



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

'Good Sexual Health promotion is grounded in a 'sex positive' framework, which, views sex as a positive force in people's lives.'

An experience of trauma can lead to interrupted development, poorer school attendance and/or separation from family/home. These factors may then negatively impact a young person's knowledge around sex, sexual health and positive relationships.

Duty of care

Working with young people who have experienced trauma requires a responsibility to avoid re-traumatisation but also to holistically address their health. Regardless of trauma experience, all young people have a right to accurate information about sexual health. Never assume that they already have this information, as many young people miss out on sexual health messages at school or by their parents/carers. To fill this knowledge gap, young people may turn towards friends the internet or social media, all of which can provide false or misleading information.

Trauma-informed practice

An experience of trauma is more likely in young people who have lived in care, been involved with the legal and justice systems, have insecure housing, face mental health challenges or experience alcohol and other drug issues. Trauma-informed care, or trauma-informed practice, can be defined as a practice which seeks to understand the young person's experience and

acknowledge its enduring impacts, while building on the young person's strengths and resilience. Practitioners validate resilience and attempt to understand the young person even if their chosen coping strategies now cause difficulty.

Promoting positive sexual experiences after trauma

Good sexual health promotion is grounded in a 'sex-positive' framework, which, views sex as a positive force in people's lives. However, not every young person's experience of sex has been positive. Our goal is to support young people reach a positive sexual sense of self, despite past trauma. Grounding the discussion in information on values of healthy relationships can help, such as talking about:

- what a healthy relationship looks like;
- how to recognise problems in a relationship; and
- how to exit a problematic relationship.

Other tactics include being proactive (but gentle), creating safe spaces for discussion, and remaining non-judgmental (seeing the young person's values, morals and beliefs as different rather than wrong).

'...not every young person's experience of sex has been positive. Our goal is to support young people reach a positive sexual sense of self despite past trauma.'



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Seeking professional advice

Experience of trauma can stall or delay a young person's emotional, social and/or intellectual development, so workers need to be careful when selecting topics for discussion. It may be necessary to consult colleagues, carers or specialists for better understanding of a young person's level of comprehension and/or development.

Principles of trauma-informed practice

You and your organisation or service can support the introduction of trauma-informed practice with young people by:

- 1 Providing a physically and emotionally safe environment
- 2 Sharing decision making with the young people of the service to maximise their choice and control.
- 3 Providing training and education for practitioners about the impacts of trauma and developing safety and crisis plans.
- 4 Providing ongoing supervision and support for practitioners to reduce the impact of vicarious trauma.
- 5 Providing a culturally safe and gender-sensitive service.
- 6 Ensuring communication is open and respectful.
- 7 Supporting young people's goals and interests.
- 8 Referring young people to trauma-specific services and interventions.

(Hopper et al. 2010; Cusack et al. 2008; Fallot and Harris 2006; Hummer et al. 2010).

Resources

Organisational checklist: This checklist is a self-assessment checklist for services working with young people. It helps reflect where your service is at in terms of sexual health information and will help you to plan sexual health activities as part of your work. The checklist can be found at <https://pro.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au/tools/organisation-checklist/>

Play Safe <https://playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au/> for information on all things to do with sexual health

Department of Communities and Justice out-of-home care <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/out-of-home-care>

Trauma-informed practice <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Trauma-Informed-Care-and-practice>

Youth health resource kit <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Documents/youth-health-resource-kit/youth-health-resource-kit-sect-3-chap-4.pdf>

An online learning module on sexual health for young people in out-of-home care (with a trauma-informed lens) will be available in 2020. Please refer to Play Safe Pro pro.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au/ for updates on this.