuating and intense sensations, heightened anxiety, and helpless fear can dominate one's emotions. Relationships can also be challenging for a person impacted by trauma because they may have difficulty trusting others and experience a shattered sense of healthy boundaries. Trauma can also affect a person spiritually, resulting in a loss of meaning, purpose, and connection



Trauma's Ripple Effects

with one's culture or community.

All traumatic experiences have ripple effects across relationships and throughout the wider community. What happens to one individual will affect how they relate to others and how others relate to them. In this way, trauma is not just an individual experience. In particular, larger systemic occurrences (such as war, colonization, or racism) and community tragedies (such as natural disasters, economic declines,

pandemics, or health crises) can have a lingering traumatic impact not just on those who experienced them, but also on future generations. We may see these effects at an organizational and community level through increased isolation, polarized conflicts, increased physical or psychological violence, or disrespect for property and space.

Many factors can mitigate the effects of trauma. Given the amount of time people spend at work, trauma-informed workplaces are one of the key factors in trauma recovery. We can't always prevent people from experiencing trauma, but we *can* be courageous in our efforts to recognize and talk about it. It is through genuine human connection and compassion that the far-reaching impacts of trauma can be transformed from isolation and fear into resilience and growth.

Questions for Reflection

1. What have you added to your knowledge about trauma from this chapter?
2. Can you recognize the impact of trauma in your own life and relationships?
3. How have you seen the ripple effects of trauma impact your organization?

PROMOTE AWARENESS

In trauma-informed organizations, leaders and employees are aware of the pervasiveness of trauma and its significance in people's lives. They understand that when anyone's sense of well-being or survival is threatened, it can cause lasting emotional and psychological injury. They know that the subsequent effects will usually cause vulnerability and influence how staff and clients engage with supports, handle stress, perform their tasks, and simply maintain hope and energy to function.

Educating staff about trauma is integral to generating awareness. All those who work in the organization should be provided with opportunities to grow in their awareness of the prevalence and impacts of trauma and apply this learning to their work. The forms of education can vary from participating in interactive workshops to watching webinars or reading about trauma. *See page 53 for training topic ideas, book recommendations, and additional resources.*

It is through exploration, connection, and dialogue that we can become aware of our own errors in thinking and learn to understand trauma from different perspectives.

Organization-wide trauma-informed assessments can also be used to facilitate learning and discussion.* This can happen through online systems or with an in-person consultation that includes customized direction, surveys of staff opinions, and a report specific to your workplace.

Regardless of the specific route taken to promote awareness, training should encourage thoughtful reflection about trauma and explore how to create meaningful interactions. This is optimally done through relationship and connection with others. Here, staff can be exposed

* Access our free Trauma-Informed Workplace Assessment in the Free Resources section of our website at www.ctrinstitute.com.

to new ways of thinking about trauma and become more comfortable talking about it. This deepens the learning from just language about trauma to the embodiment of trauma-informed principles. It is through exploration, connection, and dialogue that we can become aware of our own errors in thinking and learn to understand trauma from different perspectives.

A natural result of promoting trauma awareness is that it will lead people to self-reflect and, in some cases, develop new understandings of their own personal traumas. This process can put some staff in emotionally vulnerable positions. That is why it's important to support staff in this process by offering safe spaces, providing opportunities for confidential debriefing, and creating meaningful self-care plans.

Another way organizations can promote awareness is by reflecting on the five trauma-informed principles (promote awareness, shift attitudes, foster safety, provide choice, highlight strengths) in their mission, vision, beliefs, and values. For example, CTRI's vision is "We envision a world where everyone is trauma-in-

formed,” which we share as widely as we can – even on the cover of this book!

It is important to note that you can reflect trauma-informed principles without having to use the word *trauma*. By highlighting these principles through both internal and external communications, workplaces demonstrate commitment and set a tone of trauma awareness. The result is that everyone who works for or connects with your organization is aware of its commitment to these principles.

In trauma-informed workplaces, policies should be evaluated and updated regularly with an eye toward enhancing trauma-informed principles. Feedback from staff and, if possible, clients should be included in this process. For example, in organizations that gather data, policies around how information is gathered should be adjusted with consideration for what promotes choice and safety during this process.

One of the best ways to promote long-term awareness is to bring new people into the organization who are already trauma-informed or have the desire to become so. Start by specif-

ically naming trauma-informed principles in job descriptions. When conducting interviews, ask questions that help assess the candidate's level of current awareness and their openness to further exploration and growth.



Awareness in Action

In working to promote awareness, it can be helpful to establish some form of ongoing “champion(s)” of trauma-informed principles in your workplace. This can take the form of a dedicated role within someone’s job description or the establishment of a committee. Champions are responsible for promoting trauma awareness and monitoring the organization’s evolving long-term progress in embracing trauma-informed principles.

A key element of trauma-informed workplaces is that they are intentional about *promoting awareness of trauma*. Becoming aware of trauma is not about taking on the role of a trauma specialist or assuming that everyone has a debilitating history of trauma. It is about being prepared for the possibility that someone has been impacted by trauma, preventing further harm, and understanding the role each of us can play in promoting individual and collective well-being. Promoting awareness helps people become more comfortable talking about trauma and better at understanding its impacts.

Questions for Reflection

1. How well do those in your organization understand trauma and its impacts on people?
2. Would the people served by your workplace feel there is positive support for those who have experienced trauma? How could it be expressed better?
3. What specific steps could your organization take to promote trauma awareness?

SHIFT ATTITUDES

While trauma awareness is valuable at a *knowledge* level, an *attitude* shift is necessary in order to change how we engage with people. By shifting attitudes, we are able to *put our awareness of trauma into action*. This shift impacts the questions we ask and creates a mindset of curious empathy that we can bring to our interactions. It is demonstrated by responding to people, organizations, and communities in ways that reflect awareness of the role trauma can have. When we shift our attitudes, our biases recede and healthy responses to trauma become the norm.

Traumatic experiences can cause people to react with the protective survival instincts of fight, flight, and freeze behaviors. Because these survival instincts can also emerge in everyday situations that aren't actually threatening, these behaviors are often misunderstood and difficult to respond to. While they are useful in the face of actual threats, they can come across as unhelpful or challenging when they

By shifting attitudes, we are able to put our awareness of trauma into action.

don't seem to match the situation.

When we recognize the possibility that trauma may be a factor in these behaviors, we can understand and approach them with an attitude of empathetic curiosity. For example, a coworker may try to protect themselves from the trauma of a difficult divorce by going into a “freeze” response when overwhelmed at work. This can result in them shutting down and withdrawing from people, being chronically late to work, closing themselves in their office, or missing meetings. Or, for another individual, a domestic breakdown could produce aggressive “fight” behaviors and cause them to become defensive in the face of seemingly harmless questions.

Being in the presence of someone who is reacting to a threat, whether it's real or per-

ceived, can significantly impact our own emotional state. We can get pulled down a parallel reactive spiral and into our own fight, flight, or freeze responses. Without a pause and an attitude shift, we are likely to respond with an emotion-led reaction that is counterproductive to the situation. Furthermore, reactive responses tend to be judgmental, which can damage the relationship, increase tension, or worse yet, cause further re-traumatization. This is where someone re-experiences the emotional and physical impacts associated with the original trauma.

One of our favorite sayings at CTRI is “Shift judgment to curiosity.” At the heart of this saying is a call to approach a person’s behavior with openness and curiosity. For example, instead of thinking “What is wrong with you?” when responding to a challenging behavior, consider “*What has happened* that might be leading to this behavior?” The problematic question “What is wrong with you?” reflects a reactive attitude that implies blame and a deficit in the person. In contrast, by withholding judg-



Shift Judgment to Curiosity

ment and taking a moment to internally wonder what has happened that could explain this behavior, we are acknowledging that trauma might be influencing this person. In this way we are separating the person from the behavior.

It is important that this approach is not practiced by just a few people, but by everyone. This shift from judgment to curious empathy may begin at the individual level, but as more people practice it, it will naturally spread throughout the workplace. However, different employees will require different levels of support and time to shift their attitudes and biases. There will be times when judgmental attitudes need to be challenged, and staff who are slow

to incorporate the shift in attitude will need to be coached.

Becoming a trauma-informed workplace is not about being perfect – it's about being honest about our shortcomings and looking for ways to improve. Through open exchange and dialogue, we can become more aware of our hidden biases and problematic ways of thinking. This has the effect of destigmatizing the sometimes challenging symptoms of trauma.

An enduring reality is that, despite our best efforts, we never fully arrive at a perfect attitude. Therefore, it is important to turn our attention toward continuous learning and dialogue with our peers about the impacts of trauma. By being intentional about shifting our attitudes and bringing curious empathy to all our interactions, workplaces can take the necessary steps to avoid re-traumatization and create environments that promote well-being for everyone.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have you seen fight, flight, and freeze responses result in unhelpful or challenging behaviors? What has been your response to these behaviors?
2. Is there a tone of empathetic curiosity toward challenging behaviors in your organization? If not, what could be done to encourage a more curious approach?
3. What biases or attitudes do you need to work on both personally and within your workplace to more effectively shift judgment to curiosity?

FOSTER SAFETY

One of the central aspects of trauma is the experience of a threat to physical or psychological safety. This threat can continue to affect a person's ability to feel fully safe in future environments and situations. When an organization does not give attention to safety, it can make both staff and clients vulnerable and create barriers to engagement. Therefore, fostering safety helps reduce the impact of past damaging experiences.

Fostering a safe environment requires paying close attention to the varying needs of different people. These can range from the physical, such as the need for adequate lighting and safety rails, to the psychological, which could include managing conflict or disrespectful behavior. It is important to consider both the physical *and* psychological elements of safety. Too often, those responsible for safety limit their focus to physical areas or only give token attention to psychological concerns. To counter this tendency, it can be helpful to be

intentional about providing a clear definition to those responsible for organizational safety. For example, the “Workplace Health and Safety Committee” can be described with a slogan such as, “Attending to physical *and* psychological health in our workplace.”

Safety protocols cannot be enacted from the top down or created in isolation without considering how they impact everyone in the organization – if they are, they will usually fail. Instead, safety is best fostered collectively in relationship with each other. In a sense, we co-create safe environments when each person within the organization takes on a responsibility to make safe decisions, and people believe others have their best interests in mind. Everyone needs to recognize that their decisions have ripple effects and impact others. In order to achieve this, leaders, safety officers, and committees need to consult widely in the development of policies and procedures.

In workplaces where people feel safe, they trust that decisions are being made with their safety in mind. Trust means that people can

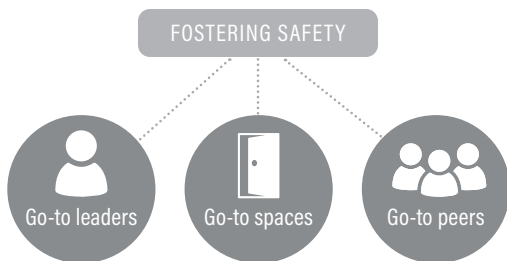
Safety protocols cannot be enacted from the top down or created in isolation – if they are, they will usually fail.

discuss safety concerns that really matter to them without fear of judgment. Building trusting relationships requires constant interaction and feedback among leadership, staff, and clients. That interaction must be characterized by listening, showing empathy, and demonstrating care for people.

Because of the power inherent in leadership positions, a leader's influence on safety is magnified. Therefore, trust in leaders' decision-making is a key component to helping staff and clients feel safe. However, leaders must first work to establish trust before employees will believe that the organization has their well-being in mind.

We have found that there are three “go-to” elements organizations should have in place to help generate psychological and physical safety:

- **Go-to leaders** are people with authority or influence who staff or clients have a trusting relationship with. Staff feel more motivated and confident to offer feedback freely when they have a healthy relationship with their supervisor or mentor. The same applies to clients interacting with staff – it is crucial to build strong relationships of reliability and trust. It reassures both staff and clients to have someone they can consult with in a position of authority, someone who is empathetic and understands their unique context.



"Go-to" Elements of Safety

- **Go-to spaces** are physical places where staff or clients can go if they feel overwhelmed or unstable. These are places where a person can be physically and psychologically comfortable, away from stress and work pressures. For example, schools often provide access to reading cubbies and sensory stimulation rooms for students. Safe spaces will look different for each worksite and industry and could be a staff room, meeting room, outside space, or even a personal office if designed with safety in mind. A key consideration for choosing a safe space in the workplace is that it is designed with accessibility and privacy in mind. It is helpful to clearly identify a safe space for people to use when needed.
- **Go-to peers** are people with whom we have camaraderie and can exchange mutual support within our work environments. These are safe and trusted people we feel confident raising difficult questions or concerns with, knowing

we will be met with respect and confidentiality. It is important for staff to take time to get to know each other and even have fun together. Meaningful relationships emerge when there are opportunities for staff to simply talk, eat together, joke around, and connect outside of work meetings. In safe workplaces, leaders value and encourage these sorts of connections.

Workplaces that foster safety are not immune to the risk of harmful things happening, but they do reduce this possibility. When organizations have a healthy level of safety and trust, people feel confident raising questions or concerns, knowing they will be met with respect and taken seriously. When we include a focus on building relationships characterized by trust in our safety planning, we encourage strong, healthy, and resilient workplaces.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways does your organization feel physically safe? Are there ways in which it feels unsafe? How could you work to improve physical safety?
2. In what ways does your organization feel psychologically safe? Are there ways in which it feels unsafe? How could you work to improve psychological safety?
3. To what extent do staff and clients trust the decisions made by leaders? How could the level of trust be improved?

PROVIDE CHOICE

Another significant aspect of traumatic events is the lack of choice and control that people experience. The helplessness felt in an overwhelmingly threatening situation can leave lasting imprints on a person's sense of power to take back control over their lives. Therefore, it's important for trauma-informed workplaces to provide *meaningful* opportunities for choice.

It's not uncommon for staff or clients to feel powerless and unable to influence the way they do their work or receive an organization's services. Effectively creating opportunities for choice requires all leadership and staff to work collaboratively and strive toward what's best for everyone, not just what's best for a few.

One way to think about providing choice is to shift from holding *power over* to sharing *power with* others. A *power with* approach grows out of relationships that are built on mutual respect and support. Organizations can increase opportunities for choice among staff and clients by mindfully considering how power is

distributed and managed in the workplace and sharing power where possible.

Offering opportunities for choice can be a juggling act of consulting, reconciling differences, and sharing responsibility. Providing staff and clients with choices means respecting their unique identities and affirming the natural diversity among individuals and communities. It means intentionally inviting minority voices and those with less organizational power to share their experiences and suggestions. At times, it will require us to respect the choices and voices that run contrary to – or even challenge – the status quo. These challenging voices are to be expected, and it is through these conversations that we can begin to create healthier, more trauma-informed workplaces.



Move to a Power With Approach

Trauma-informed workplaces provide *meaningful* opportunities for choice.

When staff are able to exercise personal choice and control – for example, over how they do their work or organize their workspace – it increases their sense of ownership over their role and their work. As a result, they will take more responsibility for improving their workplace. And when clients experience interactions that are more collaborative, it can lead to a variety of positive effects for them and your organization.

For example, organizations in the social service and health care fields can increase client collaboration by providing options for self-managed care. This improves client motivation and participation because they have more choice over the services they receive. A client who has the power to select and reject services based on what they find most beneficial will involve themselves more fully in the supports they do choose, making services

more efficient for both the organization and the client. Any organization can increase client choice by providing options for how people receive their services.

Intentionally mapping the journey of an employee or client as they connect with your organization can be a useful exercise for gaining insight into how to increase choices and avoid pain points for staff and clients. This will look very different for every organization and industry, but the exercise is applicable to all settings.

Using a client's experience as an example, start by thinking about the moment a person becomes aware of your organization and has their initial interaction with it. Who greets them as they enter your workspace? What information do they receive about accepting and receiving services or purchasing and receiving products? What do they see and experience physically? How do services continue and end? The sum total of these touchpoints contributes to and influences the overall feeling of a relationship with your organization.

Each touchpoint can inspire confidence, re-

assuring and supporting your client. Or, these interactions can cause pain, frustration, and even re-traumatization. By gathering detailed feedback from multiple perspectives and learning what it's like to walk in the shoes of a client or staff member, you can discover both the positive experiences and stressors of those who interact with your organization. For example, through this process you might learn that you need to provide a safer waiting room space or you might gain insight into the pressures clients experience to accept services before they fully understand them.

Because of the significant loss of choice in any traumatic experience, the actions that organizations take to avoid pain points and increase client and staff control can be powerfully reparative. Providing opportunities for choice helps to prevent one-size-fits-all approaches to problem-solving. Valuing opinions from a range of perspectives and being willing to change adds to the trauma-informed depth in an organization.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does your organization offer staff and clients choices about how they do their work and receive your services?
How meaningful is the level of choice that people receive?
2. How does your workplace consider the unique identities and natural diversity of people and communities in the way it offers services or products?
3. Consider the journey of someone who engages with your organization. How do the various touchpoints they might have with you contribute to and influence an overall feeling of choice in their relationship with your organization?

HIGHLIGHT STRENGTHS

Every person has inherent strengths that help them survive. For people who have come through traumatic experiences, highlighting strengths is especially relevant because it helps to emphasize and build up their inherent resilience. After all, they have survived *because of their strengths* and have found new and creative ways to live and overcome obstacles.

Unfortunately, rather than focusing on strengths, organizations sometimes emphasize the differences, problems, and weaknesses of staff and clients. This can lead to withdrawal, low morale, disconnection, and, at worst, re-traumatization. However, when we identify what is going well and build on these successes, the powers of resilience and connection can take hold and flourish.

When we focus on strengths and use language that reflects what a person is doing well – not just their problems or symptoms – we contribute to their resilience and ability to flourish. Resiliency is the ability to survive and



Focus on What's Working Well

adapt in the face of stress and adverse life experiences, and it is extremely valuable for healing from trauma. Organizations that find ways to highlight strengths increase resiliency not just in individuals, but throughout the whole workplace.

Unfortunately, many people do not know their own strengths or have limited knowledge of them. Because of this, we recommend that leaders, staff, and clients engage in intentional conversations in which people evaluate and verbalize their own strengths. In addition, we

Feeling proud and
secure in our identity
is crucial for our
ability to thrive.

have found that using formal strengths assessment tools generates productive and healthy conversations.

To highlight strengths in others, acknowledge when you notice someone doing something well. This can be done verbally or in written form. Sometimes it can be beneficial to do this in front of others. Most of us appreciate receiving acknowledgment or being noticed for strengths, and it motivates us to do more of whatever earned us the praise. Acknowledging strengths leads people to become more confident, resourceful, resistant to burnout, and able to access their full potential. It's important that these messages are authentic and applied to concrete examples – not just generalized praise. Specific feedback conveys a deeper sense

of appreciation, helps the person see clearly what they are doing well, and is more likely to be valued.

An important way that organizations can honor the unique strengths of their staff and clients is by celebrating their diversity. Our sense of identity – which may include multiple areas such as culture, race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, and sexual identities – is central to who we are as people. For everyone, and especially for those who have experienced trauma, feeling proud and secure in our identity is crucial for our ability to thrive. Workplaces can help in this process by highlighting the strengths found in diversity.

Unique individual and collective strengths can be found by getting to know each other and recognizing the inherent resources and resilience each person brings. When we learn about and engage with experiences and perspectives that differ from our own, our biases are corrected and we become more respectful of differences, breaking down barriers that can cause tension and conflict.

Workplaces can enhance respect for diversity by using sensitive language, providing diversity training, and creating opportunities and space for diversity activities. Both staff and clients will feel more comfortable and committed to an organization when their diversity and cultures are honored and respected.

Organizations can also highlight the importance of diversity by using visual reminders of their support for diversity. For example, in our entryway at CTRI we have a welcome sign in multiple languages, a rainbow flag, and an Indigenous drum we received through our relationship with a local Indigenous organization. We display these to show support to our staff and clients from diverse communities. It's important to remember that visual reminders are symbols and not a replacement for authentic respect for diversity.

When an organization focuses on strengths first, it enhances resilience, connection, and understanding. Staff and clients become more respectful of differences when they see diversity as a strength. Instead of seeing differences as

barriers to connection, they become individual and collective elements to be proud of. This enables people to develop new and empowered ways of relating and being in community together. Focusing on strengths creates a natural pattern in which additional opportunities to identify and foster resilience emerge.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does your organization help staff and clients consider what their strengths are?
2. What is your workplace doing to affirm strengths in staff and clients?
3. In what ways is diversity seen as a strength in your organization? Are there practical ways in which you can better honor the unique identities of people in your workplace?

THE PATH FORWARD

We envision a world where everyone is trauma-informed, and our hope is that this book will help your organization join us on this path. We offer the five principles in this little book as a starting place for evaluating your workplace and beginning your journey. While we have outlined them in distinct sections, *applying* them is anything but linear. The process of becoming trauma-informed is a unique path with a different timeline for each of us and every organization.

For some of you, it will be clear after reading this book that there is a lot of work to be done in order to become a more trauma-informed workplace. If this is the case, begin by looking for places where you can make simple changes. Start with your strengths and consider initiatives that have gone well in the past to build on what you have already done or learned. Keep in mind that promoting trauma awareness is the key that can open people's eyes to understanding how impactful trauma can be. Awareness is crucial for initiating commitment and adding

The process of becoming trauma-informed will take more than just hope and ideals.

motivational energy to the process.

Sometimes it may feel that when you take a positive step in one area, you're not making progress elsewhere or even backsliding. This process is a long one that will take more than just hope and ideals. Creating and sustaining a highly trauma-informed workplace will require a serious investment of time and energy. To help sustain your efforts, be intentional about celebrating the small successes, both individually and as an organization.

There is likely to be some resistance to the changes needed to become a more trauma-informed workplace. At times you might feel alone in this journey, but remember that, more often than not, others are just at different stages in the process. Be patient with colleagues who are slower to embrace trauma-informed principles, and remember that a cynic today can

become an advocate tomorrow.

A world where everyone is trauma-informed will not come about overnight. In challenging times, focus your energy on what is within your power to change and maintain your focus on the collective well-being of everyone. By continuing to build on the strengths of your organization and listening carefully to staff and clients, you will be resilient in the face of these challenges. Stay curious and keep your eye on the five principles we've outlined to provide a guide throughout your journey.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are small changes you could make today to implement the five trauma-informed principles?
2. What strengths could you build on within your organization when it comes to working in trauma-informed ways?
3. If your workplace is already demonstrating these five trauma-informed principles, how can you continue to reinforce them? What do you need to be vigilant about preventing?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blog

For more resources, we encourage you to check out our blog where you will find many articles on the topic of trauma. You can find our blog and subscribe to it by visiting the Free Resources section of our website at www.ctrinstitute.com.

Books

Counseling Insights: Practical Strategies for Helping Others with Anxiety, Trauma, Grief, and More

edited by Vicki Enns (ACHIEVE Publishing, 2018)

Written for counselors and helpers, this book has chapters on developmental trauma and situational trauma and incorporates a trauma-informed approach into all chapters.

The Culture Question: How to Create a Workplace Where People Like to Work by Randy Grieser, Eric Stutzman, Wendy Loewen, and Michael Labun (ACHIEVE Publishing, 2019)

Many of the insights and principles highlighted in this book embody the trauma-informed principles discussed in *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces*.

Free Trauma-Informed Workplace Assessment

Are you looking for a more accurate picture of your organization's approach to trauma-informed principles? CTRI has a free Trauma-Informed Workplace Assessment available in the Free Resources section of our website. This assessment normally takes between two and five minutes to complete. You will be provided with a report that will help you evaluate, understand, and discuss your organization's approach to trauma-informed principles.

Organization-Wide Assessment

Facilitating an organization-wide assessment that involves all employees will give you collective clarity when evaluating your organization's trauma-informed awareness and practice. Only when you have a clear picture of where you are now can you decide where you'd like to be in the future. We specialize in conducting assessments and assisting organizations as they plan for their desired future. Contact us to learn more and discuss the possibilities.

Training

CTRI offers over 50 workshops, all developed from a trauma-informed perspective. We also have two workshops based on this book: *Trauma-Informed Care – Building a Culture of Strength* and *Trauma-Informed Leadership*. You can attend these as open-enrollment public workshops, view them online, or if you have a group of people to train, one of our facilitators can deliver the workshops just for you, either online or at your location. Learn more about our training options by visiting our website.

For more information:

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PHOTO BY LUKE WHITMORE

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Nathan Gerbrandt, Randy Grieser, and Vicki Enns are leaders at the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute. At the heart of their work is a belief that everyone should be trauma-informed. They are passionate about inspiring learning and improving lives. Find their latest thoughts on their blogs at:

CTRINSTITUTE.COM

THEORDINARYLEADER.COM

Every workplace, from any sector,
can benefit from becoming trauma-
informed.

Trauma-informed workplaces understand and recognize the presence of trauma, acknowledge the role trauma can play in a person's life, and promote work environments that support the individual and collective well-being of all staff and clients. As a result of these practices, organizations that are trauma-informed are more resilient and better equipped to achieve their mission.

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