

## A Trauma-Informed Life

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### Introduction

Pandemic. War. Inflation. Disparities. Inequities. Social media. Bipartisan rancor. It's likely one of the aforementioned items caused you to have a reaction. It's possible it even activated an unpleasant response; and rest assured, you're not alone. The triggers in the world around us are ever-present. For many individuals, they run in tandem with another list – of negative life experiences. When triggered, the response may be the same, or worse; and, as a society, we don't do ourselves any favors or give ourselves much grace. We don't always score high marks for being sensitive, empathetic, or kind. Of course, we say we do and act the opposite. Simply put, we don't always walk the walk. But what if the same practices we used to treat patients translated more intentionally in our personal lives. This type of approach would lead self-compassion, creating safety and connection. We are trained to provide this type of care in clinical, academic and community settings. What would it take to have a trauma-informed life?

### Trauma is Pervasive

While most people have experienced some type of trauma in their lives, everyone has been through difficult events, experienced hurt and suffering, and survived losses. While many of us have experienced what is commonly described as “little t” trauma, most people have had at least one “big T” trauma. In any case, due to the statistics telling us that trauma is normative (meaning most people have experienced it) and that you won't know who *specifically* has been through “Trauma,” it stands to reason that we commit to treating ourselves, our loved ones, our staff, our patients, and our community members with trauma-informed care.

### Trauma-Informed Practices

What might it look like if we took some key tenets of trauma-informed practices and intentionally infused them into our daily lives, building a more nurturing way of life? First, we'd start with *safety*: physical and psychological safety is imperative. This includes safety for yourself, and for others. Could you build that into your life? Look at your work, school, home, community and relationships and approach with curiosity to ask yourself, is there anything I need to shift toward more safety?

Second, we'd look at *trustworthiness*: are you showing up and present in your life? Are you giving authenticity, with kindness, and expecting and advocating for the same? We believe these practices and values lead to trust and the third tenet: *peer/social support and mutuality*. What is the quality of your relationships? They should be far less transactional, and instead, rooted in respect, compassion and mutual empowerment. The strength in these connections should support the safety of it, and the trusting quality it provides.

It's also worth considering the powerful effects and reverberations of intersectionality and how we are impacted by racial, cultural, gender, disability, and historical issues; can we give ourselves grace? Expand our communities of support? Balance social justice work with nurturing relationships and experiences? These concepts are critical to a trauma-informed life.

## The Trauma-Informed Life

So, what would our world look like if we employed trauma-informed practices outside our working hours? What if this became standard operating procedures at home, in the express line at the market, or dealing with strangers in the comment section of Facebook? What if we all approached life the way we approached the patients, clients and individuals we serve? It wouldn't even be that much of a stretch. We could create safe spaces for people to show up and be themselves. The safety of that space would likely help build trust, and lead to more transparent relationships.

We could collaborate in ways which feel rooted in love and respect, and free ourselves from the transactional nature of our society. We could intentionally empower others to use their voice and have the freedom and authority to make choices of how they want to live and who they want to be. We would do this with a rich respect for historical context, especially for those who have been systemically underrepresented, marginalized and oppressed. We would also give ourselves grace, with room to fail, learn, and grow. The spirit of this might even lead to a robust movement of integrated self-care – the yield of which might just be the panacea our world needs right at this very moment.

We know it's a long shot. But we write this coming from places where professional learning has impacted personal growth in each of our lives. And we know we are not alone. We also know it's not exactly ground-breaking. But look around. The world needs a reminder and we, the trained, must stand up and do what's right by practicing what we preach. Don't you think it's time?

## TL;DR

1. *Most* people have trauma; *everyone* has had significant difficult experiences.
2. The core concepts of trauma-informed practices go beyond professional practices.
3. Living a trauma-informed life leads to self-compassion, creating safety and connection.

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