
Trauma-Informed Checklist¹

Guiding Principles

- ☐ **Realize that traumatic experiences are widespread.** Curriculum and its delivery should consider that anyone participating could be survivors and/or perpetrators of teen dating violence. Additionally, anyone participating could potentially have experienced emotional harm by being adjacent to a situation of violence, for instance witnessing a friend, sibling or parent. Consideration needs to be taken to account for participants' undisclosed experiences. Participants may show signs and symptoms of trauma, but often present with none.

Tip: Do not assume people's status and do not solicit involuntary disclosures. Pay attention to signs of potential (re)traumatization and (re)triggering.
- ☐ **Be conscious that participation and disclosures are personal decisions.** Respect the level of engagement of participants and do not put them on the spot, but instead create opportunities to participate without expectation, pressure or feelings of judgement. Participants can be quiet, but still engaged and listening. Some participants who are survivors choose to speak openly about their trauma, while others choose not to. The decision is always their own, however be prepared if they do disclose.
- ☐ **Understand that a safer environment is key to empowerment.** Acknowledging that no space can be completely safe but striving to create a non-judgmental and compassionate environment is a key ingredient to creating a 'safer' space that recognizes the difficulty of the topic of teen dating violence (TDV) and the participation and contributions of the youth participants, specifically those who may be survivors and have experienced violence in their lives.
- ☐ **Prioritize survivors' perspectives, rights and needs.** A trauma-informed approach is also survivor-centered and acknowledges the voices of survivors. This means not calling into question people's status as survivors and their personal experiences of TDV or gender-based and sexual violence. The most important thing to ensure during a workshop is that the wellbeing, rights, needs and wishes of participants are a high priority and respected.

¹ Content sourced and adapted from the trauma-informed toolkit: Dixon, S., Jones, C., Craven, E. & Crooks, H. R., (2021). Approaches for evaluating strategies that address rape culture: Toolkit with key considerations, and discussion. Addressing Rape Culture on Campus for the Women and Gender Equality Canada Project funded by FEGC/WAGE.

- ☐ Five guiding principles of trauma-informed care are: **safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment.**
- ☐ **Do no harm.** Whatever the agenda or consideration (curriculum, facilitation, evaluation, research...) you operate from the research principle, Do No Harm. **This requires keeping compassion front and center. Nothing is more important than the participants and team's mental health, safety and wellbeing. Good facilitation, research and data comes from being good to your participants and team first.** Trust, reciprocity, and respect are core to doing this work in a good way.

Checklist & Considerations

In advance of your workshop consider the following:

- ☐ **Know the resources available to offer students.** Raison d'art has compiled a resource list in the App and on the website (<https://www.raisondart.org/portraitx-resources>), it is important to be familiar with these resources and what they offer. All participating students receive a handout of resources. At the very beginning of the workshop, make sure to show students where the resource page is available on the app, the website, and check that each student has a resource page handout. Not everyone will feel comfortable asking for help or resources, but it is important to give participants the tools, knowledge, and confidence to access the types of information they may need now or in the future.

Adopting a trauma sensitive language is a part of trauma-informed care.

- ☐ **Provide the opportunity for youth participants to choose their preferred gender pronoun.** You may choose to introduce yourself and what your preferred gender pronouns are.
- ☐ **Be careful of your language and model inclusive language by avoiding heteronormative, or gendered language.** For example, do not use gendered language (such as "you guys") or reproduce stereotypes (meaning racial, ethnic, or gendered stereotypes and language) in your examples. Instead use an inclusive, intersectional language.
- ☐ **Recognize any accommodations.**

Adopt a trauma-informed structure to minimize the risk of harm or (re)traumatization and (re)triggering. Acknowledge and respect the efforts of students to engage meaningfully with the topic of TDV, as it is an emotional topic.

- ☐ **Cultivate trustworthiness and transparency.** Participants often learn and show more engagement and/or participation if they know "the why" (rationale) and purpose behind a curriculum and a workshop. Go over the agenda, expectations, goals, objectives and

learning outcomes of the workshops. Provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions.

- ❑ **Take the time to go over the plan for the workshop before starting.** This provides a roadmap, so that participants can prepare, participate or just listen, take a break, or leave the room if they choose. At this point, you can point out any sensitive areas or discussions before they happen (some people refer to this as a disclaimer or trigger warning). Be intentional in normalizing this approach to learning.
- ❑ **Build in moments of disclaimers or breaks in your workshop before potentially heavy discussions or topics.** For instance, you may say, “we are going to take a break, and after the break, we will be discussing consent and sexual assault”. This allows people to take a longer-break, step out, or be able to discreetly talk to the moderator, teacher or contact the school support staff during the workshop.
- ❑ **Allow people to choose to pass.** They may choose to pass on an activity or discussion etc.
- ❑ **Encourage and be open to feedback throughout the workshop and try to adapt or incorporate it when possible.**
- ❑ **Adapt the pace to the group.** Each group is different and will need more time with some concepts or content than others. Everyone has a different base knowledge of the material and familiarity. Spend time on the areas that are important to that group’s learning on TDV. For example, if a group is not understanding what consent is, take the time to unpack it before moving on because not only is it an important concept and learning outcome, but it is fundamental to doing no harm.
- ❑ **Adapt the pace to the content. The pace may change depending on the content.** Before giving your workshop note potential moments for breaks (to be trauma-informed), specifically after tough content or long discussions. Be respectful and honor the participants’ needs and contributions. **Go slower and be more attentive when the content is potentially more challenging, nuanced.**
- ❑ **When facilitating a curriculum, having a discussion, or doing research, your pace might need to be adapted based on how your participants are feeling. Provide a sense of control and agency by allowing space for participants to control the pace.**
- ❑ **Be aware of the words you choose, the tone you use and how you phrase your questions.** You want to create an inclusive, non-judgmental and safe environment.
- ❑ **Do not talk down to participants.** Try to have a warm professional tone, do not talk down, but also unpack any terms related to teen dating violence, do not assume prior knowledge of topic specific definitions, like sexual assault, sexual coercion, non-consensual distribution of intimate photos, etc.... which have colloquial as well as legal definitions.

- ❑ **Be trauma-informed when presenting definitions and take the time to unpack and explain them clearly.** Try to make sure everyone understands without calling anyone out or drawing attention to them (just get a sense throughout the workshop based on discussions/questions etc.), rephrase, work the definitions in, and provide examples if needed. We learn through repetition and we learn new language through hearing it again and again, used in a variety of contexts. Make sure your definitions are as clear, and as exhaustive as possible. For instance, sexual assault includes many different behaviors. We want participants to understand what constitutes sexual assault and to be able to name it. To understand the difference between consent and sexual assault, as well as between sexual assault and sexual harassment. It is important to be trauma-informed here because with teen dating violence these definitions are not just definitions but are potentially personal experiences. By providing participants with the language, you may be naming an experience that happened to them. This can be incredibly powerful, it may even change or reframe how they view a past experience, or even parts of their identity (i.e., choose to identify as a perpetrator, or a survivor). This knowledge may be triggering, or it can produce other options (i.e., disclosing, reporting, legal action), and/or potential healing and recovery options (i.e., seeking support, counselling, therapy etc....).
- ❑ **Consider shifting power dynamics by giving space to participants to speak from places of knowledge.**
- ❑ **Create learning opportunities.** ‘Calling people out’ may not be the best way to educate or create culture shifts, instead try ‘calling people in’. Address the content of the opinion/statement, behavior or action, rather than humiliating or making the participant feel shameful. This gives participants an opportunity to learn and grow, and opens up discussion, rather than stigmatizing the person.
- ❑ **Create kind boundaries that respect the safety of ALL participants.** Participants who are minorities, women, girls, LGBTQ, racial and ethnic minorities, BIPOQ statistically experience higher rates of TDV and sexual violence. It is important to recognize that this is the case in society and needs to change. However, be careful not to single out anyone because of their identity and perceived experience. Each group or experience is **not heterogeneous**, and we should not make assumptions.
- ❑ **Practice cultural humility, bias, interrupt and address oppression.** It is important to make sure that students feel safe and equitable. For instance, if a participant says something implicitly racist, it is important to address that this is a harmful stereotype and microaggression (brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups).
- ❑ **Some participants may challenge us.** This can be for a variety of reasons, but sometimes it is because of trauma. For instance, trauma can show up in the training through a participant (signs include having difficulty focusing, retaining, recalling), challenges with emotional regulation, fear of group work or taking risks, anxiety about public speaking, anger, helplessness, disassociation, withdrawal and isolation). A

potential trauma-informed way of dealing with these situations is through reframing the activity/discussion, allowing for independent work rather than group work, break, redirecting the conversation etc.... You can also contact and receive support from the teacher, school support staff or Nathalie Hazan.

Responding to Disclosures and Triggering

- ❑ **It is important to be survivor-centered and trauma-informed when responding to disclosures. It is critical to respond to the best of your ability when someone discloses because negative reactions to disclosure have a real-life impact on the survivor.** It takes a great deal of bravery, trust and willingness on the part of the participant to disclose an event of gender-based or sexual violence (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, etc...). If they receive a negative reaction to disclosure, they may feel that they are alone, have feelings of shame, increased risk of PTSD or other emotional health impacts or not seek social support or services in the future.
- ❑ **A trauma-informed response to a survivor and disclosure** means genuinely and compassionately acknowledging their courage, believing their story, and letting them know it was not their fault (i.e., rape myths, etc.).
- ❑ **Without rushing or brushing a survivor off, let them know you are not a trained therapist, but a moderator, however there is someone who is trained in actively listening, providing support and resources you need (teacher, school support staff, etc).** These people will prioritize their needs, rights, and wellbeing - help the participant choose a course of action, whether that be to talk, to report, explain where and how to report an incident, long term counselling options, or where to access other services (i.e., STI testing, pregnancy test, etc.).
- ❑ **Let a survivor know that it was good to tell you and seek support** (often people experience shame after a disclosure), **and that you support their decisions.**
- ❑ **In order to respect the privacy of others ask that participants do not share other peoples' personal stories, especially about teen dating violence and sexual assault.** People's experiences and stories are their own and there may be unintended side effects in violating someone's privacy in this way.
- ❑ **Follow-up.** If you notice someone had to leave during the workshop, follow-up with them afterwards and check-in. They may have experienced (re)traumatization and/or be having a difficult time processing. This would be a time to talk with them one-on-one discreetly, asking if they'd like to talk to the teacher or support staff, and contacting those people if needed. If the participant does not want to speak to anyone in the moment, making them aware of the resources could be helpful in the future, if needed.

Research and interactions when doing data collection from a trauma-informed and survivor-centered point of view

- ❑ **Respect participants' time and experience by only asking thoughtful, carefully considered, germane questions that will result in usable, valid data.**
- ❑ **Carefully consider how each piece of information will be used, analyzing whether the potential benefit of the data is worth the emotional and time investment of the participant.**
- ❑ **In the curriculum moderation and data collection points you may have discussions, at these points,** group settings can be good for open-ended questions about general experiences or strategies; however, it is not recommended if participants are being asked to speak about traumatic experiences. This is especially true if participants have not taken the initiative themselves or identified themselves as survivors of trauma.
- ❑ **Cultivate compassionate curiosity in doing research by treating participants as co-participants in the process of learning, knowledge production, and digital media.** A useful way of doing research is to be “compassionately curious”- be interested in what participants say, their opinions, perspectives, experiences, ways of knowing, knowledge, questions, and their behaviors and actions. Stay present, attentive (‘actively listening’), and engaged.

Situate your trauma-informed approach in a strengths-based approach or healing-centered approach.

- ❑ **Trauma-informed care is fundamentally a strengths-based approach** that aims to empower participants in their own healing process.
- ❑ **During the curriculum moderation and research process, it is important to focus not only on trauma that participants may have experienced but also their diverse strengths and experiences, in order to build resiliency and empower participants and survivors.** It's not just about focusing on what's wrong, but also acknowledging what's going strong.
- ❑ **You do not want participants to leave your workshop feeling drained, overwhelmed, and disempowered.** Instead, the goal would be for participants to feel that they can identify healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships, understand what teen dating violence is, identify and stand up for their rights, and understand that they are entitled to safety. **To know that they are entitled to have their needs respected and to respect the needs of others. They should feel better equipped to build healthier relationships, which will empower them. This will contribute to the overarching goal of this program which is preventing, addressing and ending teen dating violence and other forms of violence.**