

Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Overview

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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are “highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event, or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person’s safety, security, trust or bodily integrity.” (Young Minds, 2018).

Trauma is the multifaceted, difficult psychological and emotional response to a painfully and profoundly upsetting situation or series of situations. It is not just the event itself that defines trauma, but an individual's emotional experience of these events (Thomas, 2023).

Introduction

Early life experiences shape the development of the brain and help to determine the makeup of a person's intelligence, emotions, and personality. Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) and trauma can occur when babies, infants and young children are exposed to chronic or acute maltreatment within the caregiving context; brain development may be compromised and emotional, behavioural, or learning challenges may persist, especially in the absence of targeted and trauma-informed interventions.

ACEs and trauma have been shown to have lasting, negative effects on health, wellbeing, and opportunity. Left unaddressed, they have also been shown to have an impact on the likelihood of both future violence perpetration and victimisation, and are associated with other poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

For children and youth who experience child abuse or neglect and associated trauma, brain development may be interrupted, leading to functional impairments. Trauma-induced changes to the brain can result in varying degrees of cognitive impairment and emotional dysregulation that can lead to a host of problems. Trauma exposure has been linked to a significantly increased risk of developing several mental and behavioural health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, serious violence and substance use. Ongoing trauma can affect mental, emotional, and behavioural health into adulthood.

Although many people who experience trauma will progress in life without any long-term negative impacts, far too many others will experience more profound difficulties and traumatic stress reactions. That said, research indicates that with appropriate support, people can overcome traumatic events. As such, **Trauma Informed Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (TrISS)** has been established, and as a partnership has developed a suite of resources to cultivate collective, cross-sector learning, in order to support the ongoing development of trauma informed culture. Frontline professionals are in a unique position to recognise trauma in children and youth and provide appropriate support services.

Background and Context

Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA), established in 2021 is a multi-agency partnership aiming to work together to strengthen the visibility, early identification and partnership response to prevent violence and its associated harms. The VRA is predicated on a public health approach to violence reduction, recognising that prevention is better than cure and early intervention is key to preventing and reducing violence and its associated harms.

In line with the government's Serious Violence Duty 2023, the VRA works in partnership across the public sector, private sector, charities and community groups to better understand and support individuals and communities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The VRA aims to **protect people from harm and help to create diverse and safe communities, living fulfilling lives**. The Alliance works with a range of partners to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence and support and enable services that make a real difference to people's lives.

Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and **Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership** (SSCP) are the key statutory mechanisms for agreeing how local organisations will **co-operate, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people living in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**.

Reflecting on the evidence that trauma is a key risk factor associated with the likelihood of future involvement in violence and other poor health outcomes, the VRA, SSCB and SSCP, along with partners have established **Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire (TriSS)**. Working together with Trauma Informed Consultancy Services, TriSS have developed a suite of partnership resources that aim to raise awareness of trauma across the multi-agency partnership workforce; recognising everyone has a role in supporting those who have experienced trauma.

The resources aim to assist professionals at different seniority levels to understand the impact of trauma on the child, how they can support individuals, communities and colleagues who have been affected by trauma, and how they become **Trauma Informed organisations** that ensure safeguards are in place to reduce trauma and the impact it has. The resources will form part of a broader package of support that will be developed outside of the scope of this work; linking with individual organisations' approaches to becoming Trauma Informed.

This overview provides a background and high-level introduction to the suite of resources and aims to support the start of the journey to becoming Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.



About this Overview

This overview provides an introduction to the suite of resources developed by TrISS. It outlines the background and context of the journey, assists professionals to identify trauma and its impact, details the resources developed to date, and proposes how organisations can start their journey towards becoming trauma informed.

Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire has designed this overview and supporting resources to:

- Support consistency and develop a common language relating to trauma informed practice across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.
- Raise awareness of Adverse Child Experiences and Trauma across the workforce including:
 - o **Realise** that trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities
 - o **Recognise** the signs, symptoms and widespread impact of trauma
 - o **Respond** – how all professionals have a role in responding to trauma
 - o **Resist** re-traumatisation
- Encourage organisations and leaders to:
 - o Think about their organisation through a trauma informed lens
 - o Incorporate understanding of trauma in all policies and practices
 - o Adopt appropriate language
 - o Provide strategies for trauma informed co-production
 - o Develop collective care strategies
 - o Minimise the impact of vicarious and secondary trauma
 - o Support effective supervision to the whole workforce.
- Reflect on current practices by undertaking a Trauma Informed CALMS Self-Assessment, Maturity Matrix and Action Plan to;
 - o Identify what trauma informed practices and resources organisations already have in place and any development needs
 - o Guide organisations to understand the process of embedding a trauma informed approach
 - o Support organisations to embed trauma informed care.

Brief Introduction to Trauma

What is Trauma?

Trauma is the complex psychological and emotional response to a painful and upsetting situation or series of situations (including, but not limited to physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, witnessing violence, being the victim of violent attacks either physically and/or psychologically, witnessing accidents or natural disasters). It is not just the event itself that defines trauma, but an individual's emotional experience of these events.

Trauma can result from various situations such as physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, witnessing violence, being the victim of violent attacks either physically and/or psychologically, being involved in or witnessing accidents, or natural disasters (SAMHSA, 2023).

How might we see trauma?

When a child's brain is in survival mode, dealing with the effects of chronic stress, we may note psychological differences which can include (but are certainly not limited to):

- Attention difficulties
- Reduced memory retention for their age
- Not meeting age-related expectations at school
- Emotional dysregulation
- Attachment difficulties including forming and keeping friendships
- An increased risk of substance use across the life course
- High risk behaviours which may lead to a higher risk of committing a criminal offence – including aggression and violence.



The Iceberg diagram demonstrates the 'behaviour' that may be displayed, and helps us to understand the context and identify what might be 'underneath' the behaviour.

What can be the impact of Trauma?

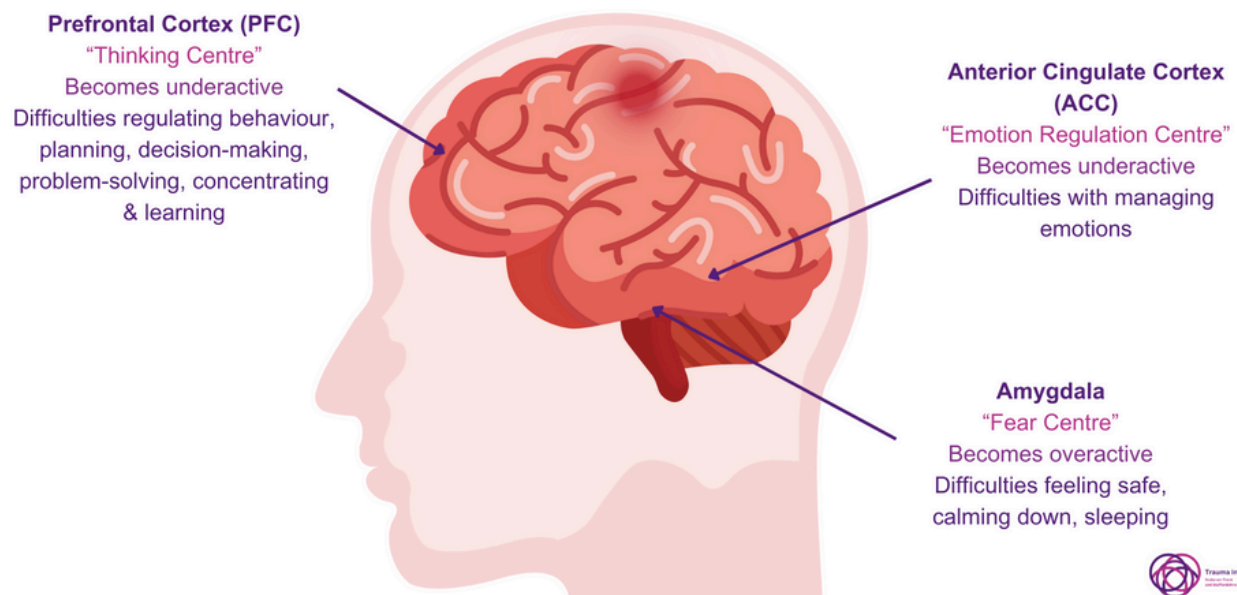
The experience of adversity in childhood can make some adolescents particularly vulnerable to harm and that the effects of such harm can persist into adulthood, this means that there will likely be a proportion of adolescents who either need to transition directly into receiving support from adults' services, or who are more likely to require them later in life.

Research shows that unresolved trauma (such as witnessing serious violence) can increase risks later in adulthood and we know that not responding to harms in early adulthood can mean that people have more difficult and painful lives, and may need more expensive support later (Director of Research in practice).

Trauma can affect an individual's long-term health and life outcomes, as well as leading to changes in an individual's biology and behaviour across the life-course, affecting relationships. As such, trauma not only disrupts the lives of individuals but also affects the fabric of communities and society as a whole. It is important to remember that trauma effects everyone differently.

The effects of Trauma on brain development

Trauma in childhood can have lasting, negative effects on health, wellbeing, and opportunity. Trauma-induced changes to the brain can result in varying degrees of cognitive impairment and emotional dysregulation that have the potential to lead to a host of problems.



This 5-minute [video](#), developed by the UK Trauma Council explains the impact of childhood trauma on the brain in more detail.

Why is it important that organisations and professionals understand Trauma and how can we help?

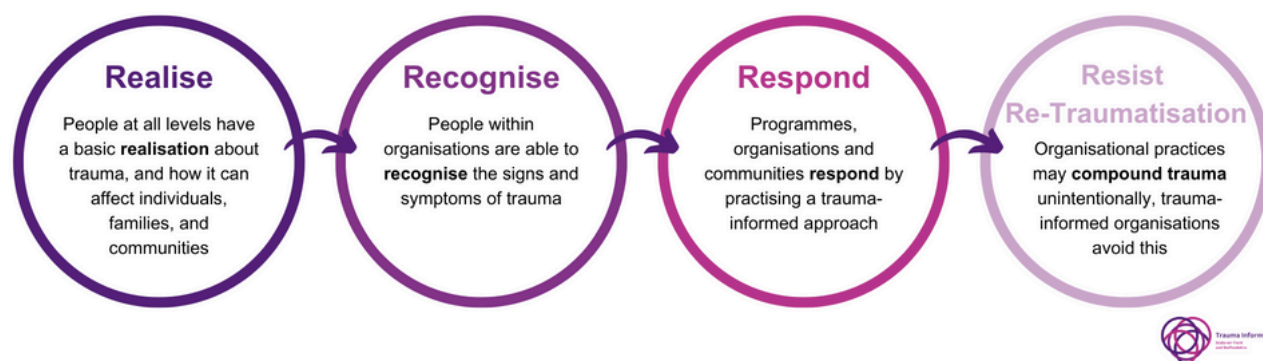
Efforts to prevent trauma and lessen its negative effects are key to improving community safety, reducing violence and working preventatively in both a physical and psychological health sense (Wilson, 2022).

The more knowledgeable we have about trauma and its effects, the more we can personalise our support to enhance outcomes and be in a position to both support and advocate for individuals who have experienced trauma. Implementing a trauma-informed approach requires an awareness of its existence, that we understand the role it plays, and adjust our approach and practice accordingly. If we embed this approach in meaningful ways the outcomes for those, we work with irrespective of trauma experiences, will be improved, by drawing on the principles of trauma informed practice (Centre of Disease Control, 2020). Trauma informed approaches have been defined as:

An organisational change process focused on preventing (re) traumatisation within services. (Sweeney and Taggart, 2018)

Trauma-informed approaches have become increasingly cited in policy and adopted in practice as a means for reducing the negative impact of trauma experiences and supporting mental and physical health outcomes. They build on evidence developed over several decades. However, there has been a lack of consensus within the health and social care sector on how trauma-informed practice is defined, what its key principles are and how it can be built into services and systems.

A primary aim of **Trauma Informed Care** is to increase an organisation's awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on children and adults, so that they can adapt practices to avoid causing further trauma. As such, TrISS have designed a suite of resources to assist professionals and organisations to:



Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Becoming Trauma Informed and Maturing

A Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Trauma-Informed Approach recognises that we all may at some point in our lives experience adversity, trauma or distress.

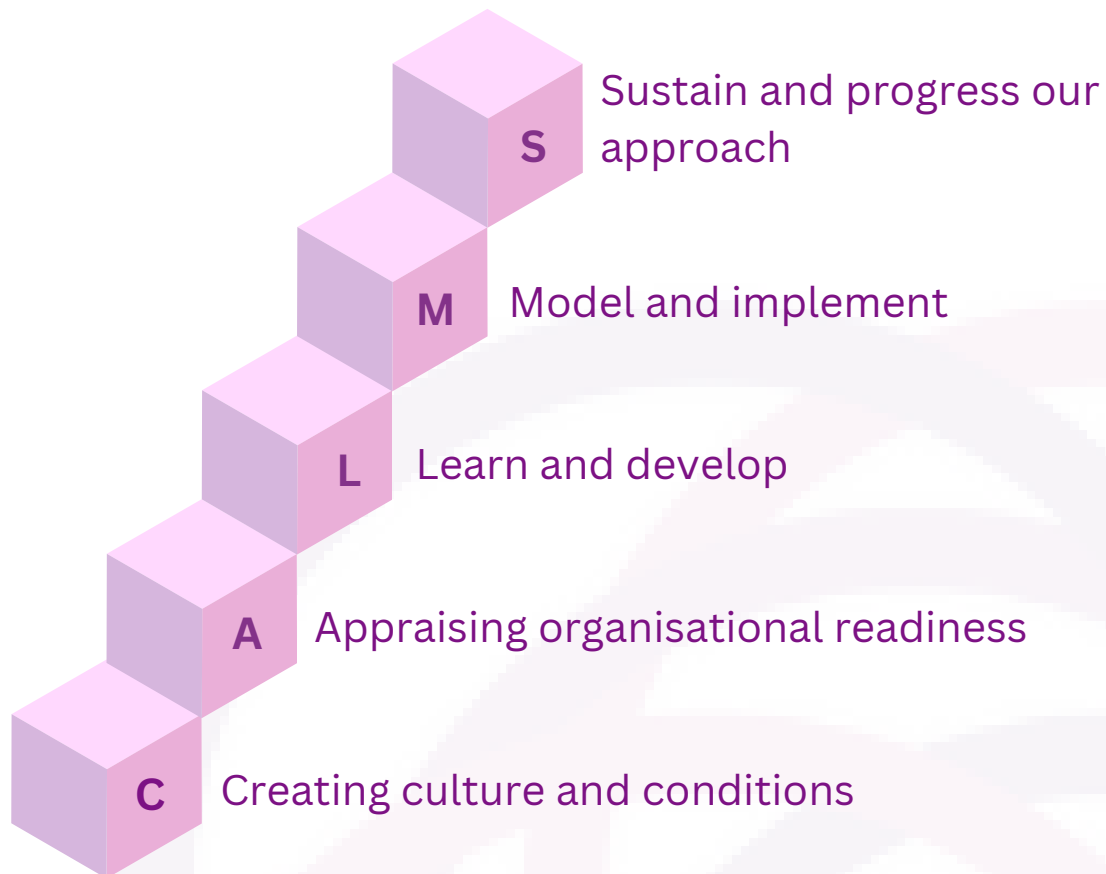
To assist organisations to become Trauma Informed, an Organisation Toolkit, Maturity Matrix and Action Plan have been developed by TrISS, and serves as a practical guide to support organisations to embed Trauma-Informed Practice. The resources aim to support organisations to reflect on current culture, practice and process and identify activity to implement more trauma-informed and trauma responsive approaches resulting in increased ownership for appropriate change within their setting.

The development of the toolkit has been influenced by the TrISS specific work and a scoping exercise of related material.

The toolkit supports the implementation of a whole organisation approach to being trauma informed, recognising that becoming trauma informed is a journey. As such, the toolkit:

- has different sections that may be relevant to different people/teams within the organisation
- anticipates that different organisations will be at different points along their trauma informed journey
- encourages assessors to refer to the most appropriate phase depending on the (individual, team or) organisation's current practices
- appreciates that implementing a trauma informed approach takes time; it is a gradual process of continual development

Within the toolkit is a CALMS Framework which supports organisations to assess themselves against, and recognise the key areas of focus to enable them to become Trauma Informed. The CALMS Framework covers:



Please use the framework to gauge your organisations progress with your trauma-informed practice. It might be that you initially rank yourself/your organisation at the beginning of the journey, and that is okay, many organisations/individuals/teams will be at this stage. Only move on to the next level once you are ready. The idea is that you systematically work through it before being mature and fully Trauma-Informed.

The Organisation Toolkit, Maturity Matrix and Action Plan guidance provides detailed information on how to use the tools and can be downloaded from the [TrISS webpage](#).

Resources to Support Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

Overview

These documents provide a high-level overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma and introduce the suite of resources to support the start of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire becoming Trauma Informed.

An Introduction to Trauma and Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma is complex and multi-layered and can have a range of impacts on those who experience it. These resources have been designed to provide you with an overview of what trauma and trauma informed practice are. We explore what to look out for and how we can help.

Acknowledging the Potential Impact of Trauma

In these resources, we sensitively explore some of the impacts trauma can have on physical and psychological wellbeing. You will be able to take away what an immediate response, ongoing support and how to support in the long term may look like.

Integrating Trauma Knowledge into Organisational Cultures

Trauma informed responses need supportive, transformational leaders. Here, we explore what is required on a cross-organisational level so that we can foster a sense of belonging and keep our teams well. Additionally, you will start to build up an understanding how to create and implement policies and practices for working with Children and Young People who have experienced trauma.

Minimising the Effects of Vicarious Trauma

When working with others who have experienced trauma, it is essential that we remember ourselves too! It is hoped that these resources will support you to reflect on your own wellbeing and to consider how we can minimise the impact on our own wellbeing.

Practical Strategies for Collective Care

For those with leadership and management roles, we consider how to engrain team well-being practices and support each individual's contribution to the overall well-being of others. This is achieved through an explanation of the meaning of collective care, the principles that underpin it, and some strategies to try.

Practical Strategies for Co-Production

The best learning we can gain is to learn from those who are using our services. In these resources, we explore together the principles of co-production, how we can work equitably and how to evaluate how trauma-sensitive our services are for those at the heart of them.

Appropriate Language Use in Trauma Informed Practice

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have and sometimes it can be challenging to find the right words when we are supporting those who have experienced or are experiencing trauma. This guide contains insights into how to be more aware of the language and we have also included some examples of phrases you can use.

Organisation Toolkit

A Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent trauma-informed approach recognises that we all may at some point in our lives experience adversity, trauma or distress. To be trauma-informed, all individuals, communities, organisations and systems in society must work towards developing approaches that assist in Realising, Recognising, Responding to trauma, seeking to Resist Re-traumatisation and minimising the impact of Vicarious Trauma. This toolkit has been produced to support organisations to become trauma informed.

Maturity Matrix

The matrix is to support a consistent approach to developing and implementing trauma-informed practice, providing the best possible support to those who need it most. The purpose of the matrix is to establish how as an organisation you can embed systems and processes that acknowledge the impact of violence, adversity, and trauma, through recognising and supporting the strengths of an individual to overcome these experiences in their lives. It has been written to be inclusive of people of all ages.

Action Plan

The Action Plan is to be used to outline your current organisational needs and priorities for developing and implementing trauma informed practice. It should be created using the emerging needs from your initial Maturity Matrix.

All resources can be downloaded from the Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire [webpage](#).

Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire have produced these resources with support from the Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA) and Trauma Informed Consultancy Services (TICS). Thank you to all partners who have supported the development of Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.



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