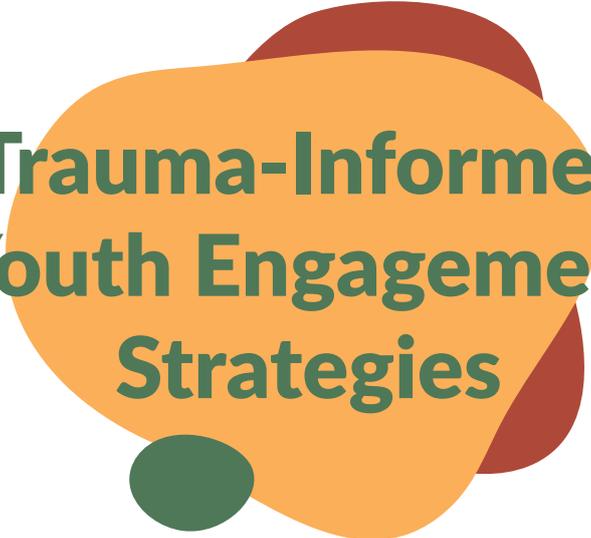


Impart Volunteer Development #2



**Trauma-Informed  
Youth Engagement  
Strategies**

# Trauma-Informed Youth Engagement Strategies

Trauma leaves its marks, and you have to understand it to identify its imprints. This lesson will help you to understand the basics of trauma and its impact, while highlighting specific models of trauma-care, such as the PACE framework.

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# Impact of Trauma

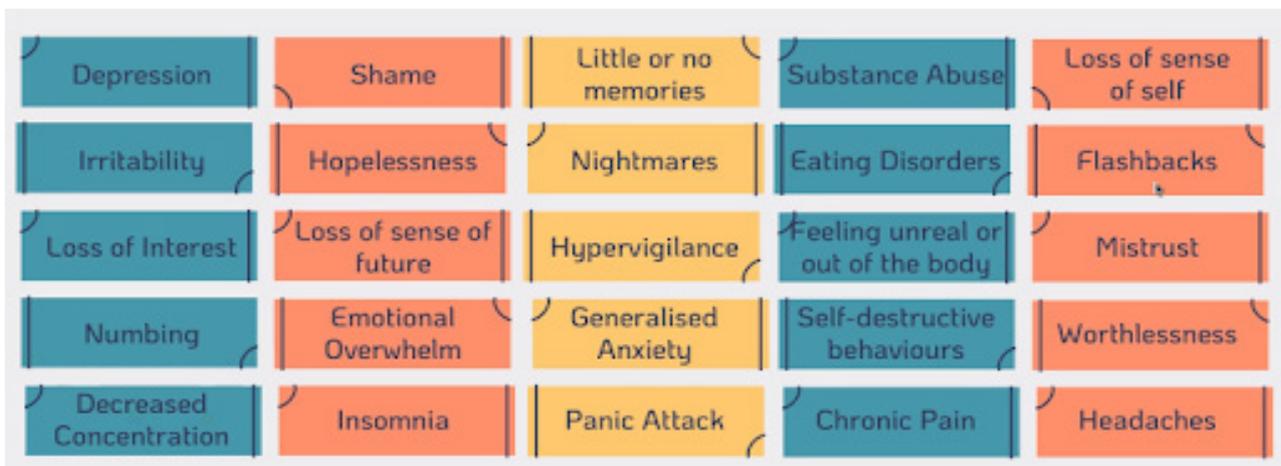


## What is Trauma?

Trauma is not just an over-emotional reaction to an event. It has a psychological basis and rewires the human brain. Properly engaging someone with trauma necessitates recognition of this physical element to trauma.

The human brain is oriented to look for trust or mistrust. People generally tend to trust persons and profiles that seem welcoming and non-threatening.

Trauma can look like:



Images courtesy of SYNC.

## What are some causes of trauma?

Trauma is not just an over-emotional reaction to an event. It has a psychological basis and rewires the human brain. Properly engaging someone with trauma necessitates recognition of this physical element to trauma.

- **Abuse:** *Physical, emotional, sexual*
- **Neglect:** *Physical, emotional*
- **Household Dysfunction:** *Incarcerated family members, domestic violence, divorce, family members affected by substance abuse*

# What are the effects of trauma?

- **On behaviours:** *lack of physical activity, smoking, alcoholism, drug use, missed work*
- **On physical and mental health:** *severe obesity, diabetes, obesity, PTSD, depression, suicide attempts, etc.*

Trauma also has an impact on brain development:

## 1. Heightened sense of fight-flight-freeze response system

## 2. Abundance of stress hormones (cortisol) in the brain

For individuals with regular stress hormones, activities like studying or playing a musical instrument can be exciting. However, for people who face stressful environments, these situations do not stimulate similar neurological reactions. They have a much higher base-line for stimulation.

## 3. Affected growth of neural pathways responsible for emotion regulation, cognition, and decision making

**“Trauma survivors have symptoms instead of memories.”**

**[Harvey, 1990]**

For example, a child who was adopted may have undergone a huge trauma from the separation from his biological parents, resulting in physical symptoms in the body although there may be no conscious memory of this event, or the language to describe it. It is embedded in the human body and responds to triggers of perceived safety or danger. Due to the psychological and neurological basis of trauma, the human body also learns certain behaviours that are associated with keeping the individual safe.

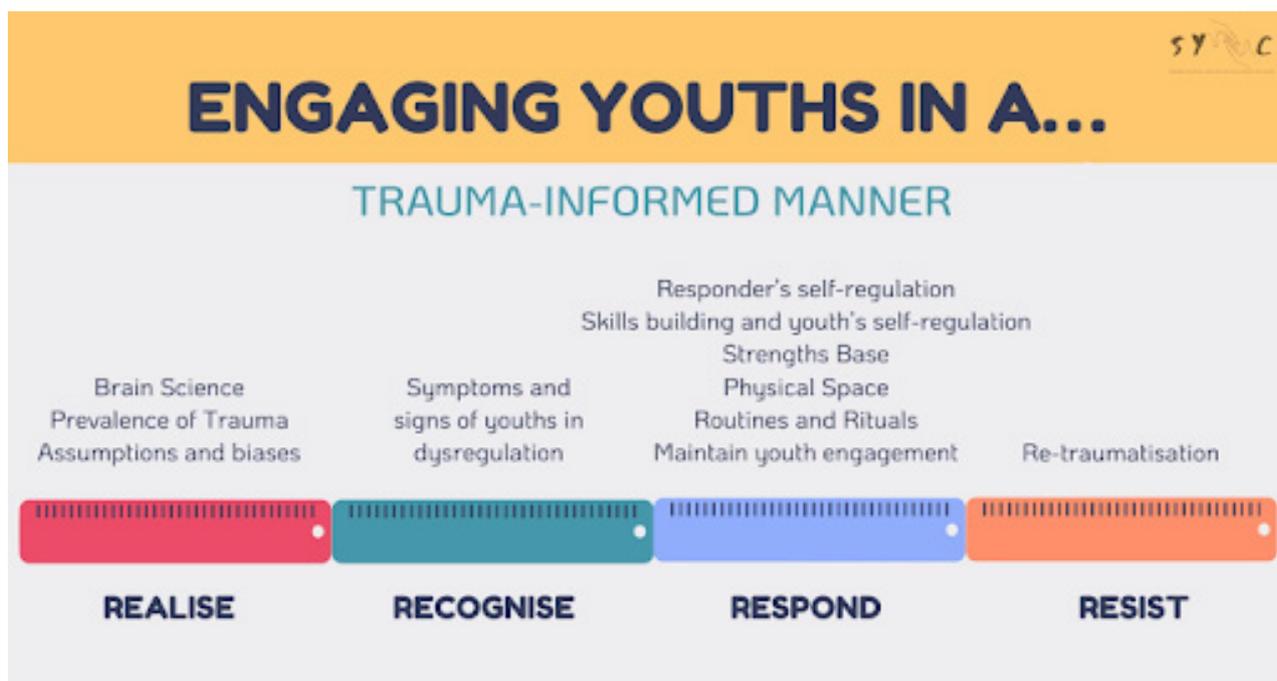
# Engaging Youths in a Trauma-Informed Manner

**NOTE:**

*You can react in a trauma-informed way without knowing the specific trauma.*

Sometimes, retelling the story of your trauma can lead to retraumatization, even if the person seems undisturbed and unaffected. By retelling the story that the body has a neurological response to, the trauma may be reinforced.

Proper engagement of youths with trauma involves a recognition that trauma is not an attitude issue, but a matter of dysregulation. When interacting with youths who display atypical behavior, it may be better to rule in than to rule out trauma.



Images courtesy of SYNC.

Practical steps you can take include:

- Spending the start of the session establishing what the session will cover, so they have more certainty on how the hour will play out.
- Ask for their opinion to give them greater ability to determine how your interaction will play out.
- Continue engaging youths, regardless of whether or not they respond. By making ourselves available, they will slowly see that we can be trusted.
- Avoiding retraumatization by keeping trauma-sharing in broad strokes. This avoids the risk of re-traumatization that happens when cortisol levels increase as people share their own stories of trauma.
- Highlighting that you are available and there for them (e.g. by writing a card, sending messages to check in)

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## Models of Trauma-Informed Care:

The critical aspect to Trauma-informed Care is *increasing resilience* and developing a sense of safety. This can be done by:

- Developing emotional management skills
- Developing connections and relationships with the person
- Demonstrating trustworthiness and transparency

Proper engagement has the ability to reshape mistrust into trust. Non-informed responses can have adverse effects on these youths (responding with shock or unreceptiveness to the revelation of an unplanned pregnancy may lead youths to close up to you as they do not feel accepted or safe). In contrast, engaging in a trauma-informed manner not only prevents the exacerbation of trauma, but also holds the potential to heal.

# PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy)

## 1 Playfulness

- a. Playfulness helps to lighten the mood. By playing, you may be able to teach someone more than by lecturing.
- b. Play comes not only from actually playing, but being candid to create a safe environment where you can provide greater support.

## 2 Acceptance

- a. "So I understand that you're doing drugs, you must be going through a difficult time."

## 3 Curiosity

- a. Asking more about something shows that you care to learn more.

## 4 Empathy

- a. "That sounds like such a difficult experience. I hear you." or "*Wah jialat sia!* That's so *rabak* man."

Find out more about PACE here:

<https://girfec.fife.scot/wp-content/uploads/sites/61/2020/06/PACE-School.pdf>

## Validation

Validation also helps to increase trust and connection, allowing you to better support a youth.

Examples in which you can do this include:

- Showing interest - e.g. texting them on the day of a tournament that they mentioned a few weeks earlier
  - Checking if you heard them correctly - “Oh you said that...”
- As you validate, you are also demonstrating curiosity and care

There is an example of validation and a technique in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). According to DBT, there are six levels of validation which can be helpful in referencing when you're struggling with finding validity in another person's point of view.

To learn more, click here: <https://psychotherapyacademy.org/dbt/six-levels-of-validation/>

## Choice Theory Reality Therapy (CTRT)

Choice Theory Reality Therapy is another trauma-informed technique of engagement.

The infographic is titled "ENGAGING YOUTHS THROUGH..." in a yellow banner. Below the banner, the text "CTRT" is centered. On the left, there is an illustration of a girl with dark hair and a red shirt, next to the heading "7 Caring Habits". On the right, there is an illustration of a boy with dark hair and a blue shirt, next to the heading "7 Deadly Habits".

7 Caring Habits	7 Deadly Habits
1. Supporting	1. Criticising
2. Encouraging	2. Blaming
3. Listening	3. Complaining
4. Accepting	4. Nagging
5. Trusting	5. Threatening
6. Respecting	6. Punishing
7. Negotiating differences	7. Bribing, rewarding to control

It is important to *negotiate differences* with the youth instead of being rigid with them by controlling them. Bribing the youth, in its many shapes and forms, to achieve a desired outcome is particularly dangerous. Even though this may be a successful tactic to motivate the youth to achieve certain academic outcomes, it is counter-productive in building healthy relationships.