



Practical Strategies for Co-Production Full Explainer Guide



Trauma Informed
Stoke-on-Trent
and Staffordshire

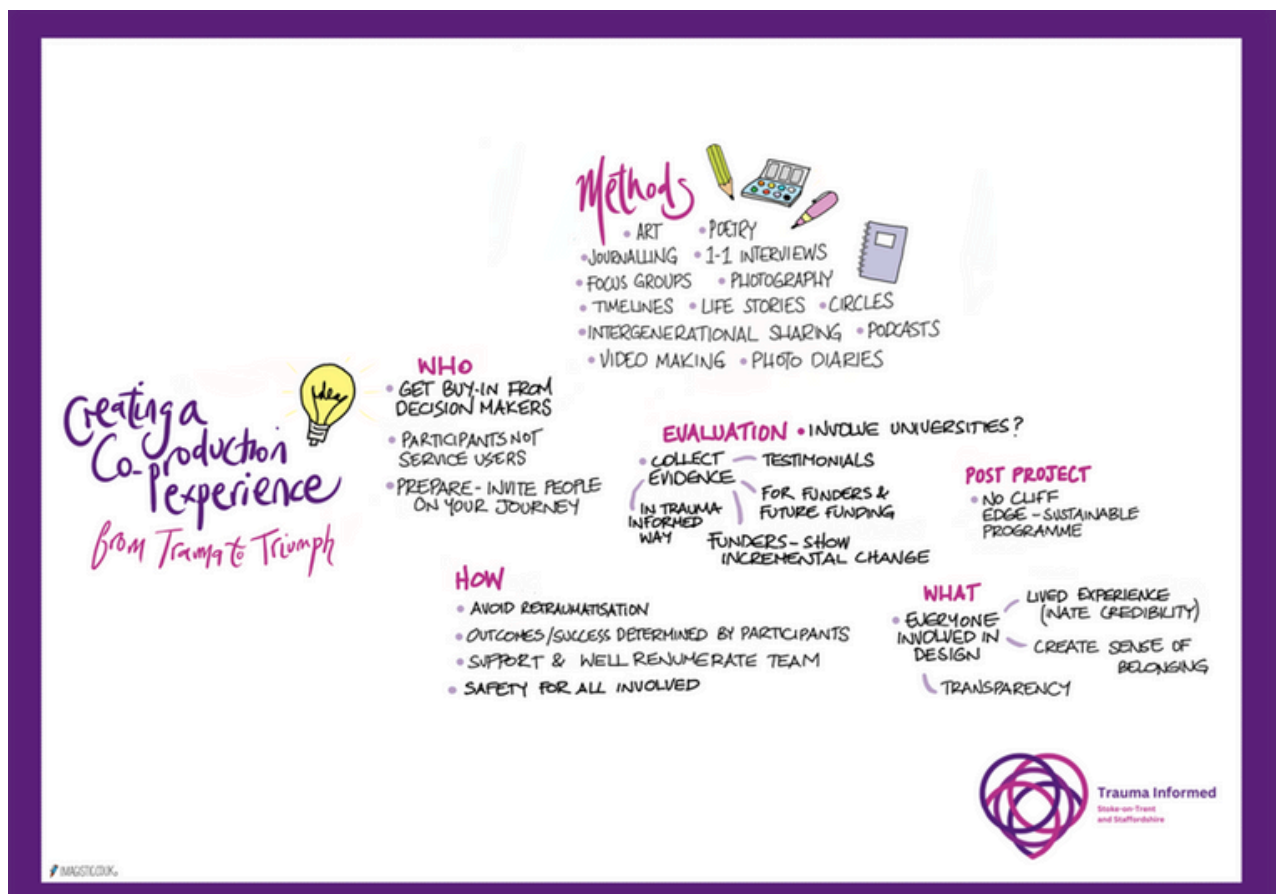
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TRAUMA INFORMED CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Trauma Informed Co-production

Co-production refers to collaborating with all stakeholders including our wider team, multi-agency working as well as including the children and young people who use our services. The best source of information we have about to get things right for those who have experienced trauma is to speak with them and learn from them.

In this guide, we will explore how, through active participation, we can ensure we design the functions of services around the expertise and value of all so that we can meaningfully meet the needs of those who have experienced trauma.

We will consider how to integrate the 6 Principles of Trauma Informed Practice, ensuring that the procedures and practices we devise are sensitive to the experiences of the whole community. This guide highlights the importance of embedding trauma-informed practices into co-production to create services that are genuinely responsive to the needs of children and their families.



Foundational principles of trauma-informed co-production

Safety: Safety (as you may know from previous guides) is the foundation of trauma-informed practice and so co-production is no exception. Safety reminds us of the importance of creating environments where we can minimise harm, always remembering to take active steps to plan our interactions carefully and to consider the space these happen in. We can seek guidance from those using our service around improvements that we can make to the environment. However, it is also essential to consider emotional safety. We can do this through encouraging open, non-judgmental dialogue (more about this in the language guide).

Trustworthiness: Trustworthiness includes constructing and continuing a relationship of trust. With regards to co-production, we can do this through explaining the process, what their involvement would require of them and what the goals are. Without this, we may struggle to gain meaningful insights which we can then translate into changes to our service design and delivery. Creating regular, anticipated communication and feedback demonstrates reliability and helps build a foundation of trust. Trustworthiness also entails being honest about the limitations of the services we offer so that we can make appropriate improvements.

Choice: Acknowledging and validating service user's independence about how and what they share or what role they wish to play in co-production is important to establish. Depending on where they are on their journey of healing, they may prefer to take a smaller role or might only want to engage with certain aspects of our evaluation. For example, completing a survey may feel less intimidating than attending a focus group. This principle of choice means that all involved should be able to keep their own control about what and how they are sharing and the topics they discuss within the co-production process. Also, we must always make it clear that they can withdraw or change their level of involvement at any time. Expressing this is essential!

Empowering children and young people to share their voice through co-production can support them to feel included, heard, held and respected. This has been found to increase their sense of ownership; building their self-confidence, self-esteem, and strength to cope with the effects of trauma.

Reflection: What methods of participation might work in your service or setting?

Collaboration: This principle is centred around respecting the input and voices of everyone working in an equal partnership. This includes holding conversation and co-production activities in a way that inspires varied viewpoints and if done well, should enable the voices that are often silenced or hidden to be heard as everyone will have the opportunity to contribute. Stratagems could be multi-modal to match participation levels, such as small sized focus groups or an anonymous feedback box where children can

No matter how you go about co-production, always celebrate the contributions and achievements of everyone and appreciate how hard it can be to share honest thoughts about something. We can do this through displaying our appreciation for their time and what they have shared. Help them to understand what an important part in the process they are as together, we can work to strengthen the offer for other children.

Empowerment: Empowerment within trauma-informed co-production focuses on identifying and using the capabilities of everyone. If we can see people for their strengths first, we are able to use the many skills they have and in turn, this is very empowering for those involved. Not only are we then supporting their recovery but at the same time, we are making long-lasting, sustainable changes which are truly trauma informed by the very definition.

Peer Support: Support accessed from peers who do the same job/work in the same field OR those who use the service. There is active encouragement to access peer support opportunities. Organisational endorsement is not required as it recognises that people may feel reluctant to share some of the aspects they are grappling with for fear of being seen as unproductive for example. Our goal is always to work towards mutual, reciprocal support.

Cultural, Historical and Gender Considerations: Oppression and the lived experience of those experiencing marginalisation are acknowledged through co-production efforts. Active work is undertaken to ensure that those groups are not further marginalised and that there is action to reduce marginalisation. Organisations and those within them actively seek to effect change with policies and procedures being designed in collaboration which reflect this.

Strategies for creating a safe and supportive environment

Physical Space

- Arrange meeting spaces which are warm, comfortable and welcoming. People are giving up their time to meet with you to help the service.
- If possible, set up the room as a horse shoe shape, or better still, a circle so that from the outside, this is going to a conversation, not an interview. In a circle or around a table to promote equality and facilitate eye contact.
- Try to pick a room which will be free of distractions, that is secure and where your co-producers know that they cannot be overheard. You will find that conversations are so much richer and transparent because of this.

Emotional Safety

- Use some of the tips from the language guide to consider how you can communicate clearly but also create a listening culture from the outset.
- Create a group agreement which establishes some 'values' or 'rules' which everyone agrees by as things that they feel will keep them safe. We have created a basic version at the end of this document to give you an idea about this might work for adult and child co-producers.
- This involves creating an atmosphere that acknowledges and values all feelings, experiences, ideas and suggestions
- Consider the use of "I" statements as a means of helping co-producers in attendance to express themselves clearly.

Reflection: What mechanisms could you put in place for those that want to attend the meetings but may not feel able to share in the group space?

Fostering Equitable Participation

Inclusive communication will mean that all those in attendance will be able to access the meeting irrespective of their age, abilities and more. Consider carefully how this needs to work in your setting.

Break things down

- Make information clearly understandable so that no prior knowledge is required about the topic.

Say goodbye to acronyms

- Irrespective of our profession, we love an acronym! However, a co-production meeting isn't the space for this.
- Use plain language instead so everyone understands.

Provide some visual aids to support the conversation topics

- Pictures, posters, visual aids can really help to bring the conversation to life especially for children e.g. when discussing a new waiting room, if artists impressions are available bring those. It's much better than describing it!

Language and Cultural Considerations

- As you will want a mix of people to attend, you will need to find out beforehand what accessibility arrangements are needed.
- You may need a translator or support from colleagues to ensure diverse examples are used so that everyone finds the conversation relatable.

Reflection: What resources or facilities do you have available to achieve this?

What about power dynamics?

From the outset, remind attendees that everyone in the room is an equal. Support everyone to feel valued by trying some of the following:

Plan for quieter voices

- You could try breakout discussions or small group work
- Use anonymous feedback tools
- Encourage quieter/shier members of the group subtly but don't call them out! This can be really exposing for those who have experienced trauma.



Share out the responsibility for leading the group

- To keep the meetings fresh and so that all members of leadership get the opportunities to meet with co-producers, rotate responsibility amongst leaders

Always seek feedback and seek to improve

- Much like you might be thinking about using co-production to make improvements to how the service works, you may also need to seek feedback to evaluate whether the group is working for all concerned. Towards the end of this guide, you will find an example of child and an adult evaluation form for you to adapt. We hope it helps to stimulate your thinking!
- This demonstrates through action that you really do care about their views and getting things right.

Adapting practices for trauma sensitivity

Being flexible means that we need to cater for all needs and preferences to ensure everyone's comfort.

This can be achieved through:

- Differing meeting formats e.g. online, face-to-face, small vs large groups, inside the service building or at another venue.

- Provide others ways to contribute e.g. writing, drawing, using digital platforms/apps etc rather than just spoken word.

As we have a duty of care and we must be doing everything we can to not retraumatise, we should try the following strategies. This is because being trauma-informed requires us to understand that we could unintentionally trigger or elicit trauma responses from the group:

- As much as possible, meet with attendees 1:1 beforehand to try to find out whether they know their early warning signs/what you might look for to know when they need a break.
- Agree a signal/word with every participant which is subtle so that they can let you know they are feeling unsafe or uneasy without the rest of the group knowing. When the signal is raised, we can change the direction of the conversation.
- Work with colleagues to establish what to do if an attendee does need to leave the door. What emotional support will be on hand? What about safeguarding concerns?
- If triggers do occur, we can work together to learn from it to re-establish how to minimise this next time. Be kind to yourself though...sometimes despite the best planning, this can still happen.

Reflection: What good practice is already happening in your service and what could be done differently?

Support and Self-Care for Co-Producers

Professional support

As professionals, we also need to think about our self-care! We have gone into much more detail in the Vicarious Trauma guide about this but here are a few snippets... Supervision might provide you with a space to be able to explore any complex cases or stories which have come up through the co-production process. Challenges can be discussed so as to keep you safe.

Setting up peer support groups with colleagues can be a huge benefit! The joy of this is that you will understand the pressures of the work you do, the challenges your service/profession faces and you might be able to break down some of the problems together.

Personal self-care

- Remember to try to create a buffer between your professional and home life. This might be as simple as taking the scenic route home.
- Maintain your physical and emotional wellbeing by listening to what your body needs and not sacrificing your own needs e.g. drinking enough water, getting enough sleep and the right nutrition to support you to do the amazing work you do every day.

*When tending to other's needs;
don't forget self nourishment
is important too.*



Is Your Service Ready for Co-Production?

Co-production requires us to be able to meet the following four conditions fully before we can commence on this work:

1. Can we work reciprocally yet? This means that we have to be ready to share what our service is doing but to hear back from our co-producers and be receptive to what they have to say as part of a two-way process.

2. Can we extend our commitment to equality into co-production work? This means that everyone in the group can be safely welcome into the conversations as equals irrespective of their backgrounds, experiences and more.

3. Are we embodying diversity in all we do? From day 1 we must ensure that we gather a representative group who mirror the communities we serve

4. Can we make it accessible? This includes the meeting methods, visual materials and the ways in which we communicate.

Reflection: Is your service ready? If not, what needs to happen first.

Conclusion

Co-production is a powerful tool which really will take your trauma aware practice to the next level! However, it really is a commitment as it requires us to be able to not just listen to, but to act on the suggestions which come from the meetings if we are to respond well. However, it is difficult to beat the level of compassion and extent to which needs are met through using other mechanisms.

Useful Resources and Wider Reading


Co-production planning proforma


- What am I aiming to find out?
- Who does it impact?
- Which members of the team need to be involved?
- Which groups of service users do I need to invite?
- Who will benefit and why?
- What are the intended changes?

Co-production evaluation for children

Hi there! We want to ensure our meetings are as helpful as possible for you.

Please answer these questions. Circle the face that fits the question.

 = Yes

 = Sometimes

 = No

1. Do you feel safe during our meetings?



2. Do you get a chance to talk?



3. Do you feel part of the team?



4. Are your ideas helping to change things?



Example of a group agreement for adults

This agreement ensures a safe, shared space where we can all learn from each other.

1. **Respect and Understanding:** Be careful with our language and understand that each of us will have different experiences and opinions
2. **Confidentiality:** What we share stays in this space unless we agree differently.
3. **Participation and Inclusivity:** We want to hear all voices however it works for you. We will not pressure people to talk, understanding that each of us will have good and not-so-good days.
4. **Safety and Comfort:** We will support each other and give space when needed without judgment. Collaboration and Empowerment: Everyone is equal, and we recognise our differences as strengths to learn from and grow from.
5. **Collaboration:** We make decisions together. This group is about hearing our experiences of the services and working out what works and what could be better so that actions/changes can come from this.
6. **Review and Adaptation:** This agreement is a living document which we can change as the group becomes more established.

Co-Production evaluation for adults

**Use these prompts to create your own evaluation form to gauge whether processes are working for your co-producers.*

Many thanks for your participation in this process so far. Please tick which statement applies to you for each question below. Use the comments space for any suggestions you would like us to consider.

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with our co-production meetings?

Very Satisfied

Somewhat Satisfied

Neutral

Somewhat Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

Comments:

2. Do you feel that the meetings are well-organised and productive?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Comments:

3. Do you have adequate opportunities to contribute and share your ideas?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Comments:

4. How included do you feel in the decision-making process?

Very Included

Somewhat Included

Neutral

Somewhat Excluded

Very Excluded

Comments:

5. Do you have suggestions for improvements we could make to the meetings?

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback. We are committed to continuously improving our co-production process and value your input in shaping our future meetings.

Wider reading

Charlton, J. (1998). Nothing about us without us [electronic resource]: Disability oppression and empowerment (University Press Scholarship Online). University of California Press.

Co-Productive Collective (2021) Co-Producing Change Together. Available from: <https://www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/> Accessed: 1.04.2024].

NHS England (2023) Co-Production. Available from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/always-events/co-production/> [Accessed: 1.04.2024].

SCIE (2024). What is co-production and how to do it. Available from: <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/what-how/> [Accessed: 1.04.2024].

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