

TRAUMA- INFORMED CARE (TIC)

As we embrace the role of sponsors in welcoming and supporting refugees, it is imperative to acknowledge the profound journeys that newcomers have undertaken – journeys marked by forced displacement and often shadowed by experiences of trauma. Our responsibility as sponsors extends well beyond providing mere material assistance; it encompasses a deep commitment to empathy, understanding, and sensitivity toward the trauma that many newcomers have endured. In this endeavor, Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) emerges as an indispensable framework, guiding us to approach this role with unwavering compassion and heightened awareness.

The reverberations of trauma, whether stemming from isolated events or recurring circumstances, can cast enduring shadows on an individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Newcomers you engage with may have weathered not only the upheaval of leaving their homes and communities but also the indelible imprints of violence and loss during their arduous journeys. These experiences, characterized by their complexity, can give rise to profound challenges in areas such as mental health, emotional equilibrium, and social integration.

Within the pages of this resource, you will unearth profound insights into the impact of trauma, the telltale signs of its presence, and the strategies through which you can profoundly enhance the lives of those you welcome. As you embark on this shared journey of sponsorship, remain attuned to your own well-being and personal limitations. The realms of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma underscore the importance of self-care and routine introspection. By immersing yourself in the ethos of trauma-informed care, you are taking a momentous stride towards cultivating an environment of unparalleled compassion and unwavering support for those who have traveled unimaginable paths.

Trauma-Informed Care

It is important to understand that the newcomers you welcome have experienced forced displacement and in turn may have experienced trauma during or before this displacement. **Trauma** is defined as a single event, multiple events or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's social, emotional and spiritual well-being. In turn, complex trauma is when an individual has experienced repeated instances of the same type of trauma over a period of time or experienced multiple types of trauma. Complex trauma is more likely to result in a long-standing interpersonal problem that can be severe.

The *Triple Trauma Paradigm* serves as an example of complex trauma. This **model** was adapted and developed to help providers understand the refugee/asylee experience and their exposure to trauma during the pre-flight, flight, and post-flight phases of displacement. Displaced populations have most likely experienced some type of loss, if not multiple: loss of home, identity, family, property, livelihood, and/or community that they may never be able to fully recover in conjunction with possible violence during their pre-flight, flight, and post-flight stages. Even after reaching their host country, they are still dealing with a high level of uncertainty when it comes to socioeconomic, political, and emotional/physical stressors.

| THE TRIPLE-TRAUMA PARADIGM | | |
|---|--|--|
| PRE-FLIGHT  | FLIGHT  | POST-FLIGHT  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Harassment/intimidation/threats ■ Fear of unexpected arrest ■ Loss of job/livelihood ■ Loss of home and possessions ■ Disruption of studies, life dreams ■ Repeated relocation ■ Living in hiding/underground ■ Societal chaos/breakdown ■ Prohibition of traditional practices ■ Lack of medical care ■ Separation, isolation of family ■ Malnutrition ■ Need for secrecy, silence, distrust ■ Brief arrests ■ Being followed or monitored ■ Imprisonment ■ Torture ■ Other forms of violence ■ Witnessing violence ■ Disappearances/deaths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fear of being caught or returned ■ Living in hiding/underground ■ Detention at checkpoints, borders ■ Loss of home, possessions ■ Loss of job/schooling ■ Illness ■ Robbery ■ Exploitation: bribes, falsification ■ Physical assault, rape, or injury ■ Witnessing violence ■ Lack of medical care ■ Separation, isolation of family ■ Malnutrition ■ Crowded, unsanitary conditions ■ Long waits in refugee camps ■ Great uncertainty about future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Low social and economic status ■ Lack of legal status ■ Language barriers ■ Transportation, service barriers ■ Loss of identity, roles ■ Bad news from home ■ Unmet expectations ■ Unemployment/underemployment ■ Racial/ethnic discrimination ■ Inadequate, dangerous housing ■ Repeated relocation/migration ■ Social and cultural isolation ■ Family separation/reunification ■ Unresolved losses/disappearances ■ Conflict: internal, marital, generational, community ■ Unrealistic expectations from home ■ Shock of new climate, geography ■ Symptoms often worsen |

CHART: [CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING](#)

Individuals that have experienced trauma can display different symptoms. Trauma symptoms are not a “one size fits all”, and it is important to check your own biases when it comes to interacting with newcomers that have experienced traumatic events. You may observe symptoms of trauma through emotional, physical cognitive, behavioral, and existential reactions. What does that mean? A newcomer may be displaying:

- Emotional symptoms in response to trauma such as numbness and detachment, anxiety, helplessness, depersonalization, constrictions of feelings or emotional overwhelm. On a longer-term basis, this can show up as depression, anxiety, grief reactions, shame, and emotional detachment.

- Physical symptoms when trauma is triggered such as nausea, sweating, elevated heartbeat, fatigue, and startled responses. Delayed symptoms may include sleep disturbance, somatization (increased focus or worry about body aches and pain), persistent fatigue, long term health effects.
- Cognitive symptoms can include difficulty concentrating, memory or recall problems, rumination or racing thoughts, intrusive memories, or flashbacks. Severe symptoms can include suicidal ideations, in which case it is important for co-sponsors to employ best practices and immediately notify their local office for mental health services. *Please note, your role as a co-sponsor is not to provide therapy and it is important to avoid triggering or re-traumatizing a client that is exhibiting such symptoms. Please seek professional support immediately.
- Behavioral symptoms can include startled reactions, restlessness, argumentative behavior, avoidant behavior, distrust of others, decreased activity level, withdrawal, and in severe cases, increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Existential symptoms, which can often be masked as they do not appear as obvious trauma symptoms, include intense or obsessive use of prayer, restoration of faith in the goodness of others, despair about humanity, questioning, cynicism, disillusionment, loss of purpose, or hopelessness.

It is therefore imperative to understand how trauma can play a major role in newcomers' lives and maintain sensitivity when interacting with families that you welcome. Additionally, you must understand the role you play in the newcomers' lives. Although you work with newcomers that have most likely experienced trauma, you are not their clinical therapists and must maintain appropriate boundaries when communicating and interacting with families. This can be achieved by maintaining a [Trauma-Informed Approach with the "4 R's"](#):

- Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential path for recovery
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma
- Respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into welcome practices
- Resist re-traumatization and be mindful of triggers

When communicating with newcomers, it is recommended to employ the principles of [Trauma-Informed Care](#), as shared below. The six principles, which are generalized and applicable across all levels and settings of resettlement, are a strengths-based approach that serve as a valuable framework when delivering services for newcomers. The principles are not designed to treat actual trauma, which is a professional's responsibility, but meant to reinforce a dynamic that restores all that our migrant populations may have lost (the six principles) when undergoing the Triple Trauma Paradigm.



Safety

- Ensure the newcomer's experience promotes emotional, physical, and psychological safety
- Promote a safe environment that is clean, organized, and clutter-free
- Be cognizant of maintaining confidentiality (safe space) when the newcomer is discussing sensitive topics
- Use a trauma-informed approach when the newcomer displays emotions or struggles, including validating their feelings and decisions (strengths-based), and communicating in a positively responsive and encouraging way



Trustworthiness and Transparency

- Build trust and rapport with the newcomer by maintaining transparency throughout the arrival and reception process
- Employ task clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries when interacting and supporting the newcomer
- Help set accurate expectations and prepare newcomer when it comes to appointments and ensure they have a choice in the matter



Peer Support and Mutual Help

- With the newcomer's consent and interest, promote social connections and support systems
- Allow the newcomer to inform you of what type of social connections they are interested in building when it comes to community engagement



Collaboration and Mutuality

- Collaborate with the newcomer when it comes to making decisions
- Promote partnering and leveling of power differences



Empowerment, Voice and Choice

- Highlight the newcomer's strengths and recognize their resiliency
- Promote a system of shared decision making, choice, and goal setting that empowers the newcomer



Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues

- Recognize cultural stereotypes and biases (on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender-identity, geography, etc.) and offer access to culturally sensitive and gender responsive services
- Understand that historical trauma can be a factor to consider when interacting with newcomers

While engaging with newcomers, it is also important to remember that vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout is a real possibility. As a co-sponsor, be mindful of your own capacity and boundaries. Ensure that you take time to check in with yourself and reflect on how you are thinking and feeling after interacting with families, both short-term and long-term. Remind yourself that it is okay to take space whenever needed.



Continued Education

[TED Talk: "The danger of a single story" Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi](#)

["Dignity" Donna Hicks](#)

[Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center](#)

