

A Service Providers Guide to

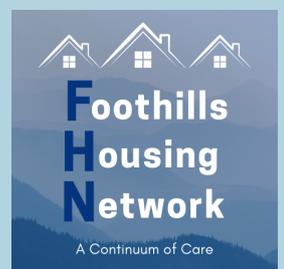
Trauma Informed Care



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What is trauma?



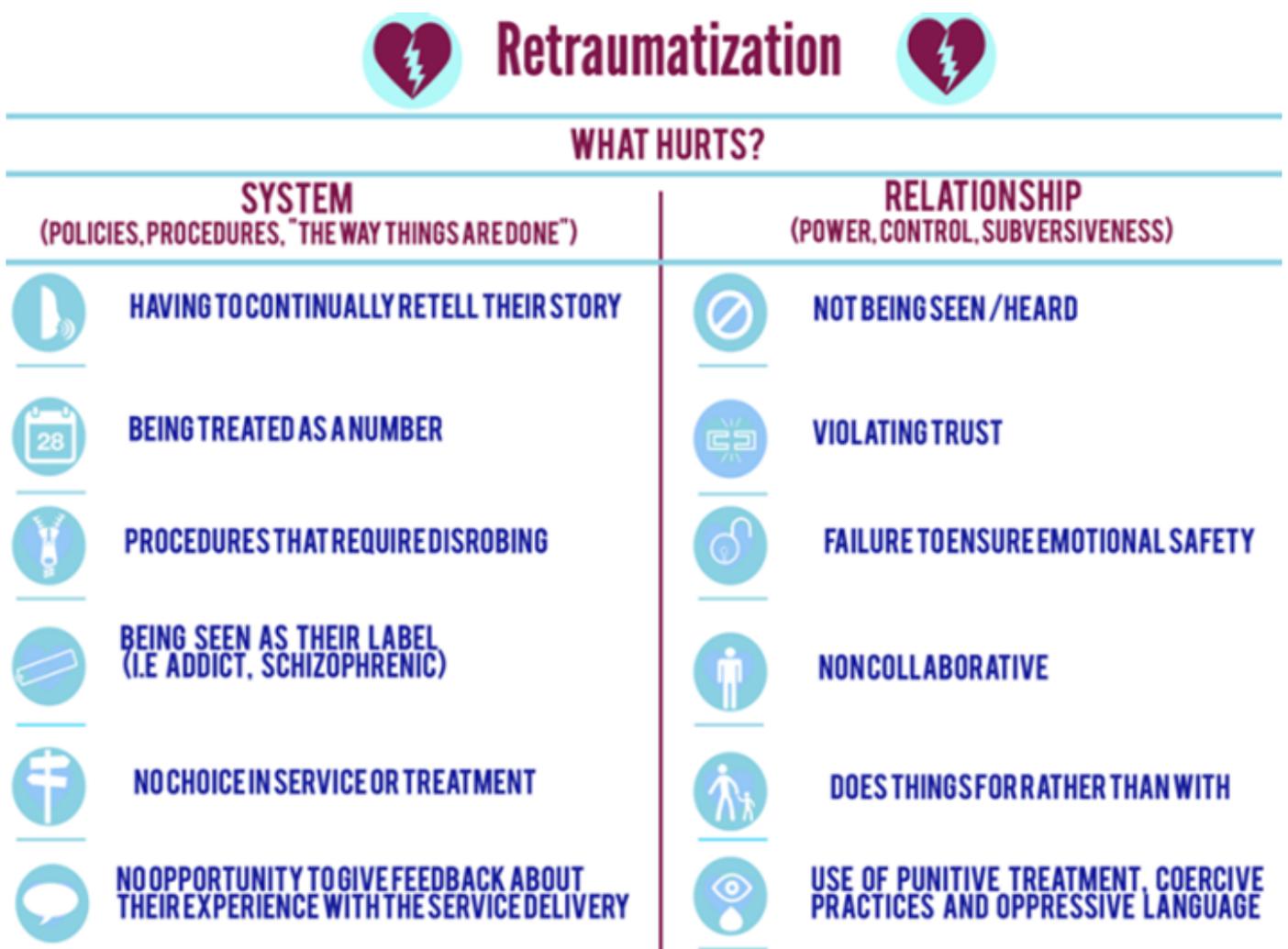
Trauma is an emotional and psychological response to a traumatic event. A traumatic event is an experience, either singular or repeated, that overwhelms a person's ability to cope with the emotional stress caused by the circumstance. Any person can experience trauma and many different events can cause trauma. Some examples of traumatizing events include: sexual abuse, childhood neglect, witnessing or being the victim of violence, car accidents, or loss of a loved one.

Immediate reactions to trauma include shock, denial, and shame. Effects of trauma last long after the traumatizing event. People who have trauma often experience flashbacks, mental illness and difficulty with relationships. Trauma affects a person's whole life and changes the way they see and interact with their surroundings. No two people's experience with trauma will be the same, so it is important to tailor your approach to each individual and their specific trauma experience.

What is re-traumatization?

Re-traumatization occurs when an individual experiences an event that resembles their trauma, even symbolically. In turn, this creates negative emotions in the individual and makes them feel unsafe in the environment. The possibility for re-traumatization exists within every system and every client interaction.

This graphic from University of Buffalo shows some common retraumatizing events that can occur in homeless services.



It's important to avoid re-traumatization by adopting a trauma informed approach.

What is trauma informed care?

The National Coalition for the Homeless defines trauma informed care as, “an overarching structure and treatment attitude that emphasizes understanding, compassion, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.”

Trauma informed care recognizes that the majority of people in the homeless system will have some form of trauma. Beyond outside sources trauma, homelessness itself can be traumatizing. Because of this, it's important to approach client services with an understanding of trauma and the goal of avoiding re-traumatization. Trauma informed care isn't changing the mission of your organization to exclusively address trauma. Instead, it is committing to providing services in a way that is mindful of the trauma clients have experienced.

The five components of trauma informed care are explained further in the University of Buffalo graphic below:



At its core, trauma informed care prioritizes creating a safe and compassionate environment in order to best serve clients.

What is secondary trauma?

Secondary trauma, or vicarious trauma, is when an individual experiences trauma indirectly, either through hearing about a traumatic event or witnessing the aftermath of it. This trauma can come from one incident, or be the result of small doses over a long period of time. Secondary trauma is a common experience in frontline community work, since workers are frequently exposed to clients' traumatic experiences. Some of the symptoms secondary trauma can cause are headaches, fatigue, paranoia, guilt, helplessness, and disassociation.

A study from the National Library of Medicine estimates that around 33% of frontline workers in the homelessness system experience some form of secondary trauma.

It is important to take steps to prevent secondary trauma. Some effective techniques are establishing good work-life balance, practicing self-care, and not taking on more than you can handle.

When secondary trauma has already occurred, there are strategies to mitigate the harm caused. Providers may find it helpful to take some time off of work, temporarily reduce their caseload, and to speak to a mental health professional.

While serving others can be rewarding, it can also be incredibly difficult and it is important to take care of yourself as well.



References and More Reading

1. Trauma Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, [What is Trauma?](#)
2. University of Buffalo, [What is Trauma-Informed Care?](#)
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5. SAMHSA, [Studies Back Trauma-informed Approaches in Homeless Services](#)
6. USICH, [Trauma Informed Care: Building on our Commitment to Strengths-Based Approaches to Ending Homelessness](#)
7. VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, [Trauma-Informed Care for Working with Homeless Veterans](#)
8. Choosing Therapy, [Secondary Trauma: Definition, Causes, & How to Cope](#)
9. National Library of Medicine, [PTSD Symptoms, Vicarious Traumatization, and Burnout in Front Line Workers in the Homeless Sector](#)
10. Invisible People, [Identifying Helper Grief and Trauma in the Homeless Sector](#)
11. Good Therapy, [The Connection Between Social Work and Secondary Trauma](#)
12. Social Work License Map, [Resource Guide for Coping with Secondhand Trauma](#)
13. Community Health Centre, [The Trauma Toolkit](#)