

## What is “Trauma-Informed Casework”?

In the Permanency Support Program (PSP), all casework with children, young people, families, and carers needs to be trauma-informed. Trauma-informed casework is about integrating all your knowledge about trauma into all aspects of your work. It is also about recognising the strengths, skills, and hopes of each of the children, families, and carers you work with and their ability to heal from trauma. An important part of working in a trauma-informed way is building effective, caring relationships.

To work in a trauma-informed way you will need to understand:

- the different types of trauma people can experience
- common signs of trauma
- resistance to trauma
- the effects of trauma
- how to respond appropriately.

It is important you understand the ways trauma can impact a person’s thinking, feelings, health and development, and worldviews. You also need to understand how traumatic experiences can affect behaviour. Big behaviours can be misinterpreted as deliberate acting out. Instead, these behaviours are often a trauma response and are not conscious.

Having a holistic understanding of trauma will help you to work sensitively with children, and the people around them, to help support recovery. For more information see: [Impacts of Trauma](#).

Remember, it is natural for people who have been abused, neglected, or discriminated against to have trouble trusting you and for them to respond to your power with avoidance, hostility or even aggression. Reflect on the purpose that their behaviour may serve and the circumstances in which it occurs.

Trauma-informed casework should always promote connection. Every child needs meaningful connection. Connection builds safe and healing relationships between a child and their family, kin, and community. This will help a child to maintain family, social, community and cultural connections.

Connection needs to be understood within a child’s culture. This is very important for all children including Aboriginal children. Many Aboriginal families and communities are severely impacted by trauma resulting from colonisation, and the associated violence, loss of culture and land. Former government policies such as the forced removal of Aboriginal children have also resulted in significant trauma for Aboriginal people.

For more information see: [Trauma in Aboriginal Communities](#), [Foundations of Culture](#), and [Collective Trauma](#).

## Principles of Trauma-Informed Casework

Use the following principals to help inform your casework.

Principles of Trauma-Informed Casework	
<b>Safety</b>	Traumatic experiences can severely compromise a person's feeling of safety. You need to provide a safe, nurturing, and predictable environment for children, families, and carers. They need to feel physically and emotionally safe during meetings, visits and other interactions. Emotional safety can be created by being predictable in your interactions. Always be respectful, supportive, and calm. You also need to work with children's families and carers, so they can provide a safe, predictable, and nurturing environment i.e., ensuring the child has a regular routine, is comfortable around people in the household, and feels loved and supported.
<b>Trustworthiness and Transparency</b>	You need to be transparent about how and why you make decisions as well as the way you will work with children, families, and carers. Be consistent in your interactions, and show you are reliable by following through on what you say you will do. This will help you build relationships and maintain trust.
<b>Collaboration</b>	You need to ensure true partnering between you and the children and families you work with (to help 'level out' power differences). Healing can happen through genuine relationships and in meaningful sharing of power and decision-making i.e., actively listen, encourage participation and involvement in decision making.
<b>Empowerment, Voice and Choice</b>	Children or adults who have experienced trauma abuse or neglect often struggle in situations where they feel they have no control (Perry, 2014). This can be a reminder the loss of power and autonomy they experienced during the

	<p>abuse or neglect. Give the child or adult choices and some sense of control in the interaction with you (Perry, 2014) i.e., this could include letting a child decide on a venue to meet and allowing them to lead the discussion. This will help them feel safer and more effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings with you.</p>
<b>Culture</b>	<p>Your casework must be culturally competent. You will need to be responsive and respectful to the unique cultural needs of the children, families, and carers you work with i.e., through cultural consultations, learning about their culture and talking to community members. This should be supported by your agencies policies and procedures. This is especially important when working with Aboriginal people.</p>

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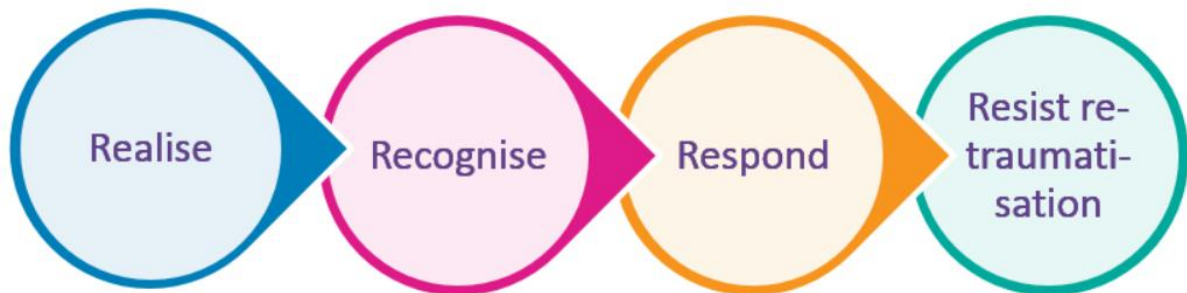
“When Aboriginal people and kids are heard then together we can find stronger ways that meet kids’ needs in culturally safe ways... Involving Aboriginal people and Aboriginal ways means we can find real lasting solutions that ease the trauma and loss for our kids and builds resilience for the future”.

Aunty Sue Blacklock, (Winangay Chair), Member of the Order of Australia (AM); ACCP Ambassador for Children

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## The Four Rs of Trauma-Informed Care

The Four Rs of Trauma-Informed Care can also guide you in your work.



(MentalHealth.org, 2015)

**Realise** the widespread impact that trauma may have on a child and other people you work with, including on their neurological, biological, psychological and social pathways, and the potential pathways for recovery.

**Recognise** the signs and symptoms of trauma in a child, their family and/or caregivers and their wider community.

**Respond** by integrating all your knowledge of trauma from your daily practice, your learning and your agency's policies and procedures.

**Resist re-traumatisation** of a child and the adults who care for them by working in a trauma-informed way. Anticipate and avoid processes and individual practices that are likely to re-traumatize.

## Understanding Resistance

Resistance is the ways a child or adult tries to reduce, prevent, or stop abuse, neglect, or discrimination etc. It provides you with information on the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the child or adult. When you focus on a person's resistance, it decreases their feelings of shame and increases their self-esteem and self-worth. It gives a person the sense of power to think about what they did to oppose the situation.

See [Understanding Resistance in Practice](#) for more information.

## NSW Therapeutic Care Framework

Trauma-Informed casework is key in your role and your work is guided by the NSW Therapeutic Care Framework (the Framework). The Framework outlines principles of trauma-informed casework that puts a child at the centre of your practice.

The Framework helps you deliver trauma-sensitive practices to a child that focusses on building safe, positive, and healing relationships. It addresses and supports a child's complex needs in a holistic, individual, and culturally respectful and responsive way.

## Professional Trauma Therapy and Therapeutic Care Programs

Some children and young people who have experienced high levels of trauma and disruption in their lives, who have more complex needs will require a more intensive, holistic care approach. This will often include participating in professional trauma therapy to treat the symptoms of trauma and facilitate recovery. This can be delivered individually or through a Therapeutic Care program.

Therapeutic Care programs (including Intensive Therapeutic Care), are holistic, individualised and team-based approaches to a child's complex trauma. They include evidence-based treatment models, usually delivered by a Psychologists, Counsellors or Mental Health Social Workers, to treat the symptoms of trauma and facilitate recovery.

Professional trauma therapy, delivered individually or through Therapeutic Care programs has a focus on:

- creating a caring environment for a child that is respectful and culturally sensitive
- providing responses to a child that are consistent and predictable
- using interventions that are individual, evidence-based and have clinical input
- providing a positive, safe, reparative, and healing relationships and experiences
- addressing the complexities of trauma, attachment, and developmental needs
- looking at the potential interrelation between trauma and mental health disorders such as substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety
- working holistically with a child, their family and community, and other agencies in a manner that empowers a child so that their voice is heard.

You are not responsible for providing professional trauma therapy.

You are, however, responsible for recognising when a child with higher levels of trauma may need this type of care, and for helping to connect them to it. For example, if a child's experience of trauma is impacting on their functioning or development i.e., they are

finding it difficult to learn, frequently experiencing suspensions, having significant issues with friendship groups, or anxiety is resulting in avoidance of activities or events etc.

A child's needs should be regularly assessed so the level of support and services received can be increased or decreased as needed. Trauma-informed casework and professional trauma therapy can make a big difference to the lifelong impacts of trauma on a person.

## References

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Perry, B (2014). *Helping Traumatized Children: A brief overview for caregiver*. Child Trauma Academy. Available: [https://www.childtrauma.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Helping\\_Traumatized\\_Children\\_Caregivers\\_Perry1.pdf](https://www.childtrauma.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Helping_Traumatized_Children_Caregivers_Perry1.pdf)