
Trauma-Informed and Social Justice Principles: Self-Reflection for Professional Contexts

Safety, Security and Safe Haven

What am I doing to foster a felt sense of safety in my relationships? Do others feel drawn towards me or seek me out for support? Do they feel soothed by my presence when in distress? Do they approach with curiosity and openness, or at the very least feel a sense of neutral rapport? Do I recognize that others' behaviour or body language may reflect of feeling unsafe or in pain, uncomfortable with the task or topic at hand, overwhelmed or confused, or may be attempts at seeking safety or comfort? What changes occur in my body, emotions, and response to others as a result of this shift in perspective?

Do I acknowledge my areas of privilege and implicit biases and how these affect my relationships with marginalized people and groups? Do I accept that some people might not feel safe with me in spite of my best intentions, due to layered intergenerational, intersectional, and/or systemic experiences of trauma and oppression? Am I humble, receptive to feedback, and willing to do the uncomfortable inner work and emotional labour required to ensure that my allyship is not merely performative?

Co-Regulation and Coherence

How do others' nervous systems respond to or 'ping' off of mine? Are my state and way of being supporting dysregulation or regulation in others around me? How do I regulate my arousal or activation so that in time others' systems might potentially shift as well? Can I tell when I am joined in a healthy way with someone and their experience, and am embodied within myself? Can I tell when I have merged with or disconnected from others or parts of myself? What does coherence feel like in my own body? What does social coherence feel like with others? What supports these states?

Am I aware of how my own trauma and attachment dynamics may impact my capacity to be present with and offer co-regulation to others in certain circumstances? How might my own implicit biases, discrimination, and/or adverse experiences contribute to me feeling unsafe with certain people, making it difficult for me to feel regulated and be fully available to lend my support? What is within my power to address and how might I approach matters moving forward, out of respect for others, myself, and ethical norms?

Consent, Choice, Voice, Agency and Empowerment

Am I paying attention to non-verbal signs of "yes" and "no"? Am I listening to what others are saying through their words and body language? What might I and others be communicating through our voice, facial expressions, movements, impulses, gestures, and behaviours? Do I recognize the difference between calm and shut down, between cooperative and compliant, and between consent and appeasement?

Am I open and receptive to hearing and honouring the voices of people who are marginalized due to race, skin colour, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, neurodivergence, religion, culture, size, appearance, disability, age, nationality, socio-economic status, level of education, type of employment, diagnosis, coping mechanisms, or other variables? How do I expand my own capacity for inclusion in support of belonging? What might enhance my ability to celebrate diversity?

Do I recognize that others are subjects in their own lives and have the agency to act in accordance with their needs? When I ask others to do things that are uncomfortable or unfamiliar, am I doing so in a connected way that minimizes the potential for harm or re-enactments of coercion, overriding, or submission? Do I recognize resistance and avoidance as signs that something may be beyond threshold or unacceptable? Do I proceed with curiosity, and a willingness to both titrate based on their internal capacity and make concrete changes to address problematic external conditions? How might I affirm others' capacity to choose?

Trust

How do I foster trust? Am I consistent, predictable, transparent, fair, reliable, and responsive? Do I recognize ruptures that I might have caused or contributed to and initiate repair? Can I recognize how my behaviour, reactions, communication, and/or dysregulation may be impacting others? Do I take steps to own my part in the equation or the sequence that is unfolding? How do I address my own inner barriers to personal accountability and integrity? What shifts when others sense my attunement to the dynamics and nuances at play?

What led me to choose my career? Do my actions reflect an underlying need for validation, approval, power, control, or to feel competent or worthy? Or do my actions reflect a fear of rejection, abandonment, criticism, or ridicule? How do I ensure my underlying needs or wounds are taken care of so that others can trust me to be there more fully with and for them? What do I do to ensure a safe and effective use of myself, to prevent counter-transference and re-enactments?

Collaboration

Am I “doing something to” others, or am “doing something with” others? Am I making someone do something or am I helping them with or to learn something? Am I imposing my ways or seeking consensus and cooperation? When making decisions, or planning and delivering programs, do I welcome and prioritize the input, feedback or perspective of others, especially key stakeholders such as clients and those with lived experience wherever possible? Am I open to other worldviews and ways of knowing, while also being cautious of views that promote intolerance, hatred, and injustice? How do I navigate complex ethical dilemmas and conflicts where differing views, values, nervous system patterning, and trauma dynamics intersect?

Kindness and Compassion

Can I hold compassion for myself and others in the face of dysregulation or trauma patterning, whether theirs or my own? Am I gently aware of the fluctuations in my own capacity and that of others? Do I recognize “tries” as one’s best attempts in any given moment? How do I know when I am overriding beyond my own window of tolerance and take steps to prevent compassion fatigue, primary and vicarious trauma, and burnout? Do I maintain clear boundaries out of compassion for myself while also having empathy towards those I set boundaries with? How do I ensure that my support for others does not come at the expense of myself? When I approach myself and others with grace, what is different in my body and my perception?

Trauma and Social Justice Awareness

Through what lens do I observe others? Am I quick to judge or am I able to pause and shift from “what’s wrong with you?” to “what’s happened to you and your ancestors/community?” and “what are your strengths and opportunities moving forward?” Can I recognize others might not be trying to be difficult but instead may be having a difficult time? Do I recognize and work to dismantle systemic barriers and injustice related to privilege, discrimination, and oppression where they exist?

What am I doing to increase my understanding of trauma, attachment, social justice, and neurodivergence to be more effective in my relationships? How am I addressing my own privilege, implicit biases, stereotypes, assumptions, prejudices, and discrimination? Do I mindfully recognize how my confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, shame, trauma, and defenses may make it difficult to be open to sensitive topics?

Scope of Practice

How do I recognize when something is out of my scope of practice? Do I seek out appropriate support or guidance from peers, elders, mentors, supervisors, consultants, spiritual directors, cultural workers, and other subject matter experts? What additional training might enhance my scope and skillset? What personal growth opportunities might strengthen my inner coherence, and expand my nervous system and emotional capacity?