

CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Why Trauma-Informed Policies Matter

In the third sector—where services often support individuals who have experienced trauma, adversity, and marginalisation—it is essential that organisational policies and procedures (P&Ps) do not unintentionally cause harm or recreate the dynamics of trauma. Traditional policies can sometimes be overly bureaucratic, disempowering, or inflexible, unintentionally leading to re-traumatisation for both service users and staff. A trauma-informed approach to policies and procedures recognises the prevalence and impact of trauma and actively seeks to:

- ❑ **Promote emotional and physical safety**
- ❑ **Empower both staff and service users**
- ❑ **Build trust and transparency**
- ❑ **Reduce the potential for re-traumatisation**
- ❑ **Enhance outcomes through compassion-based systems**

The Challenge

While governance and compliance are essential, many current policies and procedures are:

- ❑ **Overly prescriptive**, stifling professional judgement and autonomy
- ❑ **Confusing or excessive**, with too many documents or unclear points of reference
- ❑ **Uninspiring**, full of dense language that discourages engagement
- ❑ **Too vague or generic**, failing to reflect the real-world needs of those supported

Without intentional review, these documents can reinforce the very powerlessness, shame, and confusion that trauma survivors often carry.

Potential Benefits of Trauma-Informed Policies

When policies are grounded in trauma-informed principles, organisations can expect to see:

- ❑ *Greater engagement and trust from service users*
- ❑ *Enhanced staff confidence, satisfaction, and retention*
- ❑ *Reduced incidents of distress, disengagement, or complaints*
- ❑ *More responsive, compassionate, and effective service delivery*
- ❑ *A culture where psychological safety is prioritised*

Principles for Developing Trauma-Informed Policies

Effective trauma-informed policies must be:

- ❑ **Necessary** – does this policy serve a clear, helpful purpose?
- ❑ **Inclusive** – have service users, particularly those with lived experience, been consulted?
- ❑ **Empowering** – does the policy support autonomy and strengths-based practice?
- ❑ **Culturally respectful** – is there a clear commitment to diversity and anti-discrimination?
- ❑ **Clear and accessible** – can staff and service users easily understand and apply it?

Use the following reflective questions in development and review:

1. **What purpose does this policy serve?**
2. **Who does it benefit?**
3. **Who might it disempower or harm?**
4. **Does it promote or reduce inclusion, agency, and clarity?**
5. **How would someone with lived experience respond to this policy?**

Key Components of Trauma-Informed Policy and Procedure Design

Every organisation should start with a Trauma-Informed Practice Statement, committing to:

- ❑ **Understanding and acknowledging trauma and its effects**
- ❑ **Engaging in trauma-sensitive and responsive practices**
- ❑ **Promoting safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and choice**
- ❑ **Reviewing practices in partnership with staff and people with lived experience**

Example Trauma-Informed Policy Statement:

"Our organisation recognises that many individuals accessing our services have experienced trauma, adversity, and marginalisation. We are committed to embedding trauma-informed principles in all areas of our work, including our policies and procedures. This means nurturing a culture of safety, empowerment, compassion, and inclusion. All policies will be developed with care, reviewed regularly, and shaped in partnership with those who use and deliver our services."

Core Policy Areas to Review or Develop

Policy Area	Trauma-Informed Considerations
Service User Behaviour & Risk	Clearly and compassionately outline responses to self-harm, suicidal ideation, aggression, or other crisis behaviours—aiming to de-escalate and support, not punish. There should also be a focus on restorative approaches to behaviours.
Cultural Awareness & Anti-Discrimination	Commit to recognising and respecting cultural differences and lived experiences, avoiding assumptions or one-size-fits-all approaches.
Staff Conduct and Boundaries	Establish healthy, safe boundaries and expectations; include guidance on managing vicarious trauma, self-care, and reflective practice.
Hiring and Lived Experience	Where possible, embed a written commitment to recruit, train, and support staff with lived experience.
Inclusion and Accessibility	Ensure policies are not a barrier to engagement for neurodiverse, disabled, or non-native English speakers.

Making Trauma-Informed Policies Work in Practice

Writing Style and Format

- ❑ **Plain English** – avoid jargon, acronyms, or clinical language (or ensure there is a list of key terms).
- ❑ **Visually accessible** – break text into sections, use headings, diagrams, and bullet points – consider the use of infographics and other visual tools.
- ❑ **Dip-in friendly** – support easy referencing rather than dense continuous prose.
- ❑ **Co-created** – include voices of people with lived experience.
- ❑ **Consider a statement at the start of each document** – this should summarise the document and point people to key sections that they might need.

Implementation Strategies

- ❑ **Staff Training** – ensure staff understand the rationale, spirit, and application of the policy – can this be done in team meetings or other team get-togethers?
- ❑ **Supervision & Reflection** – use policies in ongoing reflective practice, not just during incidents.
- ❑ **Service User Orientation** – help people understand their rights, responsibilities, and how policies help them.
- ❑ **Accessible Storage** – make policies easily available, not hidden in folders or hard-to-navigate systems.
- ❑ **Encourage managers to use examples** – this will help staff understand and prompt discussions on any hard to understand areas.

Reviewing and Evolving Policies

Regular Review Process:

- ❑ Schedule reviews annually, or sooner if needed after critical incidents or service feedback
- ❑ Use cross-functional working groups (managers, frontline staff, and service users)
- ❑ Include feedback loops—allow staff and service users to comment on what’s working and what isn’t
- ❑ Prioritise learning over blame—policy change is a positive sign of growth, not failure

Checklist for Reviewing Policies:

- ❑ Is the policy still relevant and necessary?
- ❑ Does it promote emotional and psychological safety?
- ❑ Is it empowering to both staff and service users?
- ❑ Was lived experience considered in its development or review?
- ❑ Is it clear, accessible, and inclusive in tone and structure?
- ❑ Does it avoid recreating dynamics of trauma (e.g. shame, fear, confusion, powerlessness)?

Embedding Trauma-Informed Policy into Organisational Culture

- ❑ *Ensure senior leaders model and champion trauma-informed principles*
- ❑ *Use policies as part of ongoing staff induction, training, and team meetings – but be mindful of how these are used in inductions. Try and avoid ‘read and box tick’ approaches.*
- ❑ *Celebrate and share policy developments as evidence of a learning culture*
- ❑ *Ensure accountability structures exist, not as punitive mechanisms, but to support consistency and fairness*

A trauma-informed approach to policy is not about rewriting documents for the sake of it. It is about reshaping organisational culture—through every word, action, and structure—to be more responsive to the people we serve and the staff who support them. Policies are not just paperwork; they are a powerful expression of values, and when done right, they create the foundations for trust, safety, and meaningful support.

If you would like further support with your trauma informed policy and procedures, please contact us. We offer a range of services to support services with their development and implementation: enquiries@risk-and-resilience.co.uk

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