

# FACT SHEET

## Applying Trauma-informed Principles to Conversations About Trauma

### GUIDING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES:

**Safety**      **Trustworthiness**      **Choice**      **Collaboration**      **Empowerment**

**SAFETY** *Tips to help a person who has experienced interpersonal trauma feel safe when you are having a conversation with them:*

### 1 (a) PHYSICAL SAFETY

- **Is the physical/geographical space in which you are having the conversation safe?** Is it away from busy roads if outside or in a room in which you are unlikely to be interrupted if you are inside?
- **Have you asked the person if there is anything you can do to make the space more comfortable?** Many factors, some which we can't predict, can lead to stress reactions e.g. some people might be triggered by a particular visual cue.
- **Will the person be physically safe after, as well as during, the conversation?** This applies to the situation to which they are returning as well as their general levels of arousal. You may need to help them with a basic Grounding Exercise.

Please see Fact Sheet: Talking About Trauma – Having Safe Conversations (For General Public)

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## 1 (b) EMOTIONAL SAFETY

\* 'Choose your time': if you are initiating the conversation, have you chosen a time when the person is likely to be receptive?

- **Does your non-verbal communication show that you are supportive, focused and listening in a way which is tuned into the person?** Maintaining consistent but not fixed eye contact is important. Take care not to look distracted.
- **Are you alert to possible signs of stress in the person's body?** This can include dilated pupils or changes in skin colour. The person may be twisting a tissue or take long pauses.
- **Do you encourage the person to take their time and take short breaks if they need to?** If the conversation is long you could return to it after a short break.
- **Will the person be emotionally safe after, as well as during the conversation?** Are you able to help them to lower their level of arousal if necessary?

**TRUSTWORTHINESS** *Tips to build trust in a conversation with a person who has experienced interpersonal trauma:*

### YOU CAN BUILD TRUST IF YOU:

- Are always attentive to physical and emotional safety.
- Always tune in to the person's level of comfort and ask them whether/how you might improve it.
- Pay ongoing attention to your and their non-verbal communication. Is the person showing signs of stress? Are you being sufficiently supportive?
- Take a gentle approach which does not convey 'an agenda'.
- Listen in the right way; do not interrupt the person unless there is an issue with their level of arousal; i.e. if 'window of tolerance' is exceeded.
- Ask the person how they are feeling after (as well as during) the conversation. Be ready to help them with 'grounding' if/as necessary (see [Grounding Exercises](#)).

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**CHOICE** *Tips to increase options and choices in a conversation with a person who has experienced interpersonal trauma (questions for consideration)*

## ENABLING CHOICE

- When you are starting a conversation with a person you know or suspect may be experiencing interpersonal trauma, provide them with choice/s around the conversation.
- Has the person chosen the logistical details, including the date, time and venue? Or have you discussed your decisions with them?
- How can you give the person greater choice about the way the conversation is held and develops?
- In what other way/s can you give the person other choices, even if they are small?
- How can responding to, rather than starting, the conversation affect the extent to which you can foster choices for the person?

**COLLABORATION** *Tips to help us collaborate in conversations with people who experience interpersonal trauma*

## COLLABORATION:

- 'Do something with' a person rather than do something 'for' or 'to' them.
- Don't assume that the person can't act on their behalf or engage in decisions and actions which affect them.
- Recognise when additional assistance may be necessary.
- Recognise that we engage more effectively with people when we cooperate with them.
- Act in a spirit of cooperation whenever and as much as you can.

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**EMPOWERMENT** *Tips to maximise empowerment in conversations with people who experience interpersonal trauma*

## **TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT:**

- Understand that interpersonal trauma often stems from and fosters disempowerment, and that taking steps to feeling more empowered is essential to healing.
- Recognise that the way in which a conversation is arranged and conducted can contribute to a sense of empowerment.
- Recognise that trauma which occurs in relationships erodes self-esteem and a person's sense of their own abilities. Try to identify ways to make your interactions respectful, democratic and inclusive.
- As far as possible, seek the person's preferences around the logistics of your conversation and try to meet them in a collaborative way.

To read the full paper: Talking About Trauma - Guide to Everyday Conversations for the General Public  
<https://www.blueknot.org.au/ABOUT-US/Our-Documents/Publications/Talking-Trauma-Public>