

Handout for Module 4: Creating Inclusive Trauma-Informed Environments, Services and Organizations

Cultural Considerations

Be Curious, Be Empathetic, Be Flexible

Adapted from Phillips, H.; Fabri, M.; Lyon, E.; Warshaw, C. 2014. *Promising Practices and Model Programs: Trauma-Informed Approaches to Working with Survivors of Domestic Violence and Other Trauma* (forthcoming).

We are more likely to generate a sense of welcoming and belonging if we are curious about what meaning individuals make of their experiences and strive to understand what provides comfort. Once we know, the next question is, "Can we stretch to meet a survivor's needs?" Learning from people we support about their views and values can shape how people respond to our services.

Key Considerations:

Work from a stance rooted in a community's cultural strengths

This includes incorporating or facilitating access (as appropriate and respectful) to traditional healing practices, ceremonies and medicines, arts, holidays, storytelling, celebrations, and activities that are familiar and grounding (e.g., gardening/farming, weaving).

Increase accessibility through cultural resonance

This means providing a context that weaves throughout the organization and influences aspects of services, such as how food is prepared, the language(s) used by survivors and staff, incorporation of culturally based learning and teaching styles, and the way the program's physical space is designed and decorated. Programs have shared how this improves access through both having tangible needs met (e.g., religious or dietary needs) and increasing feelings of warmth, belonging, fairness, and trust in the program's relational environment.

Incorporate a deep understanding of the worldview and values of survivors

This includes how healing, trauma, family networks, gender roles, raising children, mental illness, wellness, spirituality, domestic violence, substance use and abuse, and relationships and marriage are understood culturally, while recognizing the diversity within cultures.

Work to counteract experiences of ongoing oppression

This includes racism, heterosexism, transphobia, discrimination, the effects of colonialism and eurocentrism, and how they intersect with domestic violence and sexual assault, other forms of trauma, and access to resources. This understanding is incorporated through both the services provided, through survivors and staff working together in community, and through systems, policy, and social change work.

Sustain a welcoming community of support

This can happen through informal and formal peer networks, resource sharing, wellness activities, social gatherings, and programs where elders and younger survivors form mentorship relationships. All of this helps to counteract the feelings of isolation that many survivors experience resulting from DV/SA plus the effects of marginalization (e.g., having few people in your area that speak your language or understand your culture).

Listen carefully to members of the community about their experiences

This includes identifying gaps in services or unmet needs; engaging youth, elders, and community leaders; providing education to the community, including dispelling myths and misinformation related to DV/SA; and doing ongoing DV/SA prevention work.

Commit to culturally specific work as an organization

This includes having a representative board of directors and staff members, soliciting ongoing trainings on issues important to the community, working collaboratively with allied partners, and having a mission statement that is reflective of the values and vision of the organization. Several mainstream programs that provide culturally specific DV/SA services have shared that working with cultural communities must be integral to the *entire* agency—in its design, strategy, and funding.

Examples & Lessons Learned from Programs:

DV/SA programs have implemented a range of culturally specific practices that support healing and resiliency, relating to survivors' ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Some specific examples and lessons learned from the work of programs across the country are listed below.

Culturally resonant and linguistically appropriate

Services need to be both culturally resonant and linguistically appropriate. This means that in addition to working within the beliefs and values of individuals and communities we serve and are a part of, we ensure that services and program information are provided in each person's primary language.

Consistent with a survivor-defined stance in providing culturally specific services, many programs emphasized the importance of respecting the survivor's choice with regard to receiving services, using translators, or working with members of the same cultural community. For example, a survivor may be hesitant to work with an advocate from the same cultural community, especially if it is small, because of concerns related to safety or confidentiality.

Programs can provide these options through hiring bilingual/bicultural staff, having written materials and signage available in the languages spoken by survivors, having volunteers who speak multiple languages, using language access lines, having

videophones for survivors who are Deaf or hard of hearing, or having program-wide language learning classes for staff.

Some programs have emphasized the importance of working with DV-informed translators and interpreters, and a number of programs report that they train their staff on how to work effectively with interpreters. Others have shared that they provide formal and informal supports to interpreters on secondary trauma or on managing their own trauma responses that may arise in the work.

Physical environment and food

Programs can think about this in every aspect of the physical environment. Think about colors of the walls, bedding, and furniture, how your space is organized and how you welcome people at first contact (e.g., offering tea).

Some programs have pictures showing a variety of rural and urban settings and culturally resonant images and items that people may find soothing. One transitional housing program has a world map on the wall. When they begin working with a survivor family from another country, they place a pin on the map and then do a great deal of research on the country, with a goal of helping the family feel more at home and welcome. Some programs meet survivors' cultural food needs through the types of foods available, the preparation methods used, and the types of kitchen and cooking supplies available (e.g., having designated pots and pans for Kosher food preparation).

Healing practices

If people have ceremonies, rituals, mindfulness practices, and/or approaches to healing that are helpful to them, find ways to support people in accessing them. There are culturally based tools for healing and resilience that can be shared throughout our programs, if we ask people we work with about "what helps healing."

Responding to historical and collective trauma

Programs work to counteract the effects of ongoing historical and collective trauma through collective healing practices and rituals. For example, this may include holding groups on culturally based healing from life experiences related to historical trauma, providing staff trainings on historical trauma, understanding staff members' own experiences of historical trauma, mentoring and caring for staff in their own healing, and working with staff to deepen their feelings of connection to their culture and traditions. Many programs have provided staff with training on immigration laws, as well as immigration-related trauma in the context of DV advocacy. It is also helpful to make it clearly known that documentation is not needed to receive services.