



Written and Oral Strategies for Building Trust and Reducing Harm

CLEAR Toronto Symposia

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Eden Dales, B.A., M.S.W., R.S.W.

Practice Director | Eden Dales Social Work



Understanding Trauma

“Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event” (CAMH)

Trauma reactions are NORMAL responses to ABNORMAL circumstances.





TRIGGERING: TRAUMA IS A SENSITIVE TOPIC

Today's training involves discussions on trauma, which may bring up sensitive topics. Please feel safe to leave at any point if you need to; there will be no judgment. In fact, taking care of yourself is commendable. This is an exercise in self-compassion and models the importance of self-regulation during distress.

THIS IS BASED ON SCIENCE. THIS IS HAPPENING GLOBALLY.

The ideas and concepts shared today are grounded in science and years of research on trauma. Thankfully, our understanding of trauma's effects on the brain is expanding, allowing us to improve how we approach it.

STAYING IN MY LANE: I AM NOT ADDRESSING YOUR ROLE

I am not here to suggest or influence any aspects of your professional role—that is outside my expertise. My focus is on how people feel in your presence, the way you deliver messages, and your mindset when reading their reports or listening to their stories. Success in this training means that you leave here more mindful, compassionate, and trauma-informed, so that when reading reports or hearing stories, you do not simply think, “more excuses.”

ABOUT ME:

EDEN DALES B.A., M.S.W., R.S.W.

REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKER FOR 20+ YEARS

DIRECTOR, EDSW-COMMUNITY BASED SOCIAL WORK MVA/TRAUMA PRACTICE

EDUCATOR, COSTI AGENCY GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PROJECT

COMMENCED CAREER AS SW AT NYC TRAUMA CENTER DURING 9/11

TRAINED IN COUPLES THERAPY, CBT, DBT, MBSR, TRAUMA THERAPY ETC.

TRAINED IN TRAUMA INFORMED CARE, TRAUMA INFORMED LAWYERING

FAN OF COUNTRY MUSIC, THE DEAD AND SPRINGSTEEN



The following ideas are offered as reflective points, not policy prescriptions. We recognize that regulators work within legal mandates and finite resources. These suggestions aim to open dialogue on how to integrate empathy without compromising rigor.

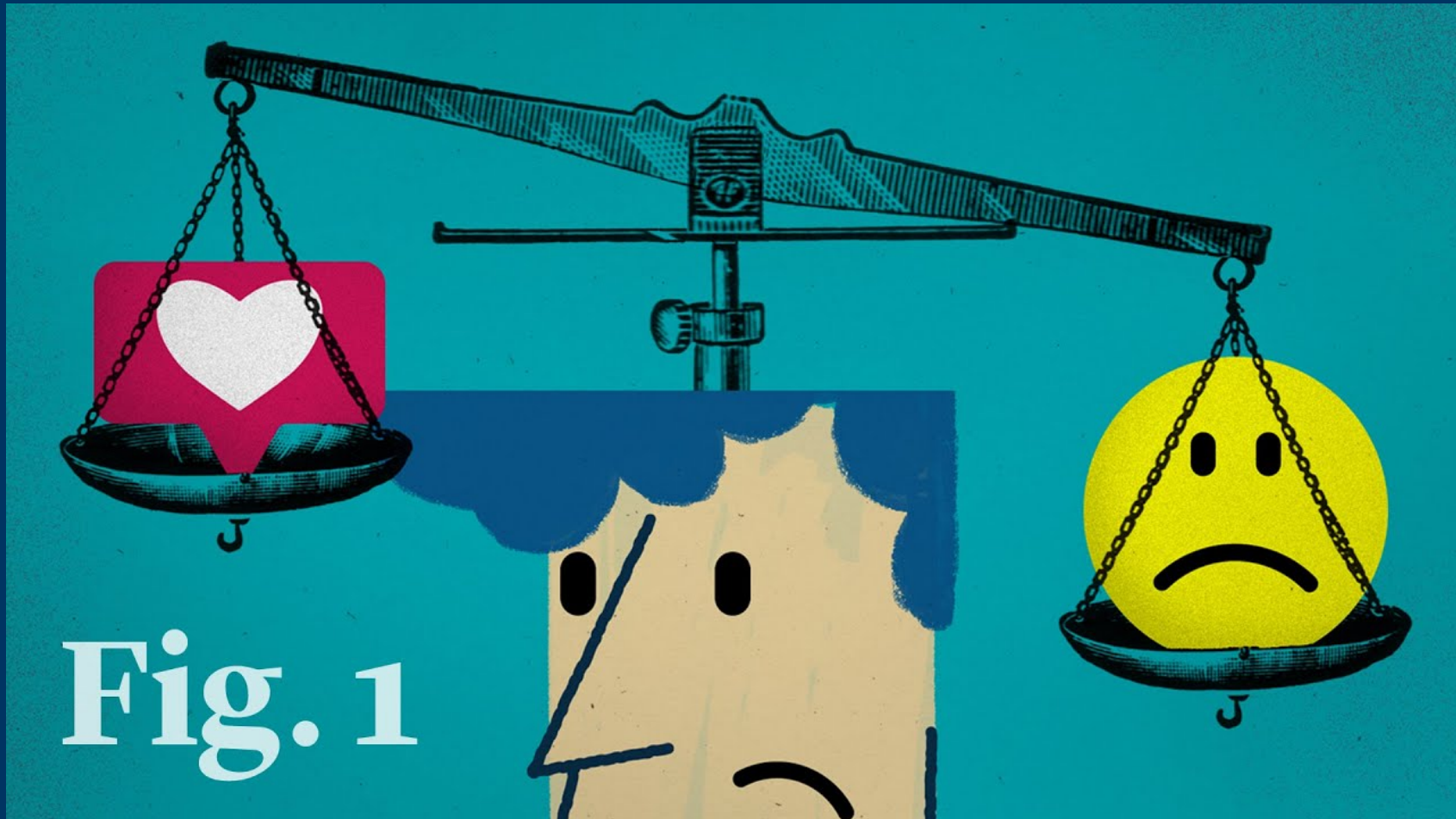
CORE MESSAGES: Trauma Informed Care Training

Trauma-informed care isn't about softness—it's about strategy. It's about how *you* show up in high-pressure situations. Your anger and dismissiveness may be survival tactics, but they are not effective leadership. The legal profession now demands something more.

Let me be clear—this isn't about coddling clients or peers. This is about **mastery**—emotional mastery. You can't advocate well if you can't regulate yourself. You can't build trust if your ego's running the show. That's what trauma-informed care really is—it's self-awareness in action.

Video:

Our Thinking Patterns and World View is Shaped by Our Experience (+ and -)



► I'm in my lane — a social worker. You are in your lane — a regulator.

► We each stay in our lane. This isn't about **what** work you do; it's about **how** you do your work.

► Offering trauma-informed options does not interfere with investigation timelines or compromise outcomes.

► It can, in fact, reduce avoidance, non-compliance, and complaints about regulatory bodies themselves.

- **A regulator** might say:
- *"We're not therapists."*
- A trauma-informed response could be: *"Correct — your lane is public protection and fairness. But staying trauma-aware while doing that helps reduce distress and improves outcomes."*

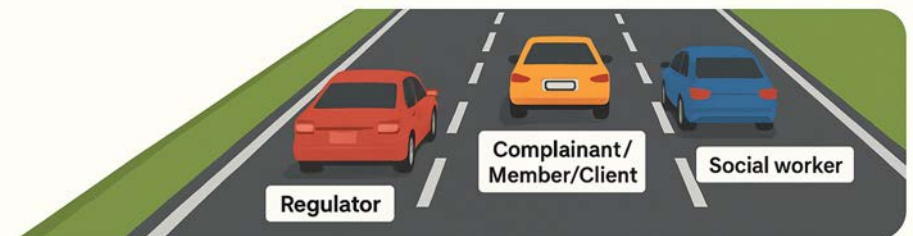
- **A social worker** might be tempted to "fix" a legal problem instead of empowering the client to consult legal support. Asking *"Whose lane am I in?"* helps reset their role as supporter, not solver.

Whose lane are you in?

"Stay in your lane" = Know and respect your own responsibilities, and don't overstep into others' roles or areas of authority

"Whose lane are you in?" = A reflective question that challenges someone to consider whether they are:

- Taking over responsibilities that are not theirs
- Avoiding their own responsibilities
- Making assumptions about another person's experience or expertise



6 GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

The CDC's [Center for Preparedness and Response \(CPR\)](#), in collaboration with SAMHSA's [National Center for Trauma-Informed Care \(NCTIC\)](#), developed and led a new training for CPR employees about the role of trauma-informed care during public health emergencies. The training aimed to increase responder awareness of the impact that trauma can have in the communities where they work.

Participants learned SAMHSA'S six principles that guide a trauma-informed approach, including:



Adopting a trauma-informed approach is not accomplished through any single particular technique or checklist. It requires constant attention, caring awareness, sensitivity, and possibly a cultural change at an organizational level. On-going internal organizational assessment and quality improvement, as well as engagement with community stakeholders, will help to imbed this approach which can be augmented with organizational development and practice improvement. The training provided by [CPR](#) and [NCTIC](#) was the first step for CDC to view emergency preparedness and response through a trauma-informed lens.

Consider Your Impact on Others....Consider how you are about to make someone feel

- ▶ Exercise: Connecting to this moment
- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Emotional literacy
 - ▶ Exercise: Emotional impact assessment
 - ▶ Exercise: Trauma-informed communication in writing
 - ▶ Exercise: Trauma-informed phone call
- ▶ The relationship to ourselves
- ▶ Core principles of trauma-informed communication
- ▶ Trauma-informed language
- ▶ Triggering language and re-traumatization
- ▶ Paying attention to power in language and communication
- ▶ Conclusion

Meditation for Peace: Chelsea Jackson

Center Yourself



GOLDEN RULE #2:

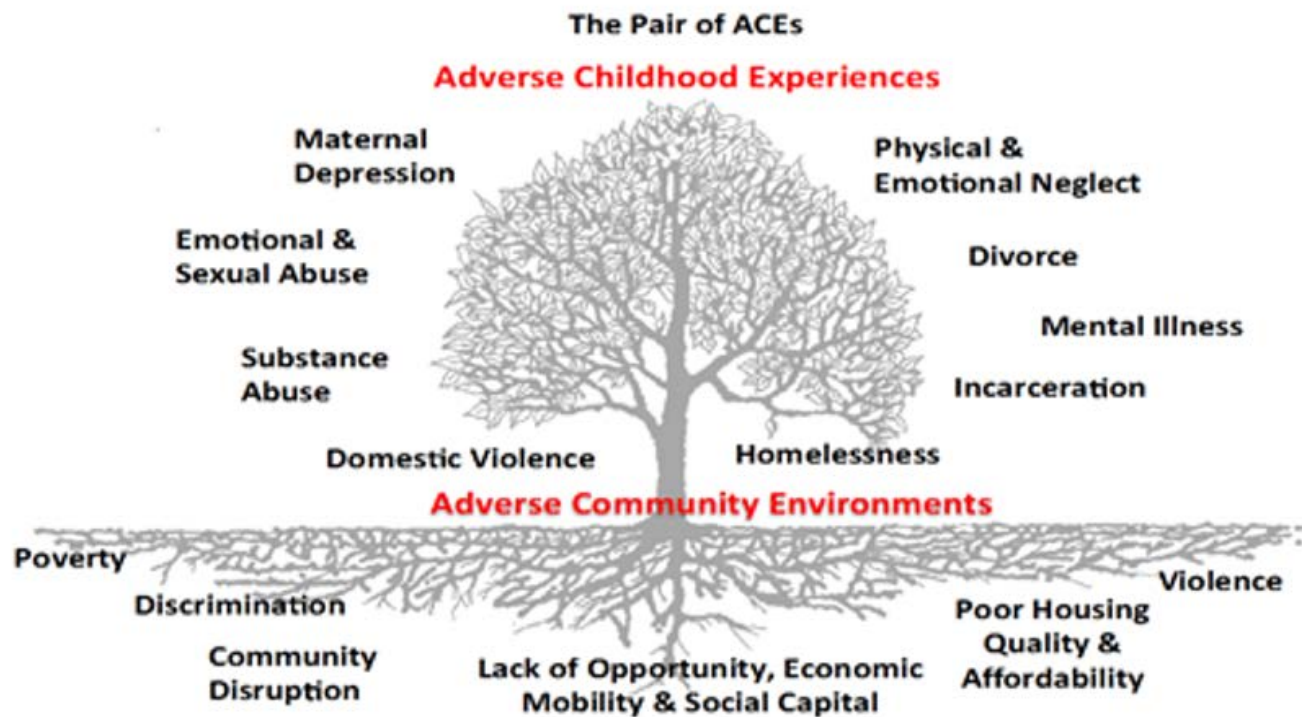
No Complaining, Blaming, Judging in your thoughts or words

Briefly: Those in Need of the Most Love and Support often Behave in the Most Unlikable of Ways

Nine times out of 10,
the story behind the
misbehavior won't
make you angry;
it will break your
heart.

-Annette Breaux

CreativeChild



Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. Academic Pediatrics. 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011



Trauma Event



Trauma Experience



Trauma Effect

The Three "E's" of Trauma

1

Event

- Actual physical or psychological harm
- Extreme threat of harm
- Severe neglect for a child

2

Experience

- Experience of event as 'traumatic' varies by individual
- Feeling of powerlessness
- Linked to a range of factors- culture, social support, developmental stage

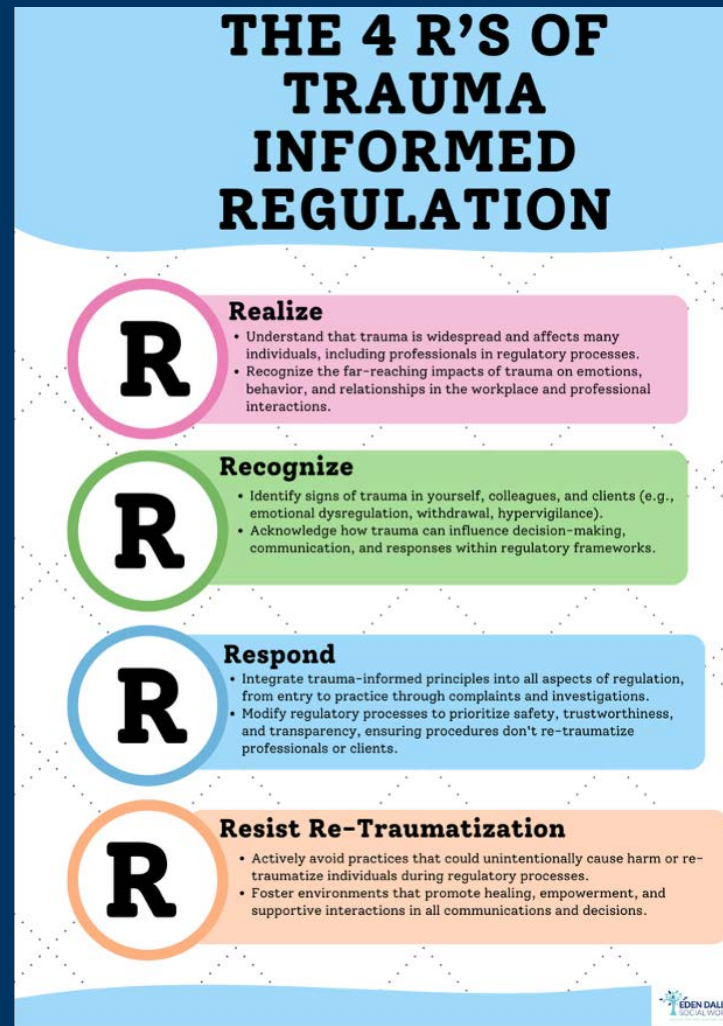
3

Effect

- Can be immediate or delayed onset
- Duration can be short or long-term
- Impacted individual may not recognize the connections between the traumatic events and the effects

Source: SAMHSA'S Concept of Trauma and Guidance for Trauma-Informed Approach, 2014

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Communication





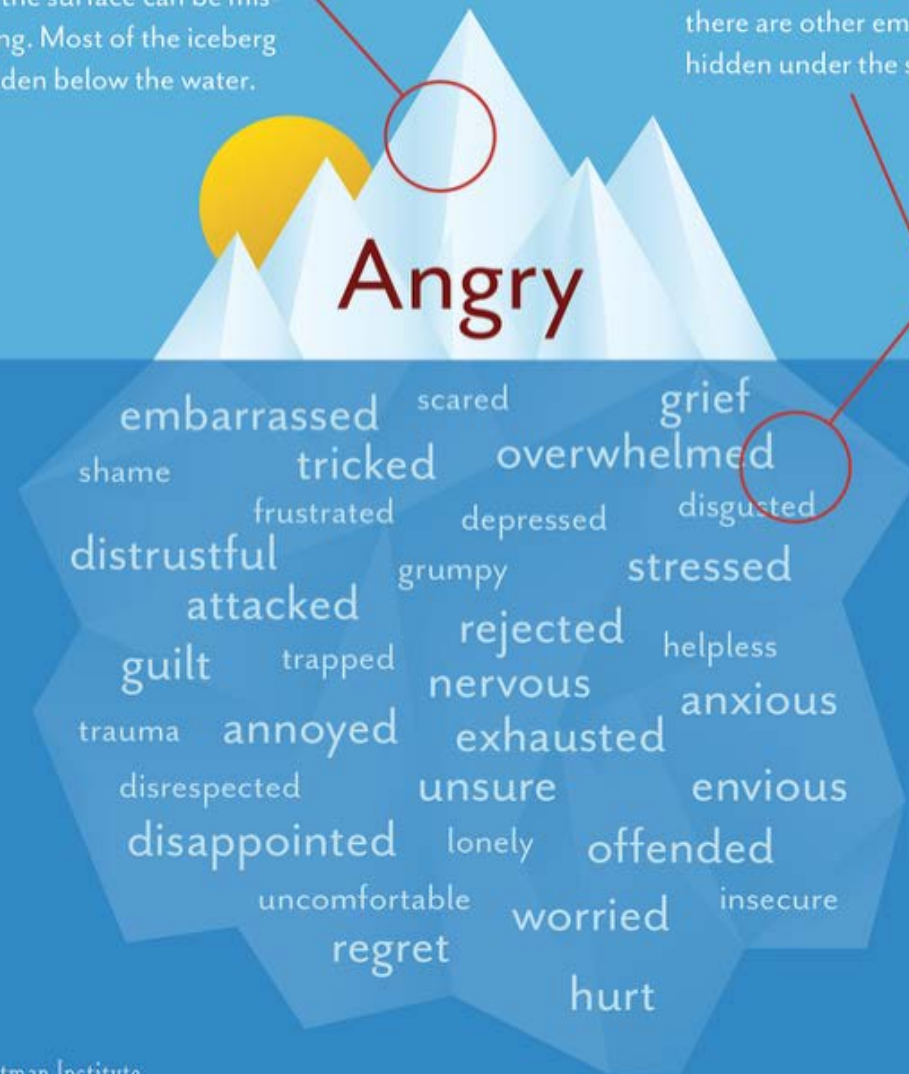
Anger Iceberg

Icebergs are large pieces of ice found floating in the open ocean. What you can see from the surface can be misleading. Most of the iceberg is hidden below the water.

This is how anger works. Often when we are angry, there are other emotions hidden under the surface.

Grief and Trauma
Associated with
Regulation/Loss of
Identity:

*Consider complex
emotions beneath
“problematic” responses*



The Gottman Institute

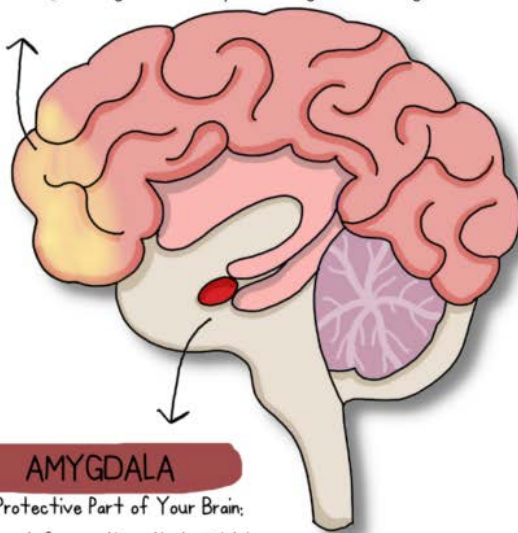
Your Thoughtful & Protective BRAIN

 WholeHearted School Counseling

PREFRONTAL CORTEX (PFC)

The Thoughtful Part of Your Brain Helps You To:

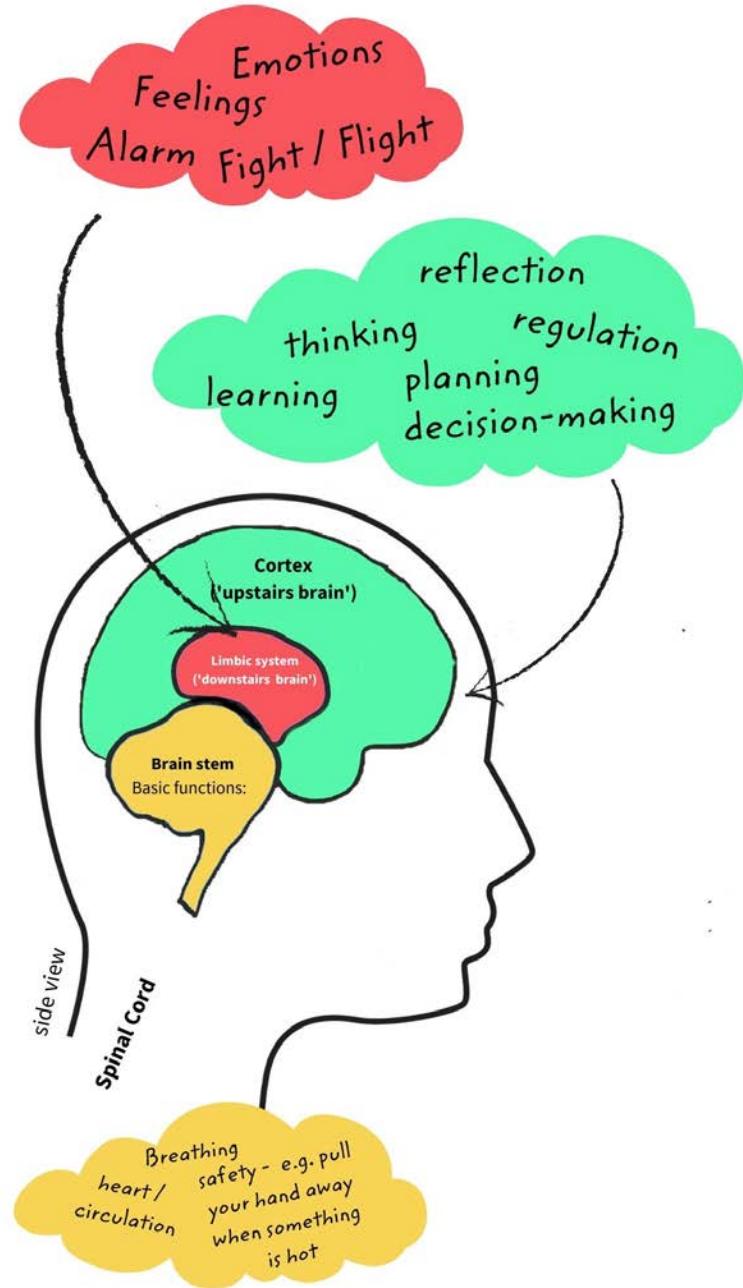
- ✓ Make smart choices and think before you act.
- ✓ Set goals and make plans.
- ✓ Problem solve and find solutions.
- ✓ Recognize and understand emotions.
- ✓ Treat others, and yourself, with kindness.
- ✓ Take good care of your feelings (or self-regulate).



AMYGDALA

The Protective Part of Your Brain:

- ✓ Watches out for anything that might harm you.
- ✓ Tries to protect you and keep you safe.
- ✓ Prepares your body for the Fight-Flight-Freeze stress response.
- ✓ Creates big emotions.
- ✓ Shuts down your PFC when it is activated.



Interpreting Behavior Under Stress: A Trauma-Informed Perspective for Regulators

Stress Impairs Learning, Memory & Response

- Chronic Stress and Cognitive Function
High stress impairs attention, processing, memory, and executive functioning — making it harder to concentrate, retain information, and make decisions.
- Stress and Memory Retrieval
Stress can enhance memory encoding but impairs recall, especially under pressure — like during exams, investigations, or testimony.

Understanding the Freeze Response

- Freeze Response in Trauma
Immobilization, silence, or disorganization is a physiological response to perceived threat — not a sign of dishonesty or non-compliance.
- Implications for Investigations
When someone appears frozen, forgetful, or disorganized, do not assume they are evasive or deceitful.

→ A trauma-informed approach interprets this as a stress response, not misconduct.

Emotional Illiteracy: How Complex Emotions Get Misinterpreted as Misconduct / lacking credibility (ASSUMPTIONS VS. FACTS)



Emotional Literacy is required for **Empathy**.



Empathy is required for **Trauma Informed Practice**.



Trauma Informed Practice is required for **Change**.

Emotional Impact Assessment: Compassionate Imagery Exercise

Begin by

- Begin by getting comfortable. Close your eyes and place your hands over your heart. Take three deep breaths to center yourself.

Set Up

- Set Up you are a nurse (or insert a relevant profession here) who has just completed a long and strenuous 12-hour shift.

Feel

- Feel the physical and mental exhaustion you feel after a demanding workday. Hold this image with compassion.

Imagine

- Imagine returning home to your three young children, all under the age of 10, waiting for your attention. They're tired, hungry, and eager to see you.

Experience

- Experience the hunger in your own belly from missing meals at work. Notice the pain in your feet from standing all day, and the stress of trying to meet everyone's needs as soon as you arrive.

Imagine

- NOW that you are HUNGRY ANGRY LONELY + TIRED: imagine opening your mail and seeing a formal letter notifying you of a complaint against your professional conduct.

Reflection

Emotional Reflection

- **Reflect** on the **emotions** that come up for you in this scenario.
- **Focus** on how you feel reading the complaint at this moment of physical and mental exhaustion.
- **Sit** in this reflection for a few minutes, allowing yourself to fully experience and acknowledge each emotion.

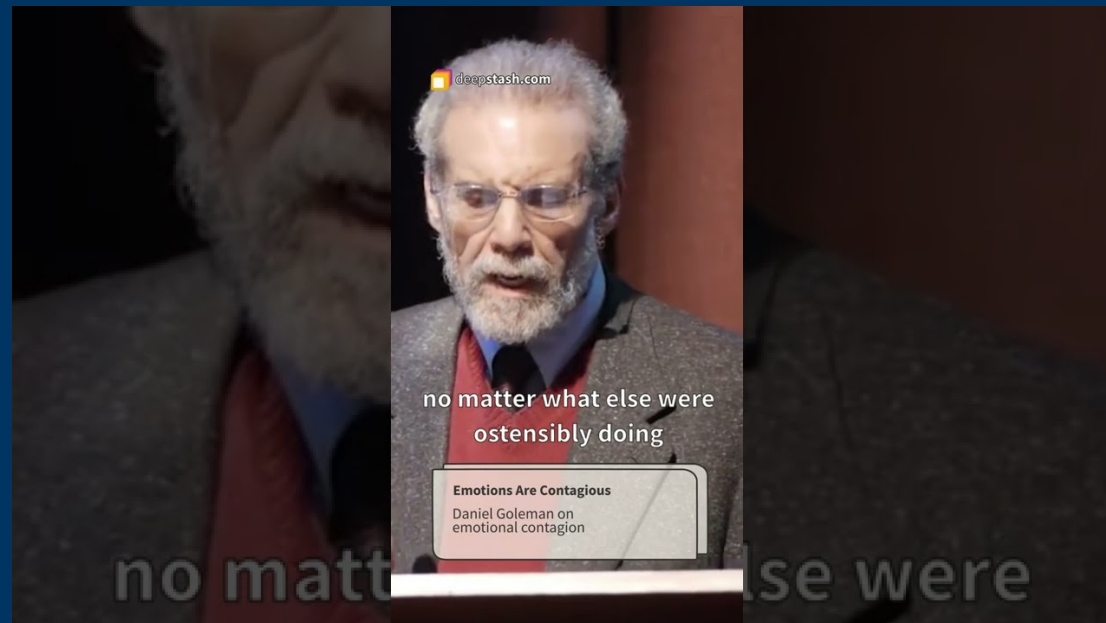
Discussion and Debrief

- **List** the emotions you felt during this exercise on a piece of paper.
- **Share** your emotions (if you want to) with the group.
- **Notice** Compassion, empathy or void...
- **Discuss** how these feelings could affect your ability to respond to such a complaint.





Mirror Neurons+ Co-Regulation



Understanding Co-regulation Skills (*Mirror Neurons*) Helps:

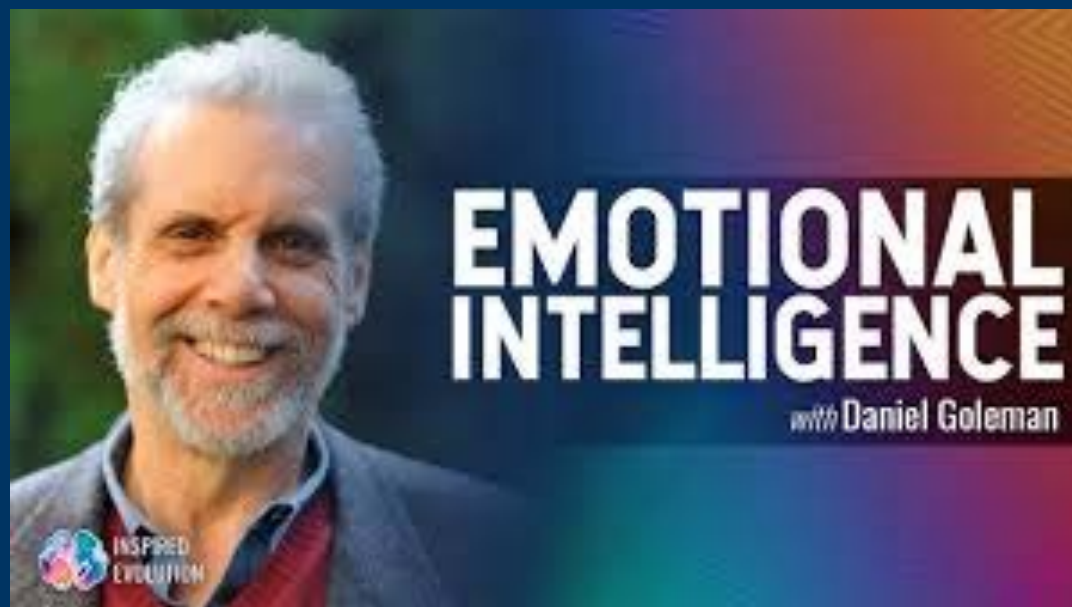
- Enhance Empathy + Understanding
- Reduces risk of re-traumatization
- Builds trust + Cultural Understanding/Compassion
- Reinforces validation, empathy, compassion

	Recognition	Regulation
Personal Competence	Self-Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-confidence Awareness of your emotional state Recognising how your behaviour impacts others Paying attention to how others influence your emotional state 	Self-Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check Acting in congruence with your values Handling change flexibly Pursuing goals and opportunities despite obstacles and setbacks
Social Competence	Social Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picking up on the mood in the room Caring what others are going through Hearing what the other person is "really" saying 	Relationship-Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting along with others Handling conflict effectively Clearly expressing ideas/information Using sensitivity to another person's feeling (empathy) to manage interactions successfully

*"In emotionally intelligent investigations, we move from judgment to curiosity — from blame to understanding. Emotional intelligence, as Goleman taught, is about tuning in. **Trauma-informed regulation asks us to tune in without compromising accountability.**"*

"Emotional intelligence begins to develop when we ask not just 'What's wrong with them?' but 'What's happening to them?'"

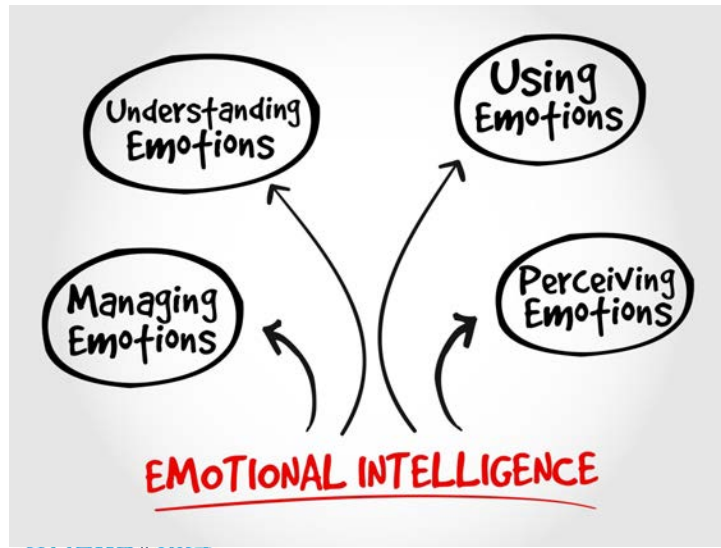
— Adapted from Daniel Goleman's work on empathy and awareness



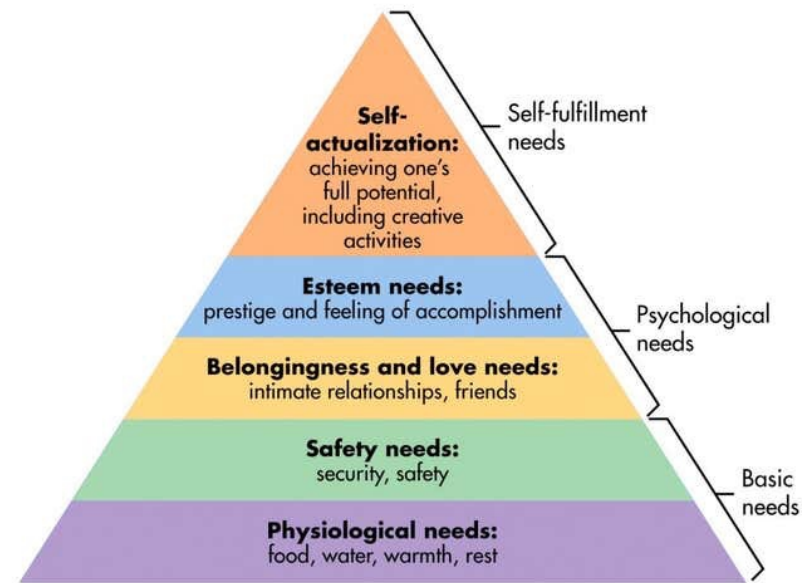
“If we want the public — and professionals — to trust the regulatory process, we must trust ourselves to lead with emotional intelligence. This doesn’t mean being soft. It means being attuned. Because regulation isn’t just procedural — it’s deeply human.”

Emotional Literacy + Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence by Mayer, John D. Caruso, David R. Salovey, Peter



What Is Self-Actualization? Meaning, Theory + Examples



“To you, it’s your day job. To them, it might be the moment that shapes how safe they feel in the world. Trauma-informed care isn’t about being soft — it’s about recognizing the weight of our interactions, and choosing warmth when it counts.”

Trustworthiness, Transparency, and Fair Exchange in Trauma-Informed Regulation

- **Trauma-informed care requires transparency.**
People feel safer when they know what to expect — timelines, steps, rights, and possible outcomes.
- **Trust is built when words match actions.**
Consistency, reliability, and clear communication foster trust — even in high-stakes or stressful regulatory contexts.
- **Fair exchange means giving something back.**
In regulation, power is often uneven. Fair exchange involves providing updates, explanations, respect, and voice — even when outcomes are difficult.
- **Professionals and the public don't just want due process — they want to feel seen.**
Transparency and fairness are not optional; they are *protective* in trauma-informed practice and essential for trust.

Trauma Informed Practice Begins with Our Relationship to OURSELVES....

Nothing will change if we do not challenge long standing limiting beliefs about ourselves and others

***“Yeah,
Yeah, I
know this
type.....”***



Using Trauma-Informed Language in Regulation

- When English is a second language, make sure that the regulatory process is understood (be creative)
- No jargon! Use appropriate language that matches the client's level of understanding
- trauma can impact cognition, and when triggered, learning parts of the brain can shut down
- plain, clear, unemotional '*vegan*' language (i.e., emotionally neutral and digestible) is FOOL PROOF!
- Acknowledge non-verbal communication as verbal communication...listen for the body language, the emotion behind the words. Silence Speaks Volumes (as does fight, flight, freeze)
- Clarify any misunderstandings you have.....a sign of respect for self and other
- Some people may speak indirectly about trauma. For instance, 'He was bothering me' may actually reflect a much more serious or harmful experience.



Respectful Language in Trauma-Informed Practice

Traditional	Trauma-sensitive
Hierarchical; rules to be followed	Decrease hierarchy, less rigidity; less power struggles; increased flexibility, shared power
Views behaviors negatively; e.g., <i>out to get me</i> , manipulating	Sees behaviors as adaptation; ways to get needs met
Treatment goals defined by others	Goals defined by both consumer and professional; self-efficacy
Reactive and crisis driven	Proactive; attempt to avoid future crisis
Views people as broken	Focuses on strength; choices
Philosophy that those people providing services are the experts; know best	Partnership between client and professional

- Use language that does not denote assumptions or judgments. **Your inner assumptions should never be reflected in your language.**
- Ask how they would like to be referred to and also how to refer to the person they are discussing (avoid abuser, victim "othering" language) (avoid assuming pronouns)
- Avoid expressing shock or surprise, which can feel invalidating or judgmental to the person sharing their story
- Be mindful of labels like 'offender' or 'batterer' — they may describe someone the person still loves, creating a complex emotional reality that requires care

Reducing Harmful Language in Regulatory Communication: Neutral Communication Prevents Harm

Regulatory communication can unintentionally **re-traumatize**

Tone matters more than judgment

The goal: reduce the risk of re-traumatization

The officer isn't disappointed when we speed — they calmly explain the law and let us move on.

Trauma-informed regulation CAN WORK IN the same way: neutral, clear, and respectful.



Words That Harm: Writing with Trauma Awareness.....What to say instead

Try to Calm down: This can be perceived as dismissive of the person's feelings

Just relax: Might imply that their feelings are not valid or serious

Overreacting: This could make someone feel belittled for their reactions or feelings

It could be worse: Minimizes the person's experiences and emotions

With all due respect: May come across as passive-aggressive or dismissive, especially when used before contradiction or critique

"You must" or "You should": Can feel commanding or judgmental

Labels like "victim" or "addict" or "perpetrator": Identifying someone solely by a life event or issue can feel stigmatizing, reductive, or overly personal

Graphic descriptions of traumatic events: Can inadvertently cause someone to relive traumatic experiences (without warning and prep)

Assumptions or generalizations: Making assumptions about experiences, feelings, or identities can feel dismissive and alienating, such as offering resources upon learning of a traumatic event.

How to Use Trauma-Informed Language in Sensitive Situations

Empathy and Active Listening: Cultivate a practice of empathetic listening to understand the context and emotional state of the person you are communicating with.

Person-First Language: Always put the person before the diagnosis or situation to emphasize their humanity (e.g., "person with an addiction" instead of "addict").

Ask for Preferences: People have different sensitivities; what is triggering for one might not be for another. Whenever possible, ask individuals how they prefer to discuss certain topics or experiences.

Avoid Assumptions: Never assume you know how someone feels or should feel. Let them express their feelings and validate them without judgment.

Use Neutral and Precise Language: When discussing potentially sensitive topics, use language that is factual and devoid of emotion or judgment. **Avoid Hierarchical Tone:** When communicating with peers or professionals, avoid condescending or corrective language that may feel shaming or superior.

Trigger Warnings: When discussing topics that are likely to be triggering, consider using a trigger warning to give listeners or readers a chance to prepare or opt-out.

Educational Sensitivity Training: Regularly engage in training or workshops that enhance your understanding of trauma and its impacts, improving your ability to communicate more sensitively.

Feedback Mechanism: Create a safe space for feedback where individuals can inform you if certain language or behaviors are triggering for them.

How Power Dynamics Are Subtly Implied in Oral and Written Communication by a Regulator

Directive Language:

- Words like "must," "should," or "required" reinforces hierarchy/top-down dynamic
- Regulator imposing demands without room for dialogue or input from the recipient, can be triggering

Complex Jargon:

- Technical/ legal jargon that is not easily understood by recipient creates a barrier
- Communication is less accessible, subtly reinforcing the perception that the regulator holds superior knowledge or status

Lack of Personalization:

- Generic communications exclusive of the individual situation or needs of the recipient can feel impersonal and authoritative
- Sending message of authority or process is priority over the health of participants

Absence of Reciprocal Language:

- When communication is one-way, where collaboration is delayed or not possible, next steps and options must be discussed, as a humanistic effort
- One-way communication can feel cold or dehumanizing. Even a small invitation for input can restore a sense of dignity



What Shifts Can We Make?

✓ Acknowledge Emotions Without Judgment

Instead of ignoring distress, acknowledge it neutrally:

"I understand this may feel overwhelming."

✓ Replace Complex Jargon with Plain Language

Swap legalese or technical terms with accessible alternatives.

Instead of "in accordance with procedural guidelines," try "based on our standard process."

✓ Create Space for Two-Way Dialogue

Use phrases that invite participation:

"Do you have any questions?"

"Let me know if anything I said was unclear or felt off."

✓ Soften Directives with Collaborative Tone

Shift from "You must submit X by Y" to:

"To move forward, we'll need X by Y. Let me know if you have concerns or need help with that."

✓ Use Person-Centered Descriptions

Avoid defining someone by their case or issue:

"A person who experienced a complaint" instead of "the respondent."

✓ Balance Authority with Respect

You can hold boundaries without blame.

"We're required to take this step, and I know that may feel difficult."



Subtle Power Reinforcers in Regulatory Communication

Assuming Compliance or Agreement

- Phrases that assume the recipient's agreement or understanding without explicitly seeking it can invalidate their perspective and reinforce the regulator's authority.
- → This poses particular risk for individuals who are neurodiverse, have learning disabilities, ADHD, or are experiencing stress-related immobilization that affects comprehension and processing.

No Mention of Appeals or Rights

- Omitting information about the registrant's rights (e.g., to appeal, seek legal counsel, ask questions) can imply the decision is final.
 - This especially disadvantages those with cognitive, language, or mental health barriers.

Formality in Tone

- Excessive formality in the name of professionalism can create emotional distance and reinforce hierarchy.
 - Professionalism is essential — but warmth builds trust.



We Can't Learn When We're Stressed

- Trauma, anxiety, and chronic stress affect the brain's ability to process new information.
- When someone feels fear, shame, or confusion, their executive functioning is reduced — this includes memory, attention, organization, and self-advocacy.
- While under investigation, legal jargon/regulatory language or tone that feels cold, accusatory, or overwhelming can shut down comprehension, even for capable professionals.
- Trauma-informed regulation means creating space for emotional safety — so information can be received, understood, and acted upon.

Clarity, warmth, and respectful pacing aren't extras — they're requirements for effective communication when someone is dys-regulated.

Be Mindful of Why This Matters

- **Association with Past Abuse:**
 - Many forms of trauma (esp abuse/neglect), involve a significant power imbalance—(abuser wields power over victim)
 - When survivors encounter **power imbalances** (such as registrant/regulator) later or elsewhere in their life, it can **evoke memories / emotional states linked to trauma**
 - *This association can trigger fear, anxiety, or a sense of helplessness, similar to feeling at time of trauma (**the unconscious mind is not interested in facts, and does not consider costs**)*
- **Loss of Control:**
 - Trauma often involves a profound loss of control over their circumstances or body
 - Power imbalances in a professional or personal setting can mimic this loss of control = heightened stress, triggering trauma-related responses
- **Vulnerability to Re-traumatization:**
 - Survivors may be hypersensitive to feeling controlled / manipulated as dynamics resemble conditions of trauma
 - In settings with ++ power differential, may feel vulnerable, unprotected, fearing harm, resulting in fight, flight or freeze response

Consider this, possibly after working tirelessly to overcome trauma, heal and recover, educate oneself and become a professional.....

Why Power imbalances Can be Particularly Triggering for Trauma Survivors

- **Trust:**
 - Trauma can severely impact a person's ability to trust others, especially in relationships characterized by **unequal power**
 - **Trusted advisor abuse is among the most challenging type of abuse to recover from**
 - Trauma and healing all happen in context of relationships
 - You are in a unique position to have a very positive or very negative impact on another human being
 - If a survivor perceives someone in a position of authority might abuse their power, it can trigger defensive or protective mechanisms, (negatively impacting the process), which are responses conditioned by their past experiences
- **Stress Response Activation:**
 - Power imbalances can activate the **stress response system** in trauma survivors
 - **When threat is perceived due to another's control + authority, it can trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response—physiological reactions that were likely adaptive during the initial trauma but may be maladaptive in normal interactions**
- **Reinforcement of Negative Beliefs:**
 - Trauma can instill deeply held negative CORE beliefs and a negative world view about self-worth or safety in the world
 - Power imbalances reinforce these beliefs, making survivors feel that they are inherently less valuable or that the world is inherently unsafe

Template: Suggested Trauma Informed Letter re. Complaint

Subject: Notice of Investigation Regarding Professional Conduct

Dear [Nurse's Name],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to inform you that the [Regulatory College's Name] has received a complaint regarding your professional conduct, and as a result, an investigation has been initiated.

We understand that receiving notice of an investigation can be distressing, and we want to assure you that our primary objective is to ensure a fair and transparent process for all parties involved. Your dedication to your profession and the well-being of your patients is acknowledged and respected.

The nature of the complaint alleges potential misconduct in [briefly summarize the allegations]. Please know that we take all complaints seriously and are committed to conducting a thorough and impartial investigation into the matter.

As part of the investigation process, you will have the opportunity to provide your perspective and respond to the allegations. We encourage you to fully participate in the process and to reach out to our office if you have any questions or concerns.

We understand that this may be a challenging time for you, and we want to remind you that support services are available to assist you throughout the investigation process. Your well-being is important to us, and we are here to provide guidance and support as needed.

Please note that this letter serves as formal notification of the investigation, and further communication regarding the investigation process will be provided to you in due course.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we appreciate your cooperation as we work to resolve this issue.

Template: Trauma Informed Letter re. Complaint

Your Rights and Responsibilities:

Representation: You have the right to be represented or accompanied by legal counsel or another representative during any part of the process.

Confidentiality: All proceedings related to this complaint will be conducted with a commitment to confidentiality, respecting the privacy of all individuals involved.

Support Available

We recognize that this process can be stressful. Support services are available, and we encourage you to make use of these resources if needed. *[Optionally, provide contact information for counseling services or employee assistance programs available through the organization or externally.]*

Contact Information (about me)

For any questions or if you require further clarification about the process or this letter, please do not hesitate to contact [Contact Person] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address]. We are here to assist you through this process.

Summary

We appreciate your cooperation in addressing this matter and assure you of our commitment to a fair and thorough investigation. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Name, Title, Contact info

Template: Trauma Informed Letter re. Complaint

Subject: Notice of Complaint

Dear [Recipient's Name],

Introduction

We are writing to inform you that our regulatory body has received a complaint concerning an alleged incident involving professional misconduct. We understand that receiving this type of notification can be unsettling, and it is our aim to handle this process with the utmost respect and consideration for all parties involved.

Details of the Complaint

The complaint was submitted on [Date] and involves the following allegations: *[Brief description of the nature of the complaint, ensuring language is neutral and non-accusatory].*

It is important to stress that this notification does not imply guilt; rather, it is a procedural step required to ensure fairness and transparency in the investigation process.

Next Steps

Investigation Process:

Initial Review: Your response to the allegations is requested to understand your perspective and any additional context you may wish to provide. Please submit your written response by [Deadline, typically 30 days from the date of the letter].

Interviews and Evidence Gathering:

Depending on the initial review, further investigation may include interviews, requests for additional documents, and consultations with relevant experts.

Your Rights and Responsibilities:

Representation: You have the right to be represented or accompanied by legal counsel or another representative during any part of the process.

Confidentiality: All proceedings related to this complaint will be conducted with a commitment to confidentiality, respecting the privacy of all individuals involved.

Support Available

We recognize that this process can be stressful. Support services are available, and we encourage you to make use of these resources if needed. *[Optionally, provide contact information for counseling services or employee assistance programs available through the organization or externally.]*

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Summary

We appreciate your cooperation in addressing this matter and assure you of our commitment to a fair and thorough investigation. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Name, Title, Contact info

Rethinking Initial Contact in Sensitive Complaints

- *In cases involving serious allegations (e.g., sexual misconduct or abuse), consider whether a preparatory phone call before or alongside the formal letter could reduce harm.*
- *This isn't about changing process — it's about recognizing that in trauma-sensitive contexts, the mode of communication can affect emotional safety and trust.*
- *Reflective Question: What might shift in the registrant's response and emotional state if the first contact was human, not just procedural?*

Trauma-Informed Choice in Communication

Trauma-informed regulation means not assuming one-size-fits-all.

In high-impact complaints (e.g., sexual abuse, racial discrimination, elder neglect), offering a brief preparatory phone call—not in place of due process, but as a soft entry—can support psychological safety.

What could change if:

- We explained the process in real time?
- We acknowledged emotional shock before asking for a written response?

Consider offering this as an option, not a default. Trauma-informed systems are responsive, not rigid.

Being Trauma-Informed Means Tolerating Discomfort

Suggesting a phone call for high-level complaints (e.g., sexual misconduct) can provoke strong reactions. That's normal. But trauma-informed systems are not comfortable — they are responsive.

- Power without empathy can re-traumatize.
- Trust requires flexibility, especially in moments of emotional crisis.

What's the greater risk?

- Sending a cold letter?
- Or taking 10 minutes to offer human contact that might prevent panic, flight, or shame?

WHO IS IT MOST UNCOMFORTABLE FOR?

Clarification Before We Begin

- *The following ideas are offered as reflective points, not policy prescriptions.*
- *We recognize that regulators work within legal mandates and finite resources.*
- *These suggestions aim to open dialogue on how to integrate empathy without compromising rigor.*

They are facing loss of identity. Loss of being able to provide for their families. Loss of sense of self. Don't double down. This could be someone you care about or love. Consider your impact. Consider your power. Consider their future.

Does This Compromise the Process?

- Offering trauma-informed options does not interfere with investigation timelines or compromise outcomes.
- On the contrary! It can reduce avoidance, non-compliance, and complaints about the regulator itself.
- Trauma-informed processes increase transparency, reduce fear, and support better engagement.
- **This is a universal precaution, a protective measure to reduce the risk of SUICIDALITY, catastrophic outcomes, breach of trust with the public.**
-

When a Trauma-Informed Call Changed Everything

- A registrant who survived intimate partner violence received a call before the formal complaint letter.
- The brief, respectful conversation prevented a breakdown, clarified the process, and built trust.
- She fully participated in the investigation, leading to faster resolution.
- The investigator later noted it saved weeks of clarification and distress management.

Pushback I've Heard... and Why It Proves the Need for Trauma-Informed Practice: When power is high, care must be high — especially when discomfort makes us want to pull away

What I've Heard from Regulators:

"We're not therapists"

"What if the complaint is egregious/morally outrageous?"

"This isn't our job — we're not here to coddle"

"If we do this for one, we'll have to do it for all"

"You mean I'm supposed to be nice to the perpetrator?"

And yet...these are the same reasons a trauma-informed lens is so critical. When power is high, care must be high.

THREE E'S OF TIC

THE EVENT

The traumatic incident or ongoing stressor (e.g., abuse, accident, or loss) disrupts family dynamics, often leading to tension, confusion, and fear as family members try to navigate the aftermath

THE EXPERIENCE

Each family member interprets and internalizes the trauma differently based on their personal history, emotional resilience, and role in the family, which can lead to misunderstandings, emotional distancing, or overprotectiveness.

THE EFFECT

The long-term effects of trauma manifest in emotional dysregulation, strained relationships, and potential generational cycles of trauma, influencing how family members communicate, support each other, and cope with stress

You hold the cards in terms of your impact on others — whether that impact is healing, neutral, or harmful

The Risks of Re-traumatization (lack of safety):

- Decrease or loss of trust
- Higher rates of self-injury/suicide
- Significantly less willingness to engage in proceedings
- Family/marital breakdown
- Increase of trauma symptoms (intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks)
- Loss of sense of self/identity
- Re-experiencing symptoms & emotions of past trauma
- Increase in chronicity of stress with greater risk for psychiatric morbidity, e.g. PTSD, chronic depression

Trauma Informed Care CORE BELIEFS

2 MOVING FROM ASKING WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, TO WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU

When a flower doesn't bloom you
fix the environment in which it
grows, not the flower.

1 YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE

How one was raised,
schooled, supported,
loved, nurtured. How
getting needs met was
modeled.

6 TIC REQUIRES DEEP SELF REFLECTION

Authenticity will be
communicated when one
reflects and adjusts thoughts
and beliefs about self and
others (required)

3 IT DIDN'T START WITH YOU

Epigenetics, generational trauma,
Eugenics Ideology, cultural,
historical and gender issues impact
future generations...

4 STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH

No one improves by
being criticized. The
World is Harsh Enough.

5 BEING TRAUMA INFORMED MEANS NEVER HAVING TO ASK ABOUT SOMEONE'S TRAUMA

TIC means being aware anyone
may have experienced trauma, and
responding accordingly to reduce
any risk of re-traumatization.



This is





ACUTE TRAUMA

Results from a single distressing event, such as an accident, assault, or sudden loss. It can cause intense emotional reactions and disrupt functioning in the immediate aftermath.

DISCRIMINATION + OPPRESSION

Trauma from discrimination and oppression arises from ongoing experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and systemic injustice, leading to deep emotional, psychological, and physical harm.

MEDICAL TRAUMA

This includes healthcare PTSD, sudden illness, injury, or emergency interventions associated with powerlessness/loss of trust in HC system. Fear of future treatments, avoidable losses.

CHRONIC TRAUMA

Stemming from prolonged or repeated exposure to highly stressful events, such as domestic abuse, bullying, or childhood neglect. Chronic trauma can have long-term psychological and emotional effects.

TYPES OF TRAUMA

HISTORICAL/ GEN TRAUMA

Trauma passed down through generations, often from a traumatic event affecting the ancestors, such as war, displacement, or oppression, impacting family dynamics and emotional patterns.

COMPLEX TRAUMA

A result of multiple or prolonged traumatic events, particularly of an interpersonal nature, such as abuse or abandonment. It affects self-concept, relationships, and emotional regulation.

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

Occurs when a child is exposed to adverse events during crucial developmental stages such as emotional or physical neglect or inconsistent caregiving. This can lead to difficulties with emotional regulation and relationships later in life.

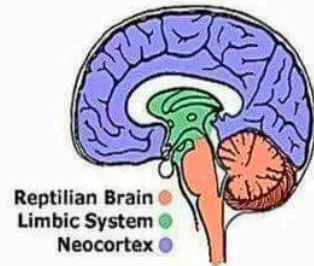
VICARIOUS/ SECONDARY TRAUMA

Experienced by individuals who are indirectly exposed to trauma, often through hearing about someone else's traumatic experience, such as healthcare workers, therapists, or family members.

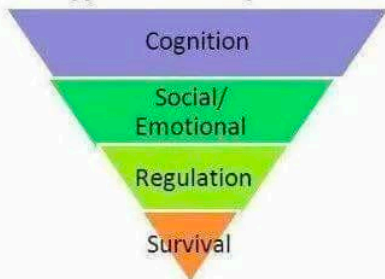


The Brain Under Threat: Why Safety Must Come First

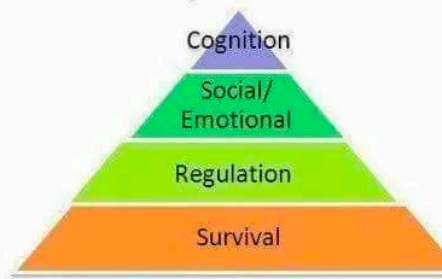
Trauma & Brain Development



Typical Development



Developmental Trauma



Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Dr. Bruce Perry's Neuro-Sequential Model for De-Escalating

The Four R's of TIC

1

Realize

All people at all levels have a basic **realization** about trauma, and how it can affect individuals, families, and communities.

3

Respond

Programs, organizations and communities **respond** by practicing a trauma-informed approach.

Recognize

People within organizations are able to **recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma.

2

Resist Re-Traumatization

Organizational practices may compound trauma unintentionally, trauma informed organizations avoid this **re-traumatization**.

4

We Can Not Learn When We Are Stressed

Trauma Changes the Function and Structure of the Brain

- Trauma can change gene expressions, memory function and impact the stress response. These changes can impact all areas of life, and continue throughout adulthood.



Factors to consider:

- Type of Trauma, Age of trauma, duration of trauma, frequency of trauma, who the perpetrator was and other bio-psycho-social-environmental factors play a role in determining the outcome in the future
- ***The good news? Just as trauma can impair functioning, the brain can heal and make new connections with the proper support and treatment.***

Trusted Advisor Abuse: One of the Most Severe Forms of Abuse, with Complex & Prolonged Recovery

YOU ARE TRUSTED ADVISORS



Trusted Advisor Abuse

is like a puzzle piece that helps us to understand abuse perpetration dynamics that do not fit neatly into other categories.

While Trusted Advisor Abuse is similar to sexual assault, domestic violence, and workplace harassment, it has a power dynamic based on the inherent trust between certain roles or positions, such as teacher/student or doctor/patient. There is not a romantic, familial or employment relationship. However, what they all share is the perpetrator's use of manipulative techniques to keep the victim within the abuser's control.

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- Financial Advisor Fraud
- Legal Advisor Misconduct
- Medical Advisor Exploitation
- Religious Advisor Abuse
- Technology Advisor Deception

Grounding Skills to Help Others to Feel Safe



- Avoid sudden movements
- Quiet Space
- Amplify Strengths
- You are not alone



Feeling Unsafe Can Trigger Trauma Responses

- **Hyper-vigilance:** Feeling constantly on guard, anxious, and easily triggered by any perceived threat.
- **Avoidance:** Avoiding certain topics or situations that remind them of the unsafe experience or the professional.
- **Dissociation:** Feeling disconnected from emotions, thoughts, memories as a way to cope with the unsafe experience
- **Fear and anxiety:** Experiencing intense fear and anxiety related to their interactions with the professional or seeking help
- **Anger and Aggression:** Expressing anger and aggression towards the professional or others as a way to protect themselves.

Safe Script For Trauma Safe Communication

EDSW

Safe Script

For Interpersonal Effectiveness



Listen without Responding

I am listening to you, and reflecting on what you are telling me. Thank you for telling me. Is there anything I can do? (let them get it wrong)



Stay Out of the Weeds

Stay above the words, imagine the emotions name the emotions, yours and theirs. commit to no-defending or arguing details



Respect

Is this a good time? Do you want the door open or closed? Is it ok if I sit here? I want to be sure I fully understand you.



Acknowledge, Commit to Change

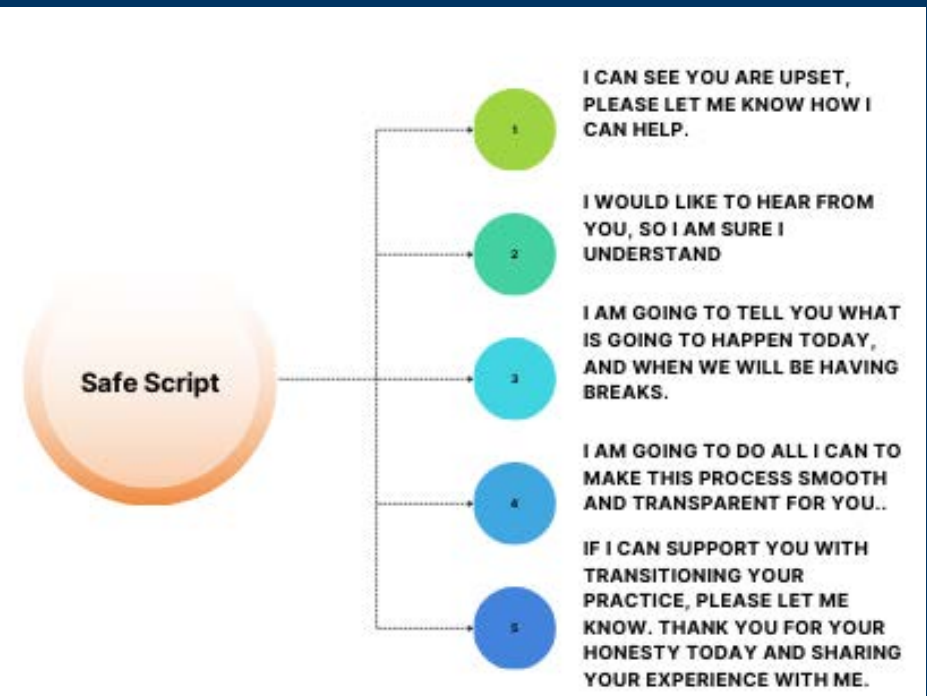
"I am glad you are telling me this, I was not aware, but I do not want to make you feel this way so I will be mindful of this going forward"



Pushover or Skilled Distancing?

Choosing not to argue over details is a skill. An act of self-respect. and respect for other to not escalate. Meet harshness with softness.

**MODEL THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO
SEE IN OTHERS**



Trauma-Informed Communication and Psychological Safety

- Effective communication strategies for promoting psychological safety, ex: active listening, validation, empathy
- Trauma-informed policies & procedures that promote safety, offer info and support, & advocating for client safety and well-being
- Recognizing the **impact of power dynamics & systemic oppression**, understand the importance of cultural humility + sensitivity, promote client-centered approaches
- Cultural Awareness, Cultural Humility, Cultural Curiosity, **CULTURAL COMPASSION**
- Self-Reflection & Safety-Recognizing **biases**, assumptions and being open to feedback, working collaboratively to develop safe solutions **PRO-ACTIVELY** (not as a reaction)

Caregiver burnout is real. Carers are at major risk of emotional health problems, especially without proper stress management and emotional regulation training and skills.

TIC IS PROTECTIVE FOR ALL



Empathy + Authenticity: Sophisticated Tools

Maybe you think someone doesn't have a lot on their plate compared to you.

But maybe their plate is smaller than yours and doesn't have a lot of room to begin with.

Or maybe their plate is paper, and their flimsy paper plate can't hold as much as your sturdy ceramic plate can.

Amanda Lynn Burkhardt

INSPIRATIONALGOODS.COM

Trustworthiness, Transparency and Support: Knowledge is Power

Introductory Questions	My name is _____. My job is to_____ Today I am going to_____. Do you understand the process?
Consent	In order to proceed with this, I need to ask you about _____.I know it may be repetitive, but this is required for XXX
Information + Planning	I want to explain how today will go. Do you have someone you can call if needed?
About You	It will help me to understand you, and what you are experiencing so I can be sure to support you through this. I imagine this must be very tough, and I want you to know that I am thinking about how to best support you now and for the future.
Future Care	Can you tell me if you have someone you can trust and speak to about this? I know you were given a list of resources, but I am happy to help coordinate support for you, and check on you in a few days.



Thank you for your time.

Feel free to reach out at eden@edendales.com

www.edendales.com

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