

Applying Trauma-Informed Principles to your sport organisation

Victoria University – Vicsport Trauma Informed Workshop

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Acknowledgement of Country



Victoria University acknowledges, recognises and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Bunurong/Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land in Victoria, the Gadigal and Guring-gai of the Eora Nation who are the traditional owners of University land in Sydney, and the Yulara/YUgarapul people and Turrbal people living in Meanjin (Brisbane).

Organisational application of Trauma Informed Care Principles

SAFETY (including being trauma aware)

- Build trauma and violence awareness into the culture of your organisation.
- Develop mission and value statements articulating a recognition of trauma and safety as a universal human experience.
- Make clear what behaviour(s) are within the remit of the club's code of conduct and policies, noting that the sport context extends beyond the playing field, into other spaces in and around the club including online environments.
- Policies and procedures align to a commitment that all matters should be investigated seriously regardless of perceived level of severity and level of evidence.
- Prioritise Trauma and Violence informed training for all staff. Potentially provide specialised Trauma-Informed Response training for those working and/or volunteering directly with participants, receiving formal reports and investigating.
- Provide training and resources for staff on external services available for people who have experienced abuse in sport and may need support (e.g., counselling and mental health, peer support, legal aid, etc.).
- Modify policies, procedures, and environments to ensure they are less likely to replicate aspects of traumatic experiences and reflect Trauma and Violence informed tenets.
- Ensure that reporting/ investigative procedures and policies consider potential triggers, e.g. that people are only asked once about trauma or that procedures/investigations are conducted in a sensitive manner.
- Embed in policies and procedures consideration for the safety and confidentiality of the environment where discussions take place (online or face-to-face). Be mindful of situations where privacy is not ideal (curtained-off space, dressing rooms, hotel rooms) and be prepared with alternative arrangements.
- Develop safety protocols post-disclosure (i.e., supports for athletes and practitioners).

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

- Develop rapport with participants/families and club.
- After a disclosure or report/ during investigations, ensure there is a system/ process for communicating procedures and decisions to participants/ families with transparency, consistency, respect and fairness.
- Provide clear information and resources about possible next steps.
- Use supportive and accessible language (i.e., limit jargon or procedural/legal terminology).
- Ensure there is support or link to support systems (informal/formal) for both staff and people impacted (victim-survivor, family/ friends).

(PEER) SUPPORT AND RECOVERY

Focus on support and recovery for those impacted.

- Even in organisations where the main goal is not supporting someone's mental health, procedures can be structured so that practices support recovery (e.g. effective referrals).
- Those in safeguarding roles and adults in the club/organisation take action and assist in the child's recovery – and feel empowered to do this work as well as possible with the provision of adequate organisational support.
- If the child/parents want to continue participate, help the child stay involved in sport if the child/family choose.
- Create strong relationships with trauma-recovery and support services and clear referrals pathways.
- Regularly reviewing policies, practices that may get in the way of recovery or even potentially further traumatise the individual disclosing/reporting to the organisation.

Self-care for volunteers and staff

- Worker/ volunteer wellbeing is a shared responsibility of the individual and the organisation.
- Policies and procedures ensure that staff/ volunteers (particularly those managing complaint/investigation) have self-care plans to maintain/ enhance wellbeing.
- Staff/ volunteers are encouraged to seek professional support may they be needed.

EMPOWERMENT, CHOICE AND VOICE

- Provide choice for and be open to how (e.g., verbal, written) and what people want to disclose about their experience.
- Ensure resources (reporting procedures, support services etc) are widely available and staff/ volunteers have a good understanding of internal procedures and the scope of practice of external and local support services to make effect referrals if the people impacted want further support.
- Ensure policies and procedures encourage those disclosing/ reporting/ impacted by violence in sport to make informed decision, for example, by ensuring that information around rights, complaints and advocacy is provided and accessible. Note that when a child is involved, you have a responsibility to report to the authorities, and this should be clearly and calmly communicated to those involved.
- Proactively disseminate the policies and procedures of disclosure/ reports based on your sporting organisation, overarching sport governing body, or government policies.
- Ensure policies and practices reflect an acknowledgement of the uniqueness/ strength of each individual particularly when disclosing/ managing disclosures of experiences of violence.
- Support staff and volunteers in identifying, using and celebrating their own unique strengths.

COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY

- Actively address power differences between children/ families as sport participants and the club officials, coaches and volunteers, club administrators and committees.
- Implement strategies to strengthen relationships between participants/ people with lived experience and staff.
- Ensure sport participants/ families/ people with lived experienced of violence in sport are included in decision-making and meaningfully ask about their opinions and act on them.
- Make time to discuss (e.g. in meetings) the importance of relationships with participants/people impacted by violence in your sport.
- Ensure processes are in place to regularly obtain feedback from/ consult with participants, people with lived experience of violence, and staff about disclosure/reporting processes to ensure they minimise the likelihood of re-traumatisation and further system-based victimisation and traumatisation.
- Ensure that policies, procedures and practices reflect a recognition that relationship building, especially in the context of trauma, takes time.
- Include a participants' charter of rights, a statement about the nature of the relationships they can expect to encounter with your organisation.

CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND GENDER ISSUES

- Understand how intersecting identities (e.g., race, age, sexuality, gender) and associated systems of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, heterosexism) can impact individual experiences.
- Ensure diversity in staff/ volunteers through hiring practices.
- Ensure the availability of interpreters or bilingual workers to support effective communication with service users from diverse communities.
- Consider language and cultural differences in communication when establishing policies and practices (are there multi-lingual resources? Is it clear what is acceptable or not in the club).
- Ensure that reports/ responses policies meet the needs of key communities accessing your services.
- Ensure inclusive practices.

Further Resources/ References used to develop this material:

- VicSport Standard 5 - **Responding and Reporting. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.**
<https://vicsport.com.au/standard-5---responding-and-reporting-leagues>
- Australian Institute of Family Studies - **Practical Guide on Responding to children and young people’s disclosures of abuse.**
<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/responding-children-and-young-peoples-disclosures-abuse> - Excellent evidence-based resource
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration SAMHSA - **Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach** <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsas-concept-trauma-and-guidance-trauma-informed-approach/sma14-4884>
- Phoenix Australia, the Australian National Centre of Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health - **Education and Training on Trauma-Informed practice in Australia**
<https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/education-training/>
- Sheppard-Perkins M, Bradley L, Beaudry S, et al. 2024 **Someone in their corner: trauma- and violence-informed approaches to disclosures of maltreatment in sport** British Journal of Sports Medicine
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2023-107532>

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