



SOMAPsych

TO BE TRAUMA-INFORMED

What does it mean to be Trauma-Informed?

This document offers you a brief explanation of what it means to be Trauma-Informed as a facilitator. In order to understand this, we first need to explore what trauma is, its impacts and nuances, the physiology behind trauma, and why as a facilitator it is important to educate ourselves in order to hold safer and braver spaces.

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DEFINING TRAUMA

While there are many nuances to trauma, one definition is; severely threatening event(s) that are intense, overwhelming, sometimes continuous or repeated. The key is that it is the profound compression of survival energy - the residue of the 'thing' - that has not been able to complete its meaningful course of action.

"Trauma originates as a response in the nervous system, and does not originate in an event. Trauma is in the nervous system, not in the event."
~ Peter Levine

It is important to note that trauma is not always a tangible event. Trauma comes in all shapes and sizes. From natural disasters, domestic violence, and physical accidents, to emotional abuse, generational trauma, early childhood experiences, and so much more. Whilst trauma can occur from a car accident or sexual abuse, trauma can also occur from things like experiencing constant microaggressions within a toxic workplace and not being able to stop or escape them, leaving a person unable to move the trauma out of their body. Trauma is a complete overwhelm of the nervous system's capacity to cope and restore itself - it is the residue of the experience, not the experience itself. We will explore how trauma is perceived quite differently by each individual later in this document.

Understanding trauma is integral to being human. When we think about everything that has happened and continues to happen in our local and global world, we realize how common various types of trauma are and how everyone has either experienced trauma directly or indirectly (vicarious trauma occurs through knowing someone who has experienced something deeply distressing, stressful, or traumatizing). Even watching the news these days can be traumatic or retraumatizing. It is this knowing of how common it is that we see the absolute necessity of understanding what trauma is, how it impacts people differently, and how we can compassionately and empathetically show up in solidarity and support of each person in their human experience. It's here that we learn the tools to appropriately and effectively hold space, to create a little more safety for ourselves and others, and to think in a more forward and solution-based way. A forward, solution-based approach is holding hope and wonder even within spaces of darkness and uncertainty; it's about giving people back their power and helping them to reconnect with their innate intelligence, resilience and inner healer.

How to recognize physical/ mental manifestations of trauma

Ever wonder how trauma shows up in your body or mind? Well, first things first - trauma is not linear and it definitely is not the same for everyone; it's an adaptive coping response. Symptoms may present immediately or manifest over time. They emerge as the body+mind attempt to cope with and resolve the residue of life's stressors and trauma.

What you may notice:

- **Physically:** headaches, dizziness, tightness, muscle tension, digestive issues, constricted breathing
- **Emotionally:** decreased capacity to feel (physical sensations, emotions, etc.), increased fear, anxiety, panic, overwhelm, loss of choice, difficulty feeling comforted, anger, shame
- **Mentally/Socially:** dissociation, rumination, low self-worth, negative self-talk, self-blame, memory challenges, depression, loss of interest in activities, isolation, loneliness, relational and attachment reenactments

The residue of traumatic experiences can leave us feeling powerless, helpless, and disconnected from Self and others. It can disrupt and remove us from being able to experience the present moment.

...And there is always hope. There is always a way to renavigate and reframe these experiences and symptoms. It starts from within.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE BODY+MIND

The brain is neutral - it does not understand what is good, bad, right or wrong. It all comes down to one's past, what has been passed on through lineage, perception and individual experience. What is extremely impactful and traumatic for one person, might not have an impact on another. Whilst two people can be in the same time, place and experience, one person may walk away traumatized and the other might not - and neither is right or wrong, good or bad. This is because everyone has a different biochemical makeup and nervous system wiring which may dictate how they perceive or interact with a situation.

When we experience a stressful situation in the brain, a physiological response is activated within our body, with the intention of preparing us to 'fight, flight, or freeze'. This can move the individual into the sympathetic nervous system which is responsible for arousing one to action through responses like increased heart rate and breathing rate. The response experienced is often overwhelming and can cause people to feel out of control of their thoughts, feelings and actions. People often feel TOO MUCH or TOO LITTLE. This can also move people into a dorsal vagal response, immobilization or freezing/numbing. This can be seen as the nervous system's way of 'playing dead' and removing us from a threatening situation so we don't 'feel' it - if we can't fight or run away, the next best thing is to dissociate or become disembodied.

Due to the changes in the brain and body, the individual will often experience increased difficulty in making decisions and problem-solving, because the mind is flooded with such intense emotions and thoughts.

This ultimately can leave an individual feeling out of control of many areas of their life, emotional state, and well-being.

And, again, there is always hope - there is always a way forward.

TRAUMA-INFORMED FACILITATION

A large majority of the population has experienced a traumatic event to some degree. This means you as a facilitator (potentially holding your own trauma) are likely to be holding space for individuals with trauma.

When working with a group of individuals, there is a potential for individuals to be **triggered**. This is particularly true if you are facilitating spaces where folks are encouraged to move out of their comfort zone for growth purposes, engage in a healing modality, or enter into an embodied state.

The body holds trauma to different degrees and complexities and will process and integrate it in just as spontaneous and complex ways. As a facilitator, you are creating space for individuals to explore and connect with their breath, body and mind. Therefore it is important to be sure we are able to hold students in the wholeness of their experience and understand what may be happening for them on a physiological and neurological level, without feeling the need to alter or change their experience. We are here to bear witness, allow, and hold space for their transformation in their own time and way.

Trauma-informed as a practice and approach means to know and understand the intricacies and complexities of trauma on a physical, mental, emotional, and energetic level. It means understanding the ways in which trauma can become stored in the body and how it can then manifest itself over time. It's about constantly learning ways to hold space for survivors of trauma and how to help support them on their road back to themselves. It is also about knowing and understanding yourself and your own history while also being committed to your own self-evolution. This is how we learn to walk alongside and remember that each person knows best and we are here as support. Being trauma-informed isn't just about being a good listener or empathetic - it's about taking the time to educate yourself and continue to learn the ever-changing and unfolding landscape of trauma. It is about truly putting your own agenda, expectations, thoughts, and ego to the side and powerfully showing up for the person in front of you.

Above all, being trauma-informed is knowing and wholeheartedly believing that no one is broken or damaged. No one is beyond help. We hold hope as a possibility, as a beacon of light, for those who may feel lost or overwhelmed because we know there is always room for transformation and growth.

ELEMENTS OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO FACILITATION:



01

Compassionately assume anyone walking through the door may have experienced trauma at some point.



02

Keep the power in participants hands through language and choice-making; this means hands-off and using verbal or visual cues.



03

Intentionally work towards an atmosphere of safety, comfort, and possibility above all else.



04

Limit the amount of sensory stimulation and overwhelm by consciously thinking about all senses (lighting, aroma, temperature, etc).



05

Offer intentional mindfulness and grounding techniques in ways that participants can take it with them off the mat if useful.

If you would like to learn more about trauma-informed facilitation and this body of work, you can join me, Amanda Hanna (Founder of SomaPsych) for the **20HR Trauma-Informed Facilitator Training**. This is held in-person across Aotearoa and Online & Live.

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Amanda holds over 500 hours in trauma-informed training, including social justice and inclusivity. She is a registered Psychology student and holds regular Yin Yoga Teacher Trainings with a large focus on trauma-informed facilitation, neuroscience and mindfulness.

Amanda's passion lies in knowing the sacred responsibility facilitators of any space or experience hold. Through her work, she helps people discover their power and voice within their offering while ensuring it is done with respect, kindness, informed intention, and evidence-based knowledge.

The intention behind the trauma-informed trainings at SomaPsych is to open a conversation and deepen the understanding of what trauma is, how it manifests differently from person to person, and how we can more bravely hold safer spaces for all. Its heart rests in the knowing that personal restoration is unique to all and we are here to offer tools, techniques, insights, and points of curiosity for you to develop into the facilitator you want to be.