

# Trauma-and Violence-Informed Approaches to Nursing Education

Trauma-and violence-informed approaches to nursing education include the development and implementation of policies and practices that focus on preventing harm by creating safe environments for people who have experienced (and may still be experiencing) violence and trauma. This approach to nursing education requires accountability at the organizational and individual levels.

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning, mental health, physical health, or social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

## HEALTH EFFECTS

Mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation); use of substances; difficulty concentrating, memory loss

Physical health concerns including chronic fatigue, migraines, chronic pain, gastrointestinal symptoms/concerns, asthma/breathing problems, sleep problems, autoimmune disorders, chronic health problems

## IMPACT ON LEARNING

Difficulty focusing, retaining or recalling information

Disengaged in class

Absent from class

Fear of taking risks

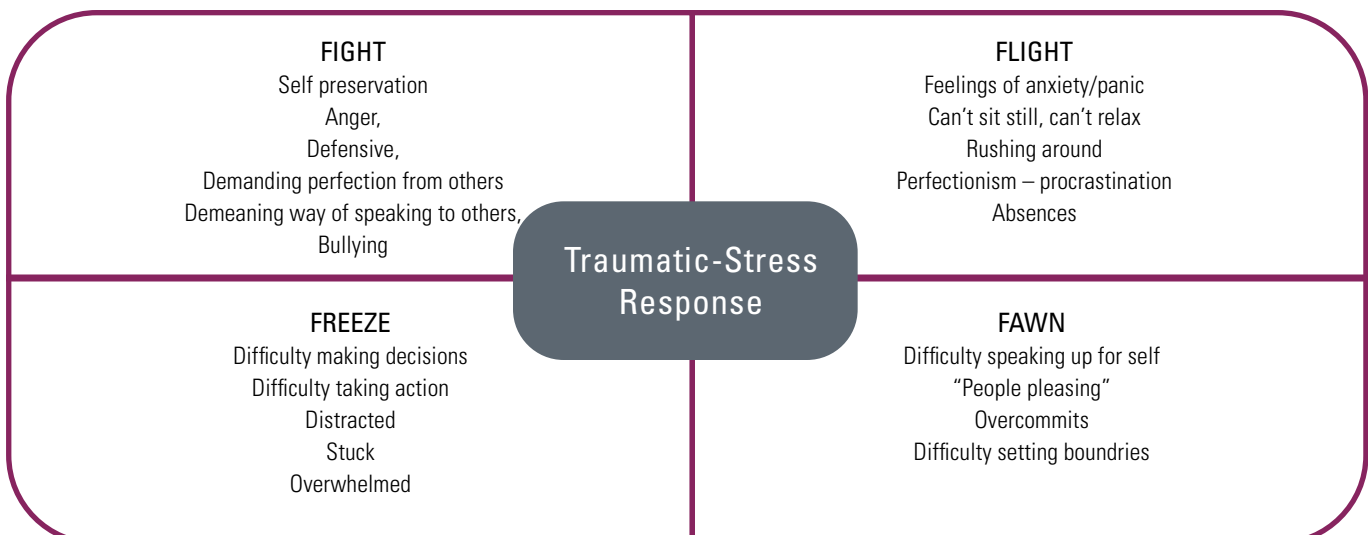
Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group projects, public speaking

Anger or dissociation when stressed

Isolation from peers

Increased risk for program withdrawal

When learners, particularly those with a history of violence or trauma, experience a lack of safety in the learning environment, then they may have a traumatic stress response. In this state, learning can be impaired.



# Trauma-and Violence-Informed Principles for Nursing Education

## Understand trauma, violence & its impacts on people's lives & behaviours

### ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES & STRUCTURES

- Provide faculty/staff professional development & enrich BScN curricula on health effects of interpersonal violence, structural violence, trauma & vicarious trauma
- Provide faculty/staff with educational opportunities to develop skills in reducing risk of learner retraumatization & secondary traumatization in the classroom (including de-escalation strategies)
- Organizational policies and structures established that actively resist re- traumatization and secondary trauma for staff, learners
- Organization is mindful of and has supports in place for faculty/ staff experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma

### INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS

- Be trauma aware & understand that histories of trauma impact health and learning.
- Be positive, have an approachable demeanor. Early in semester, explore "Is there anything I need to know in order to help you succeed in class? Are there any challenges that you anticipate will impact your coursework that we need to address early?"
- Recognize signs of traumatic stress & how to support individual
- Be confident in handling disclosures appropriately: actively listen, believe the experience, affirm & validate, express concern for safety & well- being, identify priority need & review preferences for supports
- Check assumptions, observe & be curious – talk to students, ask questions "how are you?" "do you feel safe to share what you are experiencing (in classroom, clinical)?"
- As concerns arise, reach out early to learners

## Create emotionally, culturally & physically safe environments for all learners, staff & faculty

### ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES & STRUCTURES

- Review learner/faculty/staff experiences of physical safety in classroom, building, parking lots
- Ensure signs & visual materials are welcoming, accessible, clear & legible
- Provide washrooms that are accessible, well-marked, gender neutral
- Seek learner input about safe and inclusive strategies
- Support staff/faculty at-risk of vicarious trauma
- Conduct a "trauma review" of learning/working environments
- Strengthen anti-racist nursing practice

### INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS

- Ensure first-contacts (in classroom, meetings, offices) or introductions are welcoming, respectful, & engaging
- Provide learners with clear explanations & information about tasks, procedures, assignments
- Provide anticipatory guidance to ensure learners understand "what will happen next" in a class, lab, clinical setting
- Take a non-judgmental approach so that learners feel accepted and deserving
- Foster connection and trust – start classes with rituals, icebreakers, meditation
- Maintain a consistent schedule & classroom structure
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- Encourage interactive dialogue & asking questions
- Act as an ally to the learner
- Focus & prioritize continuous improvement
- Create learning conditions that include ongoing dialogue & candor
- Language matters – use person-first language, avoid stigmatizing labels

## Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, & connection

### ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES & STRUCTURES

- Establish learner advisory board with significant role in planning & evaluation of services, programs, curricula, policies (e.g., dress code)
- Institute strategies to ensure learner input & preferences are given substantial weight in planning, goal setting, priority development
- When appropriate, provide choice and flexibility with respect to assignment “due dates”
- Apply universal design principles when designing evaluation measures

### INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS

- Reflect on potential for power- imbalances; identify opportunities to “learn with” and “learn from” or “teaching with” learners; treat all learners as valuable members of the learning environment.
- Be empathic, open to new perspectives and ideas, flexible
- Inform learners about available choices & options in program, class, professional practice setting
- Model flexibility to learners when faced with unexpected changes to a routine
- Create opportunities for learners to collaborate and connect with peers in class
- Approach staff/faculty-learner encounters from a position of being empathetic and supportive.
- Acknowledge shared humanity, challenges experienced
- Demonstrate a tone of appreciation for the learner/colleague, what they contribute to the learning environment or collaboration
- Share ongoing challenges to avoid learner perceptions/ experiences of isolation
- Offer multiple contact opportunities (with clear expectations around access, response times)

## Create emotionally, culturally & physically safe environments for all learners, staff & faculty

### ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES & STRUCTURES

- Provide curriculum/program options that can be tailored to learners’ needs, strengths, and social/economic conditions
- Recognize that staff/faculty need sufficient time for meaningful engagements

### INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS

- Identify strategies to ensure that learner strengths and skills recognized (e.g., highlight both strengths & areas for revision in written work)
- Communicate a sense of realistic optimism about learners’ capacity to achieve goals
- Provide frequent feedback
- Ensure timeliness in communication
- When faced with adversity or experiencing challenges, explore with learner strategies they have successfully used in the past to resolve challenges, reduce stress etc – build on strengths.
- Be prepared with information necessary to refer learners to campus or community-based support systems (with learner permission)
- Acknowledge the effects of historical and structural conditions
- Teach skills for calming, centering, and recognizing conditions that activate a traumatic stress response
- Discuss first, and refer (with permission) for academic supports