

Organisational Commitment to Trauma Informed Practice

A guide to support practitioners working
with children and young people



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Introduction

This guide is intended to support practitioners working with children and young people across a range of settings including schools, further and higher education and youth groups to access the [‘Gift of Reconnection’ training series](#) to make an organisational commitment to trauma informed practice.

We recognise that it can be challenging to find the time and space to engage in learning and development and we hope that this guide will make this easier to plan and implement for your organisation. The guide is broken down into sections which are aligned with the introduction and eight chapters of the training series.

Each section includes a brief overview of the content, suggested points for discussion and practical activities to integrate learning into practice. Depending on the amount of time you have available for the training, you may not wish to engage with all of these suggestions, instead select those which are most applicable to the setting in which you work. We also know that online training can be difficult to engage with and so we have woven group discussions and practical activities into each section so that it might enhance engagement, create inspiration and provide opportunities to share ideas with colleagues.

We hope that you find this training useful, inspiring and beneficial to your work and thank you for your time and dedication in helping children and young people to navigate their experiences.

We know that this work is not easy and sometimes it is heartbreaking so please don't forget that being trauma informed starts with looking after you!

With warmest regards and admiration

Nicola Lester and Thrive LDN

Planning the training

It is important to take the time to plan how and when the training will be accessed. For some settings, we understand that there are limited opportunities to deliver training (such as schools or other educational settings) and so planning in advance is essential.

Depending on the time you have available, you may wish to access the training across nine-sessions (for example, weekly, fortnightly or even monthly), or by completing one or two levels during an 'inset' day or half day training. The introduction is 20 minutes and each chapter take around 30 minutes to complete. If you wish to engage in the discussion and practical activities suggested, we recommend allocating an hour to an hour and 15 minutes for each chapter to ensure that you have enough time available.



As you plan the delivery of the training, there are a number of other points to consider, these include how you will:

- Check that participants are in their 'window of tolerance'
- Ensure safety
- Integrate a trauma informed approach
- Making it accessible and being flexible
- Invite questions
- Share reflections and strengthening connections
- Promote learning

Checking that staff are in their 'window of tolerance'

All of us have a 'window of tolerance' and when we are in our window of tolerance we are able to think and learn. However, when something causes us to step outside of our window of tolerance, this becomes more challenging. We find it difficult to engage with new ideas, we struggle to focus and retain information, we are easily overwhelmed and confused. Checking whether or not staff are in their window of tolerance prior to the training is essential. If they are not, this is an important opportunity to find out what might help them to move into their window of tolerance. We can find out this information simply by asking them, via email or in person, and by being curious about what they might need. Often just

by taking the time to check, will in fact, help to move someone back into their window of tolerance, as this will enable them to feel seen, heard and valued.

Ensuring safety

It is important to be mindful of the content of the training. Whilst the title and outline of the chapters provide an indication of the topics which will be discussed, it is always worth including a safety message to be delivered at the start of each section to remind staff of the importance of self-care and giving them the permission to pay attention to their own needs. In particular, it can be beneficial to reassure staff that if they are triggered by any of the content (such as feeling distressed or overwhelmed), they should feel able to take a break and do what they need to do in order to feel safe and supported. No matter what our level of experience and knowledge or in what capacity we access the training, discussions about trauma can be heart-breaking and harrowing; a trauma informed approach starts by making a commitment to look after ourselves.

Integrating a trauma informed approach

The training should be an opportunity to generate discussions, share ideas, create connections, reflect on practice and validate your work. We encourage you to make it more enjoyable, by baking or buying cakes for the breaks, sourcing good quality tea and coffee and even offering

lunch, if you can. For those organisations who have a training budget, you may also consider using this to create self-care kits for your staff to deliver alongside the training; this will ensure that they feel valued and appreciated, in addition to promoting engagement with the training. Ideas for self-care kits for all budgets are included at the gold level in the toolkit.

No matter what our level of experience and knowledge or in what capacity we access the training, discussions about trauma can be heart breaking and harrowing; a trauma informed approach starts by making a commitment to look after ourselves.

Accessibility

The training is designed to be flexible. If you are facing limitations in terms of time, you may consider dividing the training into its respective chapters so that they can be accessed on a weekly or even monthly basis (we would recommend no longer than monthly intervals between the respective chapters for each level). These could be integrated into regular team meetings or as short CPD sessions. It is important that the training itself does not become another source of stress and pressure.

Where possible, you may wish to seek preferences from the group about when and how the training should be accessed, this in turn will likely increase engagement and help to identify what people may need in order to participate more fully.

Inviting questions

Although there is no capacity within the training to ask questions or seek clarification, Nicola can be contacted directly and is happy to respond to any queries which may arise during the course of the training. We advise creating a platform for generating questions such as using post-it notes, a whiteboard or flipchart paper if the session is being facilitated in person, or the chat function if it is online and downloading it after the session so that it can be shared with the group. We would also encourage you to discuss these questions and to generate your own suggestions. This will offer a useful opportunity to share knowledge and learning. It will be important to reassure staff that this is a confidential space, free from judgement so that they feel safe and supported in sharing their experiences and ideas.

Sharing reflections

In addition to the discussion points suggested for each session, we encourage you to share reflections.

It will be important to reassure staff that this is a confidential space, free from judgement so that they feel safe and supported in sharing their experiences and ideas.

This can be done by asking staff in small groups to identify any 'satisfactions', 'discoveries', 'learnings' and 'dissatisfactions'. Whenever a 'dissatisfaction' is shared, the staff member should try to identify a next step which promotes them taking responsibility for their individual learning or experience. For example, if their dissatisfaction is that they disagree with something in the content or don't fully understand a concept, the next step is to email and seek clarity. Sharing reflections is also a good

opportunity to strengthen relationships within teams and across organisations by finding commonality and also noticing differences in experiences. When a staff member shares a reflection, they may like to invite 'anyone else' to join them to create unity, or if there is a difference, another group member may highlight this and then share their reflection in response. Building on each other's reflections can be a good way to strengthen staff cohesion, to share learning and exchange ideas.

Promoting learning

When planning the training, it is important to think about learning beyond the training and how this can be continued to be promoted. Developing a trauma informed approach in practice is a continuous commitment and will require ongoing work. Each of the three training levels (bronze, silver and gold) include a reference/reading list. Significant texts have an asterisk by them and could be used to structure other learning and continuing professional development sessions by creating a book club (outlined in the gold level) to encourage this continued learning and sharing of ideas.

Delivering the training

Session 1: Introduction

Introductory video

A 20-minute video provides an introduction to the concept of both trauma informed practice and the 'gift of reconnection' and sets out the content for the following eight chapters. The introduction can be useful in offering context and also preparing staff for the training.



Activity

After showing the video we advise breaking into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What does connection look like in your context?
- What does reconnection look like in your context?

The context here is open to your interpretation and will vary between groups and sessions. For example, it could mean work environment or job role or all of this.

Tips

Try to be as specific as you can when discussing each of these questions. Write down the different ideas which are generated and then see if you can reach a shared consensus. If you can't, don't worry, outline the different views.

Remember, there is no right or wrong answer, both connection and reconnection, can and do, mean different things to different people.

If time allows, share your findings as a larger group and make sure you write them down so that you can refer back to them as the training progresses.

Session 2: Bronze Level - Chapter 1

Understanding Trauma and Loss

The bronze level opens by focusing on understanding both trauma and loss, recognising how traumatic bereavement in particular can be challenging and harrowing to respond to. As a society, we rarely talk about death which can often lead to those who are grieving experiencing a strong sense of isolation, loneliness and disconnection at a time when connection and social support is most needed.



Activity

At the end of this session, we suggest taking the time to reflect on how well-equipped you feel to have conversations with children and young people who are grieving, in other words, what are the barriers to offering reconnection? What are your concerns, fears and anxieties? Are they shared with others in the group or are they different? Once you have created a list, spend some time thinking about next steps, what do you need in order to reduce these barriers?

We have shared a list below of common concerns and fears which often come up for staff when they are faced with a traumatic loss, these include:

- Not knowing what to say
- Saying the wrong thing
- Making it worse
- Becoming too emotional, tearful and upset
- Not being able to manage someone else's intense emotions
- Not wanting to think about losing someone themselves
- Reminders of their own losses

Tips

This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other barriers to engagement which are very individual. A staff member may not feel able to share them in a group setting, or perhaps even be able to articulate what they are. Respecting these perspectives is really important and so the list above may help offer a starting point for discussions, simply by asking members of the group which ones feel true for them and then building from there.

Session 3: Bronze Level - Chapter 2

Understanding the complexity of developmental trauma

The second chapter in the bronze level focuses on developmental trauma, and for those working with children and young people in particular, understanding how trauma, stress and adversity affects development is critical. However, so too is knowing how to respond to and engage with a child, young person, or even an adult, whose development has been disrupted by trauma, stress and adversity.

In this chapter, you will learn more about how a person's 'window of tolerance' is narrower when they have experienced trauma, meaning that any increase in the demands made of them (even those which are seemingly small) may move them outside of their window of tolerance leading to a flight, fight or freeze response as they go into survival mode.



Activity

Firstly, encourage staff to think about their own window of tolerance and to take the time to consider what things move them beyond it, and what helps to bring them back inside of it.

A second stage to this activity, is to then think about someone they are working with and to ask the same questions. Now that they have completed this chapter, are they able to notice when someone has moved outside of their window of tolerance, what happens, how do they know? Are they able to identify any patterns in the context which 'trigger' this response?

Tips

This activity is about developing both self-awareness and understanding. Knowing what shifts someone from being in their window of tolerance to being outside of it, is vital in reconnection work. Whilst we may not always be able to avoid those things which move us beyond our level of tolerability, understanding how we can return there is essential, as is the ability to notice this in those we work with and to support them to find their way back there. Identifying what might help this shift can offer a really powerful tool which enables someone to feel noticed, heard, supported and valued.

Session 4: Bronze Level - Chapter 3

Integrating a trauma informed approach to practice

In the final chapter at the bronze level, we focus on the central tenet of a trauma informed approach: the capacity to focus not on 'what's wrong?' with someone, but on 'what's right?' with them instead. The Battlemind¹ model discussed in this chapter offers a helpful framework in which to think about the behaviours of those we work with, encouraging us to take the time to consider how they help someone to 'survive'. In doing so, we can think of them as assets and strengths, addressing the question of 'what's right?' with them.



¹ developed by the WRAIR Land Combat Study Team

Activity

Start by making a list of the so-called 'negative' or 'challenging' behaviours which you see in your organisation or role, noting how they are disruptive or 'inconvenient'. Next, think about how these same behaviours may help to keep someone safe during times of extreme danger or when they are under threat or great stress.

From there, in small groups, you can create your own 'Battlemind' model which we hope will serve as a reminder to pay attention to 'what's right?' with someone, rather than only being able to focus on the ways in which their behaviour cause disruption or are inconvenient.

Whilst these behaviours may continue to be present and show up in your setting, understanding them is an essential step in being able to offer reconnection. The capacity to view them with curiosity rather than judgment may be just enough to create those flickers of light in someone's darkness and to change how they engage in the world.

Tips

Working in small groups can help you to create a framework which encompasses a range of behaviours. It can be beneficial to share these as resources for your colleagues and depending on the age of those you work with, you may also wish to show them the model, it could serve as a helpful reminder to them that there is so much 'right' with them, perhaps more than they have ever known.

Session 5: Silver Level - Chapter 4

From disconnection to reconnection – therapeutic skills for practice

The first part of the silver level explores in more depth the qualities of reconnection and how such qualities are an intrinsic part of our humanity. Much of this chapter is about connecting us with what we already know, however, it aims to build confidence and capacity to do this work.



Activity

Here, the practical activity focuses on 'practising' these qualities of reconnection and it is intended to remind us that reconnection work is about drawing on our humanity and extending that humanity to others.

In groups of three, take it in turns to be in the following roles:

- Supporter
- Beneficiary (the person receiving the support)
- Observer

The person receiving the support should identify an issue that they would like to talk about (something which is stressful but manageable).

The supporter should initiate a five-minute conversation to explore their experiences, how they doing and what they might need.

After five minutes, come together as a group to reflect and share your observations and feedback.

Tips

Remember that there is no right or wrong approach, however, it would be good to explore the experience of both giving and receiving support. Did the recipient feel seen, heard and valued? What helped? What was observed to have happened? Try to offer each other specific examples in the feedback. Don't overthink it, you know how to be human.

Session 6: Silver Level - Chapter 5

Creative Trauma Informed Practice

In the second part of the silver level, we focus on integrating a creative approach to trauma informed practice and this chapter outlines a number of creative ideas to support our work.

We recognise that when practitioners do not consider themselves to be naturally 'creative', introducing creativity into their work can be challenging and cause anxiety. For groups familiar with working creatively, you may wish to develop your own activity for this session or to select one of the suggested activities from the chapter such as the 'trauma jar' or photovoice activity ([see pages 40 - 42 of the silver level manual](#)).



Activity

This suggested activity is intended to demonstrate how creativity is possible for us all by providing a structure for the poem which allows us to recognise and share the things which make us unique.

The 'I am from' poem is taken from the 'Healing Classroom's'² training workshop delivered by the International Rescue Committee³ and is comprised of four statements. Each statement begins with the line 'I am from' and then staff need to create responses to the following four topics:

1. Familiar foods, especially those associated with joyous occasions and celebrations.
2. Sights, sounds and smells from your childhood neighbourhood.
3. Familiar sayings heard repeatedly growing up.
4. Familiar people, family members, friends and ancestors.

Tips

Try to allocate a set amount of time for this activity to prevent staff from over-thinking what they are trying to write. Once completed you could display the poems on a board so that they can be shared with the whole group.

I am from chicken schnitzel
and spaghetti eis, gyros and
pitta bread

I am from salty sea air,
pungent geraniums,
cinnamon gingerbread
houses and roasted
chestnuts

I am from 'na'er cast a
clout until May is out' and
'rain before 7, dry before 11'
I am from Mum, Dad and
Nicola, and Granny and
Grandad.

² <https://www.rescue.org/uk/irc-uks-healing-classrooms>

³ <https://www.rescue.org/uk>

Session 7: Gold Level - Chapter 6

Understanding organisations, trauma, power and betrayal

In the first chapter of the gold level, the focus shifts to thinking about trauma, power and betrayal across systems. It acknowledges the unique challenges of working with and within organisations affected by trauma and how this in turn can influence our practice. A learning activity is embedded into this chapter and we suggest pausing the recording to allow you the time to engage with this. It asks you to write a trauma informed version of a letter for a housing charity and then goes on to demonstrate what this could look like.



Activity

This activity presents an opportunity to think about how you can integrate a trauma informed approach within the specific context in which you work. We suggest selecting a piece of information (such as a letter) which is intended to be read by your beneficiaries (or their parents/caregivers) and reviewing it in small groups to see how it is both already trauma informed and how it could be developed to reflect this commitment.

This session can also be used to reflect on the current practice of an organisation and generate action plans to develop specific areas. Remembering that a commitment to trauma informed practice is an ongoing process, this encourages staff from across the organisation to contribute to this continued commitment. In the appendix, you will find a number of mapping exercises focused on each of the six principles of trauma informed practice to guide your discussion and inform your future planning.

Tips

Remember to be very specific about the changes that you wish to make, even the smallest change can often have a big impact. Always start with the change which is most achievable, this will sustain a commitment to achieving the action plan at both the individual and organisational level.

Session 8: Gold Level - Chapter 7

Our hearts: The impact of working with trauma

In the second chapter at the gold level, we turn our attention to how working with trauma can affect our own wellbeing. Drawing on the content from across each of the chapters, we reflect on how what we have learnt can be turned inwards. The video for this chapter includes two learning activities. The first focuses on helping us to define and become really specific about our values. We risk burnout and vicarious trauma when we work outside of our values and so it becomes essential to clarify and define our values.



Activity

This activity can be useful both for ourselves and in thinking about how we show up in the systems in which we work. You may wish to share these in a small group and consider how they both complement and conflict with those of your colleagues. Knowing your own and each other's values can be beneficial in creating relationships based on trust, mutual respect and understanding.

The second learning activity focuses on self-compassion and the importance of turning those qualities of 'reconnection' inward to offer ourselves the same compassion and kindness that we extend to those we support.

In addition to the guided activity, you may wish to invite staff to share their messages of kindness and also to offer the space and time to consider the challenge of applying self-compassion in practice; all too often we regard ourselves with self-judgement and self-criticism. You may also use this opportunity to discuss how your organisation can promote self-compassion and what might be needed to create this shift in culture.

Tips

These activities can be undertaken in small groups, however, for the values activity in particular, it may be useful to assign groups based on those who normally work together as this will provide an opportunity to reflect on and strengthen working relationships with colleagues.

Session 9: Gold Level - Chapter 8

Making SENSE of trauma informed practice

In the final chapter of the series, a structure for trauma informed practice is presented via the five stages of the SENSE model. Each stage is considered in turn and guidance provided as to how the model can be adapted across a range of contexts. The social support mapping exercise outlined in this chapter is suggested as a learning activity to draw the training to a close.



Activity

Working in small groups, but creating their own individual social support maps, staff are encouraged to spend time reflecting on who or what in their life helps them to cope, how, where any gaps might be and what they could do to address these. Time should also be allocated at the end to share their maps within their groups and to exchange ideas.

Tips

The social support mapping exercise should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than seeking to create a finished product. Encourage staff to share ideas and add to their maps when they are inspired to do so by the maps of their colleagues.

Contact Us

We would love to hear from you about how the training has supported you in your role or what we may consider additionally for future trauma informed work.

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Use of the training, guides and further materials

The team at Nicola Lester Trauma Consultancy have worked hard to develop this training and to make it accessible to all. Thrive LDN is delighted to host it for free, with thanks to funding and support by the Mayor of London, on our website via: www.thrivedn.co.uk/trauma-informed.

We ask that you respect this by keeping this online training for use by you and your organisation and do not reproduce the materials or re-distribute for profit. However, we do encourage you to share the details about the training with those in your networks who would benefit from participating.