

Creating Trauma-Informed Services and Organizations: An Integrated Approach

Produced by the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health | April 2018

Introduction

The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health's (NCDVTMH) approach to creating accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed domestic and sexual violence services and organizations draws from a number of different places and perspectives - from the voices and experiences of survivors, advocates, and clinicians; from the insights of social and political movements; and from research and science, including a growing body of research on child development and neurobiology.

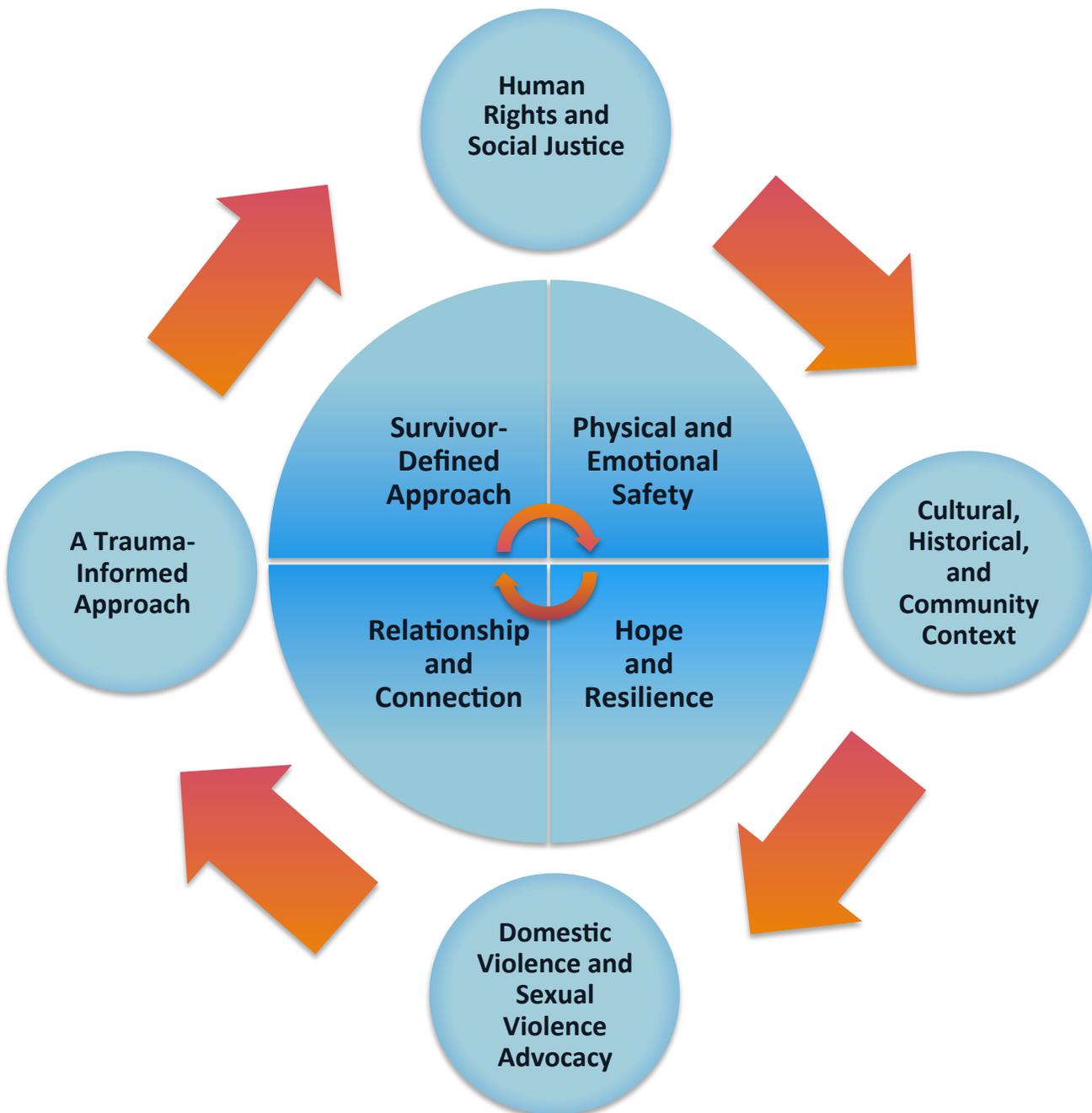
Initially developed as a way to bridge trauma-informed and advocacy perspectives, this more integrated approach has evolved into a framework for holding many of the key elements that are critical to doing our work - work that is grounded in domestic and sexual violence advocacy perspectives, that incorporates an understanding of trauma and its effects, that creates accessible environments for healing, that recognizes the centrality of culture, and that is committed to social justice and human rights.

More specifically, this framework provides a foundation for doing work that is inclusive and accessible, attuned to the range of people's experiences, and relevant to the people and communities we serve. It also provides a foundation for working in ways that are grounded in dignity, respect, and justice; that honor people's strengths and creativity; that foster resilience and healing; that attend to the well-being of staff, organizations, and communities; and that support activism and social change.

It provides additional scaffolding for holding the depth, nuance, sensitivity, attunement, self-awareness, and accountability that is so important to our interactions with others and the broader political awareness needed to understand our own and others' experiences in context. It also provides the inspiration, analysis, and tools to advocate for change within our organizations, in the systems that impact the lives of survivors, and in the attitudes and policies that contribute to abuse and violence in our world and restrict people's options. Given this, we use the term "survivor" to mean adults, adults and their children, youth, young adults, elders, and anyone in the family system – as defined by survivors – who have experienced or witnessed violence.

The following perspectives and principles help provide a foundation for accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed work. They also offer a framework to draw on when our work becomes challenging and to support us in creating services and organizations that truly reflect our intentions and values. We hope that you can take strategies from this document to help you live and practice these values in your work.

Key Perspectives and Core Principles for Engaging in Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Work



Key Perspectives

NCDVTMH's framework is informed by several key perspectives, which, when woven together, provide a more integrated approach for working with survivors and their children. Each perspective offers an important dimension that helps inform how we conceptualize and how we do our work. All contribute to our ability to ensure our programs are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Advocacy

This perspective highlights the importance of attending to not only the traumatic effects of domestic and sexual violence but also the ongoing realities of coercion and control by an abusive partner, and by the systems where survivors seek help. A domestic and sexual violence perspective also brings an analysis of gender-based violence, including transphobic, biphobic, and homophobic violence, to our work and emphasizes the importance of holding individuals and systems accountable for their abuse of power.

Cultural, Historical, and Community Context

This perspective focuses our attention on the historical and social context of people's lives including their ongoing experiences of oppression, discrimination, and microaggression. It helps us recognize the richness and complexity of people's identities, beliefs, and experiences, and the traditions, values, and relationships that serve as sources of meaning and strength. It also places the creation of services that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and linguistically accessible at the forefront of our work.

Human Rights and Social Justice

Incorporating human rights and social justice perspectives ensures that awareness of the conditions that create and uphold abuse, violence, oppression, and discrimination in our lives, our communities, and our society remains central to all that we do. It strengthens our ability to recognize social injustice, to critically analyze the conditions that produce it, and to work toward social change. It also helps us to be more attuned to any stigma or discrimination experienced by survivors and staff in our own programs and to actively take this on.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed perspective brings an understanding of the pervasiveness of trauma and its impact on survivors, our organizations, our communities, and ourselves, and what we can do to help mitigate

those effects. It normalizes human responses to trauma and reminds us that the quality of our interactions is critical to the process of healing from abuse and trauma. A trauma-informed approach provides guidance on how trauma can affect people's experience of services and what we can do to reduce further traumatization at every level of our organizations. When we understand trauma responses as adaptations to being under siege, then part of our work is to do everything we can to reduce the likelihood that survivors will feel discounted and disempowered in our programs and systems. A trauma-informed perspective also informs the creation of services and environments that support the resilience and well-being of people and communities through the work we do and the way we work. A trauma-informed perspective acknowledges the need to support staff and to create opportunities for reflection and growth.

Core Principles

The following core principles or values provide a foundation for doing accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed work. They are all part of creating a relational environment that can help to counteract people's experiences of trauma and dehumanization - one that is deeply respectful and that honors and supports each person's experience, resilience, agency, and humanity. Central to this integrated approach is recognizing the importance of the quality of our interactions and the relationships we create. Each of the following principles represents a somewhat different aspect of this overarching approach. These principles include recognizing and honoring the importance of:

Physical and Emotional Safety:

A key aspect of accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed work involves attending to both physical and emotional safety, with particular attention to culture and accessibility, while honoring each person's understanding of what safety means for them, and a commitment to ongoing self-reflection and evaluation of whether systems, policies, and procedures are facilitating feelings of safety among participants and staff.

Relationship and Connection:

Relationships are central to healing, growth, and change, including our relationships to the people, places, practices, and things that help us to cope, grow, and thrive. As harm often occurs in relationship, the quality of our relationships and interactions has the potential to facilitate healing from experiences of abuse and discrimination, and create a sense of connection and belonging.

When trust has been betrayed, being honest, clear, transparent, and consistent and relating in ways that are genuinely respectful, collaborative, and non-hierarchical are essential to creating safety and building trust.

Hope and Resilience:

Believing in the human capacity to survive and heal, and recognizing the strengths, resources, and tools that survivors already possess, are central to holding hope and resilience. Being a steady source of hope, and acknowledging, naming, and reflecting people's profound resilience are critical parts of supporting survivors while they heal from trauma. It also means that we embody a genuine sense of openness in our relationships and our work.

A Survivor-Defined Approach:

Recognizing and honoring each person's right to define and determine what works for them, and guaranteeing choice and control over their experiences are critical components of a survivor-defined approach. This means taking cues and guidance from survivors, including adults, children, and youth, about our programs and services. This approach ensures the meaningful involvement of survivors who use or have used our services in our planning processes, in evaluation and oversight, and in volunteer, staff, and leadership roles within our programs. Engaging in survivor-defined work also means that we are working to acknowledge and jointly confront the power imbalances in our interactions, while working to change the conditions that facilitate violence in our relationships and communities.

Source

Tools for Transformation:

Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations

An Organizational Reflection Toolkit

Carole Warshaw, MD, Erin Tinnon, MSW, LSW, and Cathy Cave