Factsheet 6
Response to Trauma

What is trauma?

Trauma is an emotional response to experiencing or witnessing:

+ A frightening or distressing event; or
+ A threat (or perceived threat) to life or physical safety.

What is trauma informed practice?

Trauma-informed practice means understanding trauma presentation and minimising the impact of trauma for the client.

What is vicarious trauma?

Vicarious trauma develops cumulatively through repeated exposure to clients' traumatic stories.

Trauma informed practice

There are a range of strategies to ensure your practice is trauma informed:

Trauma awareness

+ Understand trauma presentation and its impacts (ability to give instructions or understand advice may be affected)
  - Consider office set-up - leaving a door open, client sitting away from the door, sitting together side by side instead of across a table
  - Allow extra time for appointments
  - Utilise support people (with permission)
  - Consider providing written or follow-up information

Prioritising safety

+ Provide a safe and private physical environment
+ Ensure processes promote safety and confidentiality
+ Ask screening questions and know what to do if DV is indicated
+ Use appropriate referral pathways

Respectful and trusting relationships

+ Believe the client (violence is the responsibility of the perpetrator)
+ Be clear about service parameters to manage expectations and minimise uncertainty

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+ Minimise re-telling by making follow-up appointments with the same staff
+ Communicate clearly

Choice and empowerment

+ Give choices about the time/method of consultation (in person, by phone)
+ Provide information and allow client-driven decision-making

Collaboration

+ Value a client's knowledge: they are the expert in their situation
+ Seek feedback about service delivery

Managing vicarious trauma

Vicarious trauma may be prevented or minimised through:

+ A supportive work context
  • Formal support mechanisms: peer mentoring, professional supervision, in-house counselling and debriefing.
  • Informal support/workplace culture
+ Individual responsibility
  • Awareness of signs of vicarious trauma (requires training for workers)
  • Self-care strategies (requires training and support for workers to implement)

Support in the workplace

Impacts of DFV in the workplace include

+ Reduced work performance
+ Absenteeism
+ Disruptions at work
+ Harassment and abuse at work.

Impacts on colleagues include

+ filling in for unproductive or absent workers
+ vicarious negative impact on mental health (fears, resentment, anxiety, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, stress leave)
+ WHS risks of dealing with perpetrators in the workplace and trying to protect victims.

Industrial protections include

+ Access to paid leave to estimated 2 million workers through enterprise bargaining
+ Right to request flexible work arrangements (*Fair Work Act 2009*)
+ Discrimination on basis of gender/family responsibilities
+ Workplace Health and Safety obligations
+ National Employment Standards and modern awards.

Resources

+ Domestic violence capacity building for CLCs webinar – *Domestic violence and trauma informed practice:* https://communitylegalqld. org.au/clc-staff/staff-training-and-cle/webinars/dv-capacity-building/trauma-informed-practice
+ Domestic violence capacity building for CLCs webinar – *Responding to domestic violence in the workplace*: https://communitylegalqld. org.au/clc-staff/staff-training-and-cle/webinars/dv-capacity-building/workplace-responses
+ Australian Institute of Family Studies: https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/trauma-informed-care-child-family-welfare-services/what-trauma-informed-care
+ Blue Knot: https://www.blueknot.org. au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Trauma-Informed-Care-and-practice
+ Domestic violence capacity building for CLCs factsheets https://communitylegalqld.org.au/clc-staff/staff-training-and-cle/webinars/dv-capacity-building-for-clcs