



# Information Sheet: Supporting Refugee Clients Who Have Experienced Trauma

Many refugees have not only been exposed to traumatic events in their countries of origin, but also endure stress challenges related to resettlement and acculturation in their new community. The following information sheet provides an introduction to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma-informed practice with refugees, and resources for further learning.

## What is trauma?

- » A traumatic event involves a single experience, or enduring repeated or multiple experiences, that completely overwhelm the individual's ability to cope or integrate the ideas and emotions involved in that experience.
- » Traumatizing events can take a serious emotional toll on those involved, even if the event did not cause physical damage. This can have a profound impact on the individual's identity, resulting in negative effects in mind, body, soul and spirit.
- » Traumatic events often cause feelings of shame due to the powerlessness they create, which can lead to secrecy and further embed the experience of shame.
- » It is important to remember that refugees are not a homogenous group. There are various individual or cultural responses to trauma.



Source: *Trauma-informed: The Trauma Toolkit (Second Edition, 2013) and Trauma-informed Practice in Different Settings and with Various Populations: A Discussion Guide for Health and Social Service Providers (March 2015)*

## What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

- » A type of anxiety disorder that can appear after a traumatic event.
- » Many people will experience a traumatic event at some point in their lives, but very few will experience PTSD.
- » Refugees are at higher risk for PTSD because of the stressful events that forced them to flee their homeland and the difficulties involved in moving to a new country.

Source: *Canadian Mental Health Association: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*

## Continuum of Trauma-Informed Practice



## Trauma-Informed Practice

- » Entry-level training that supports program staff in being aware of the prevalence and impact of trauma
- » Key aspect is understanding how trauma can be experienced differently by different populations, such as refugees, people with developmental disabilities, women, men, children, and youth
- » Emphasizes collaboration and strengths-based work, reducing stigma associated with trauma and mental health
- » Creates an environment where service users do not experience further traumatization or re-traumatization and where they can make decisions about their treatment needs at a pace that feels safe to them
- » If trauma assessment is used at this level, it should be done agency-wide as part of the intake process. If the assessment shows trauma AND the client has expressed openness and readiness to seek support, then a referral can be made to other services

Principles: trauma awareness, safety and trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and connection, strengths-based and skill building

Trauma-Informed Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Demonstrate an understanding of trauma and adopt a trauma-informed practice, but do not necessarily provide services to address or treat trauma</li> <li>» Do not require disclosure of trauma; rather, services are provided in ways that recognize the need for physical and emotional safety, as well as choice and control in decisions affecting one's treatment</li> </ul>	Trauma-informed Practice (TIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Baseline commitment as an organization</li> <li>» Baseline training for all staff (e.g. board of directors, senior management, frontline staff, reception, volunteers)</li> </ul>
		<b>Stage 1</b> Trauma Work (Safety and Stabilization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Family support programs, parenting programs, etc. that are supported by a clinical supervisor</li> </ul>
Trauma-Specific Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evidence-based and promising prevention, intervention, or treatment services that address traumatic stress, as well as any co-occurring disorders (including substance use and mental disorders) that developed during or after trauma</li> <li>» Focus on treating trauma through therapeutic interventions involving practitioners with specialist skills</li> <li>» More directly address the need for healing from traumatic life experiences and facilitate trauma recovery through specialized counselling and other clinical interventions</li> </ul>	<b>Stage 2</b> Trauma Work (Remembrance and Mourning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Clinical counsellor (registered)</li> <li>» Psychologist</li> <li>» Psychiatrist</li> </ul>
		<b>Stage 3</b> Trauma Work (Reconnection and Integration)	

## Stages of Trauma Recovery

1

### Trauma Work (Safety and Stabilization)



- » Secondary-level work where there is not only recognition of the impact of trauma, but also allows for a deeper assessment that engages individuals in a more comprehensive service
- » Not focused on counselling, but rather on a generic connection between symptoms and trauma, normalizing the symptoms while helping clients see the connection in an indirect manner
- » Tools may include emotional regulation strategies (how to regulate and manage difficult / overwhelming emotions)
- » Trauma assessment may result in a referral to a family physician or other services

2

### Trauma Work (Remembrance and Mourning)



- » The task shifts to processing the trauma, putting words and emotions to it, and making meaning of it
- » Process is usually undertaken with a counsellor or therapist in group and/or individual therapy
- » Involves the important task of exploring and mourning the losses associated with the trauma and providing space to grieve and express emotions

3

### Trauma Work (Reconnection and Integration)



- » Creation of a new sense of self and a new future
- » Final task involves redefining oneself in the context of meaningful relationships
- » Through this process, trauma is no longer a defining and organizing principle in someone's life
- » Trauma becomes integrated into the life story, but is not the only story that defines them

Source: *Trauma-Informed Practice Guide* (May 2013), *Trauma-informed: The Trauma Toolkit* (Second Edition, 2013), *Trauma Recovery: Introduction to Recovery*, and *Trauma-informed Practice in Different Settings and with Various Populations: A Discussion Guide for Health and Social Service Providers* (March 2015)

## Who provides Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) training in the Fraser Valley?

The following organizations provide TIP training for the refugee service providers in the Fraser Valley:

- » **DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society**  
e: [carroll@dcrs.ca](mailto:carroll@dcrs.ca)  
p: (604) 547-1373
- » **Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST)**  
e: [mariana.martinezvieyra@vast-vancouver.ca](mailto:mariana.martinezvieyra@vast-vancouver.ca)  
p: (604) 255-1881

### For more information:

- » **AMSSA – Trauma Informed Practice: Supporting Clients Who Have Experienced Complex Trauma**  
[amssa.org/resources/quicklinks-resources/trauma-informed-practice](http://amssa.org/resources/quicklinks-resources/trauma-informed-practice)
- » **AMSSA – Mental Health and Trauma**  
[amssa.org/language/instructors/special-topics/mental-health-trauma](http://amssa.org/language/instructors/special-topics/mental-health-trauma)
- » **Evidence In-Sight: Best Practices for Working with Trauma-Affected Newcomers**  
[excellenceforchildandadulthood.ca/sites/default/files/eib\\_attach/Trauma-affected\\_newcomers\\_Final.pdf](http://excellenceforchildandadulthood.ca/sites/default/files/eib_attach/Trauma-affected_newcomers_Final.pdf)
- » **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: Becoming Trauma Informed**  
[camh.ca/en/education/about/camh\\_publications/Pages/becoming\\_trauma\\_informed.aspx](http://camh.ca/en/education/about/camh_publications/Pages/becoming_trauma_informed.aspx)
- » **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: Refugee Mental Health Project**  
[porticonetwork.ca/web/rmhp](http://porticonetwork.ca/web/rmhp)
- » **Canadian Mental Health Association: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**  
[cmha.bc.ca/documents/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-2](http://cmha.bc.ca/documents/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-2)
- » **Caring for Kids New to Canada – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**  
[kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health](http://kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health)

### Community Resources:

- » **Provincial Mental Health Toll-Free Line**  
[refugeehealth.ca/sites/default/files/ISSofBC%20RRF%20Newsletter%205%20%28Jan%2025%29%20%281%29.pdf](http://refugeehealth.ca/sites/default/files/ISSofBC%20RRF%20Newsletter%205%20%28Jan%2025%29%20%281%29.pdf)
- » **bc211: Free information and referral to community, government and social services**  
[bc211.ca](http://bc211.ca)
- » **8-1-1 HealthLink BC: Free provincial health information and advice phone line**  
[healthlinkbc.ca](http://healthlinkbc.ca)
- » **Fraser Health Crisis Line**  
[options.bc.ca/fraser-health-crisis-line/overview](http://options.bc.ca/fraser-health-crisis-line/overview)
- » **Fraser Health: Mental Health and Substance Use Community Services**  
[fraserhealth.ca/health-info/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-community-services/](http://fraserhealth.ca/health-info/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-community-services/)
- » **Fraser Health Short Term, Assessment, Response, Treatment (START) Team**  
[fraserhealth.ca/health-info/mental-health-substance-use/child-and-youth/child-youth-mental-health-services/short-term-assessment-response-treatment-team/](http://fraserhealth.ca/health-info/mental-health-substance-use/child-and-youth/child-youth-mental-health-services/short-term-assessment-response-treatment-team/)
- » **Ministry of Children and Family Development: Child and Teen Mental Health**  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health)