

It's all about relationships: Understanding Trauma Informed Practice and the NES Parenting Offers

Every child deserves to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected and, wherever possible, children should be able and supported to stay with their families ([The Promise, 2022](#)). However, for many families, things may not be quite so straightforward.

Psychological trauma, including early adverse and traumatic experiences throughout childhood, is a lot more common than people might think. The impact of trauma and early adversity is well established, and for children and families, this can significantly affect children's overall development, their relationships and their longer-term health and opportunities into adulthood.

In 2019, a survey of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) first became included as a core part of the national Scottish Health Survey ([Scottish Government, 2020](#)). It found that a substantial proportion of the Scottish adult population had experienced some form of abuse, neglect or other adverse experiences throughout their childhood, with 71% reported at least one and 15% reporting four or more ACEs.

With such levels of reported trauma and/or adversity, from childhood to across-lifespan experiences, it is essential to be aware of the potential impact that such experiences may have had on individuals within families. The following provides helpful information on how our interactions and approaches, in support of whole family systems, can be conducted in such a way as to be 'trauma informed' and sensitive to the possibility of early adverse experience.

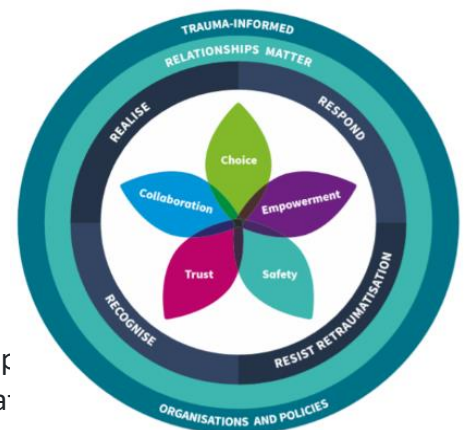
NHS Education for Scotland (NES) was tasked by the Scottish Government to create the National [Trauma Transformation Programme \(NTTP\)](#) to support a trauma informed and trauma responsive workforce and services across Scotland. Details of 'The [Roadmap](#)' outline a number of key elements that need to be considered (NTTP, 2023) including the Transforming Psychological Trauma knowledge and skills framework and a number of training and educational resources. This should be considered alongside the [Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing framework](#) (NES, 2021).

What is "Trauma Informed Practice"?

Trauma informed and responsive practice is a way working. The NTTP outlines the key aspects of informed working, facilitated through **R's** that underpin trauma-informed

- **Realising** the prevalence of trauma and adversity
- **Recognising** the many different ways that trauma can affect people
- **Responding** by taking account of the ways that people can be a recovery
- **Resisting re-traumatisation**

**The term 'parent' is taken to describe all adults who have parenting responsibilities, while 'family' refers to biological, kinship, adoptive, foster families and others.*



- Recognising the central importance of **relationships**, and
- **Respect** and promote resilience

This model also highlights the importance of interacting with people using the trauma-informed principles, that is providing individuals with **choice** and **trust**, **empowerment**, **collaboration** and **safety** through working relationships that they can trust.

Parenting Interventions through a Trauma Informed Lens

Relationships Matter

Developmental trauma is often experienced within the context of a relationship. Whether you are working with a *parent or child who may have experienced trauma, it is relationships that matter (see also **It's all about relationships**, [here](#)). You can support recovery by providing parents with a different experience of relationships and by supporting them to provide their child with a different experience of relationships too. You can do this by being trauma informed in your practice.

Being Trauma informed with parents

The parenting interventions offered through NES (such as Triple P, Incredible Years, Circle of Security & Solihull Approach Parenting) were not specifically developed to treat trauma, however their design is consistent with the principles of trauma informed practice. From the very first contact with a parent, the engagement process and throughout the intervention, you can help parents feel in control by giving them **choices** and working **collaboratively** to ensure that the parenting intervention is the right one from them. You can use your strength-based communication skills to help explore parents' motivations and **empower** them. Exploring parent goals and hopes for their child and their relationship is vital to developing a collaborative relationship. It is important that they feel **safe** and **trust** their relationship with you, so regular and reliable communication with families is important. If you say you will do something, it is important that it happens.

You may not always know whether a parent has experienced trauma or adversity, so adopting a trauma-informed approach as your way of working is not only advisable – it's essential. You can be trauma informed in your approach whether you are working individually with parents or through group processes or across their wider systems. There are no limits to making this your way of working.

For some parents it may be daunting to engage in individual or group-based interactions, but both can offer opportunities to model and support positive interactions in relationships. Throughout your work, you are encouraging the importance and value of relationships between parents, parents and their child and wider systems from which parents can experience additional support to help their child. Remember – it's all about relationships.

Having a friendly, welcoming, caring, nurturing approach to your interactions with parents can create relationships where parents can begin to trust others and create an environment where they can feel safe. Establishing expectations in your work together whether individually or in groups, through agreeing group rules or reviewing shared expectations of working together, is important in creating this safe space. These expectations should be reviewed and followed up on when required. This helps parents know what the boundaries are and what is expected of them in in your work together.

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Parenting interventions that support parents to set their own goals for their child, which are regularly referred to, followed up on and reviewed by you helps to create a collaborative and empowering environment for parents. This can be reinforced through noticing, encouraging and affirming parents' strengths, skills and successes. This can go a long way to help parents build their confidence. Group settings offer parents the opportunity to share their experiences and successes. Building supportive relationships, with facilitators and other group members, can strengthen their journeys to more positive relationships with their child. This can all help build confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy – encouraging parents to believe that they can make positive changes too.

Trauma Informed Interventions

Parenting interventions that aim to help parents strengthen their relationship with their child promote the core elements underpinning the principles of trauma-informed approaches. Supporting parents to develop their responsive and nurturing interactions, can significantly help their child's social, emotional and behavioural development.

Children who have experienced trauma or adversity need support to build resilience and protective factors. The way children are parented can be one of the most protective factors. Developing a trusting and nurturing relationship is key for all children, especially if they have experienced developmental trauma.

All children and especially those who have experienced a trauma, need to feel safe and secure. They need to know their environment is safe and the people around them are predictable and reliable. NES supported Parenting Interventions support parents to create this type of environment. For example, Incredible Years and Triple P explore with parents how they can create this environment with children through routines, rules, and setting limits with children. They also support parents to respond in predictable and consistent ways. Although children may resist and test boundaries, children need clear routines and boundaries to help them feel safe.

Looking after yourself – taking a trauma informed approach

Remember, we are all human! Our own wellbeing can be impacted by our experiences at work and across our own lives.

Exposure to traumatic events, whether witnessing, hearing about or experiencing personally, can be difficult for everybody and taking care of ourselves is extremely important. Without doing so, we can be at greater risk of burnout or secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma. We all have a window of tolerance and having some understanding of that is extremely helpful – more information about windows of tolerance can be found [here](#).

The following principles are useful ways of doing so:

The ABCs of Self-Care:

- **Awareness** - of the potential impact of trauma on ourselves. Look out for warning signs, like feeling stressed, lacking in energy, changes to your normal routines, finding yourself preoccupied with thinking.
- **Balance** - reflecting on what you can do to rebalance, this might include taking good care of your body, healthy sleep routines, managing work/life boundaries, taking exercise and taking breaks.
- **Connection** – seeking out positive connections to others, this is a key part of psychological wellbeing.

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