

# An introduction to providing trauma informed services



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# Why learn about this?

- ✓ We all like to feel that we are helping someone
- ✓ But sometimes there is a possibility that we can disempower those we are helping
- ✓ Learning about the underlying reason why someone may be homeless can help us to understand their needs
- ✓ This helps us to provide safe, supportive relationships and environments
- ✓ We also need to take care of ourselves



# Trauma and Homelessness

Research has found that:

- Experiencing trauma can lead to homelessness, losing your home can be traumatic and being homeless can be traumatic

*Goodman et al (1991)*

- There is a strong link between homelessness and complex trauma (trauma in early childhood).

*Nick Maguire et al (Southampton Uni)*

- 85% of those in touch with criminal justice, substance misuse and homelessness services have experienced trauma as children.

*Lankelly Chase Foundation,  
(2015)*

- Historic service provision; shelter/housing, food, clothes
- Services are now working in a more therapeutic way

# What is trauma?



- An event which leaves a person feeling HELPLESS and TERRIFIED: lack of control/unpredictability, loss of safety, fear of serious harm/death
- Defined by the experience of the individual NOT the event
- Not everyone that experiences trauma will develop chronic symptoms. This will depend on their RESILIENCE
- Early childhood trauma has more of an effect than only experiencing trauma as an adult

# Complex trauma

- Prolonged or multiple trauma (abuse/neglect) usually from caregiver in early childhood
- Profound lifelong effects – physical health, mental health and social
- Common among people with mental illness, prison histories, suicide attempts, eating disorders, drug and alcohol addictions
- Likely to continue experiencing trauma into adulthood and throughout life



# Attachment Theory



- From birth we learn how to relate to others and the world through our caregiver
- We are also taught to understand our own emotions and how to control them
- Many things are gained through this relationship which are crucial for a functioning personality
- If all is well, the child develops a ‘secure’ attachment and is unlikely to have further issues

# Attachment Theory



If the caregiver is unavailable or abusive an individual may not learn:

- How to feel safe/secure in self and with others
- The difference between intimacy and sexual contact
- To understand facial expressions or how to gauge emotions in others
- How to understand and deal with their own emotions
- Confidence, self worth
- How to engage socially
- How to appropriately get their needs met



# Insecure attachments as adults

People with an insecure attachment may think that:

- Others cannot be trusted or want to hurt them
- The world is dangerous
- Life is unfair
- Life has no meaning
- They have no control or power
- They need to be on guard all the time
- They are a bad person and the abuse was their fault
- They cannot protect themselves

They are unlikely to feel a sense of SAFETY or CONTROL within themselves, with others, and with the world

# Aims of Trauma Informed Care?

Increase safety

Increase control

Increase understanding

Increase empathy

Enable recovery to begin

Decrease risk of secondary trauma

Decrease likelihood of retraumatisation

# The thinking of a trauma-informed support provider:

What has happened to you?

NOT

What is wrong with you?

How can I make you  
feel more safe?

How can I make the  
environment safe?

# Creating safety

## Building a therapeutic relationship:

- ✓ Friendly, but not friends
- ✓ Authentic, honest and fair
- ✓ Respond to their need within the relationship
- ✓ Empathic
- ✓ Consistent and stable
- ✓ Being clear of your role
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Creating a safe environment
- ✓ Non-judgemental
- ✓ Validate their actual emotions and feelings
- ✓ Be aware and honest about what you can/can't do, know/don't know
- ✓ Strong role model
- ✓ BOUNDARIES

# Boundaries

## Do...

- Role model good boundaries: how to act, what to share, what to say, how to respond, how close to be to someone
- Be clear about your role: 'I am here to.....I will.....'
- Provide support within the boundary of your role
- Treat everyone the same
- Work with your team to address issues and signpost to specialists

## Don't...

- Forget your role and position of power
- Treat any guest differently
- Meet up with guests outside of your official volunteer role
- Give away personal details e.g. phone number
- Deal with an issue by yourself or collude with a guest
- Give or accept money or other items

# Creating safe environments

- Clear policies and procedures (and rules) allow people to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect of others
- Enable staff to keep the environment safe
- Support people to feel safe and, in knowing the rules, people are unlikely to feel out of control
- Ensure you work as a team to keep the environment safe by following policies and procedures and supporting clients to follow the rules



# Things to be aware of



As children, people who experience abuse or neglect may not have had their needs met by their caregiver. For this reason the child has to adapt to survive

Having developed other coping mechanisms as children, an adult may still use these without realising it

This could be; lying, 'manipulating' or becoming angry or upset

Be mindful of this and work in a team to meet the needs whilst modelling appropriate behaviour and language

Some clients will have experienced people pushing or violating their boundaries before or may act or speak in ways we find uncomfortable. We need to keep them and ourselves safe and be a consistent and stable person for them.



# Fight or Flight?

- Autonomic nervous system is triggered when we feel fear/threat (fight, flight, freeze)
- Dis-regulated as a result of early childhood trauma or neglect – people may quickly become hyper/hypo aroused
- May not have the knowledge to understand their emotion and/or how to control it
- What has made them feel unsafe?
- Check in with yourself too



# Challenging behaviour

When fight/flight system is triggered the person can become overwhelmed with the emotion

They may be feeling hyper-aroused (highly anxious, stressed or aggressive) or hypo-aroused (withdrawn and numb)

They may use coping strategies to deal with the emotions; drugs/alcohol, self harm, lying, lashing out, shouting or being threatening

- ✓ Understand this and validate their emotion
- ✓ Work as a team
- ✓ Be consistent



- ✓ Be assertive not aggressive
- ✓ Do not assert your authority
- ✓ Ask them what they need from you

During the night one of the guests tells you that he feels suicidal. He does not want to speak to his caseworker about it because he is scared that they may try to have him taken into hospital

- Listen empathically and remain calm
- Keep chatting, you can't make it worse
- Let him know that as a volunteer you always need to tell your supervisor
- Explain why this is - because he is at risk to himself and you are concerned

A shelter guest asks if he can have your phone number to let you know about a housing appointment he has the next day

- Politely explain you are unable to give personal details to guests
- Say he can tell you about it the next time you are there
- Encourage him to let a paid member of staff know

You are waiting at the bus stop on your way home and one of the shelter guests asks if you could lend her the bus fare so that she can go to a GP appointment. She promises to pay it back to you next week.

- Encourage her to return to the shelter/centre as they may be able to provide the fare
- Do not give money yourself
- Explain that you are not able to give money

# Looking after No. 1

- Working in homelessness services can be DRAINING!
- Service providers can experience ‘secondary trauma’ – which leads to burn out
- Feeling hopeless, depressed, stressed, uncreative, frustrated etc
- Ensure you look after yourself – ask for support if you need it, do things you enjoy, make sure your basic needs are met, trust your gut



# Top things to remember

- ✓ Look after yourself!
- ✓ We need to make service users feel SAFE and EMPOWERED
- ✓ Work within the boundaries of your role to make people feel safe
- ✓ Work as a team to provide a consistent and predictable service
- ✓ You're not here to heal or help, you're here to support and empower



# Questions?



## More Information:

Jo Prestidge

[joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk)

020 7840 4420

@joanneprestidge