



Trauma-informed care

Many refugees and people seeking asylum have been exposed to trauma through war, violence, dangerous journeys, constant uncertainty and very limited support upon arrival. Embedding trauma-informed care principles into health care practices acknowledges the impact that trauma may have had on individuals and their mental health.



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About this resource

This resource contains key information about experiences of trauma in refugees and asylum seekers, including challenges associated with their journey and resettlement. It is important to consider the impact of past experiences and trauma when caring for people from a refugee or asylum seeker background.

USING THIS RESOURCE

The information in this resource is designed to support suicide prevention in refugees and asylum seekers. It is recommended that this information is used in conjunction with advice from health professionals and resources. A list of helpful resources is located at the end of this fact sheet.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Trauma can create long lasting physical and psychological impacts. People from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds may have experienced extreme events including but not limited to violence, war, abuse, sexual violence, hardship and loss. It is important to understand these experiences may shape a person's ability to respond to situations and communicate with others, such as health professionals.

Using a trauma-informed approach to care should be considered when working with people from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds.

Trauma-informed care is based on the understanding that:

- A significant number of people living with mental health conditions have experienced trauma in their lives which is extremely likely in the case of refugees and asylum seekers
- Trauma may be a factor for people in distress
- The impact of trauma may be lifelong
- Trauma can impact the person, their emotions and relationships with others.

Trauma-informed approaches do not involve trying to distinguish 'symptoms' or signs of mental ill-health from the impact of trauma – they recognise that these signs of mental ill-health are often responses to trauma.

It is important to avoid asking people to recall past traumatic events to avoid causing further distress. Try and gain an understanding of what may have happened to this person, as opposed to what may be wrong with the person.

Principles of trauma-informed care:

1. **Safety** – Refugee and asylum seeker clients must feel physically and emotionally safe. Physical settings are important and should be culturally appropriate. All interactions should be safe and inviting.
2. **Trust and Transparency** – Decisions on care should be made on the basis that the client has built a level of trust with their service provider. Ensure transparency regarding decisions impacting the client.
3. **Collaboration and mutuality** – Trauma-informed care should look at service collaboration, or collaboration in the form of other relationships such as community cultural groups to support a comprehensive approach to care.
4. **Empowerment, voice and choice** – Clients should feel they are supported in decision making and goal setting to determine their journey of care.
5. **Cultural, historical, and gender impacts** – Respect diversity adapt to the cultural needs of our clients.

Further information

Conversations Matter: conversationsmatter.com.au

Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors: startts.org.au

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre: asrc.org.au

NSW Transcultural Mental Health Centre:
dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/transcultural-mental-health-centre