

## What is trauma?

“Trauma’ refers to both the event and the particular response to the event. The experiencing of, understanding of, and healing from trauma varies among individuals, because we all are unique and bring our perspectives and strengths to our experiences (Proffitt, 2010). Trauma begins when an event or experience overwhelms normal coping mechanisms.” –Building Cultures of Care, p. 4.

## What are common responses to trauma?

**Avoidance** <-----> **Hyperarousal**  
(numbing, distraction, physical avoidance) (alert, hypervigilant, flooded with emotion)

**Intrusion** – flashbacks, re-experiencing, rumination  
May respond through retreat, self-destructive or other negative behavior

CORE PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED CULTURE	
Safety	Ensuring physical and emotional safety; “do no harm”
Trust	Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries
Choice	Prioritizing survivor choice and decision-making; supporting survivors’ control over their own healing journey
Collaboration	Maximizing collaboration and sharing power with survivors
Empowerment	Identifying strengths, prioritizing building skills that promote survivor healing and growth
Cultural competence	Ensuring cultural applicability of services and options; sensitivity to the role of culture in lived experience and decision-making

Adapted from Proffitt, 2010

## Why Trauma Informed services and environments?

Trauma Informed approaches are not designed to address the trauma impacts (though Trauma Specific services do directly work on reducing symptoms) but rather are a way to be aware of the trauma people have experienced, avoid triggering/traumatizing people, support individuals’ coping, and allow survivors to manage their trauma responses successfully so they are able to engage in and benefit from services.

## Further reading:

- [trauma-recovery.ca](http://trauma-recovery.ca)
- [acestoohigh.com](http://acestoohigh.com)
- [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
- [tiny.cc/CulturesOfCare](http://tiny.cc/CulturesOfCare)

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