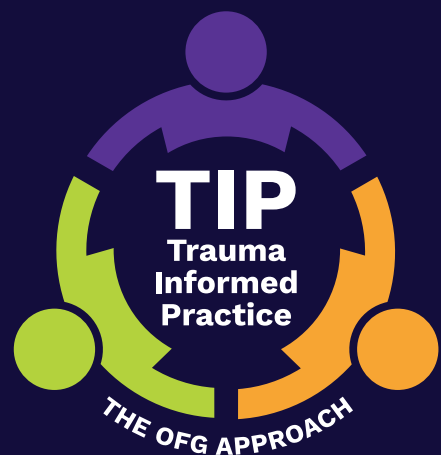


# Trauma Informed Practice

**A GUIDE TO CULTIVATING  
RESPECTFUL AND TRAUMA-  
SENSITIVE LANGUAGE  
AND CULTURE**

6 See a person differently and  
you see a different person.  
See a situation differently and  
you see a different situation 9

Karen Treisman, 2023



# ‘We don’t learn from experiences; we learn from reflecting on experiences’

John Dewey

Language has the power to place blame on individuals and reinforce their negative self-concept (e.g. I’m bad and unlovable) as opposed to thinking about the wider context.

In TOP TIP TIPS, we learned from our Outcomes First Group Lived Experience Expert Group that they do not want to be defined by their trauma experience, it is a part of them, so person first language is key. They are also very clear it is vital not to talk about children in front of them as this can have a lasting impact on them and their future.

Working with trauma can impact us on a number of different levels – it is important to recognise and support this to enable us to create sustainable therapeutic teams

for young people. Finding helpful spaces and time individually and together to reflect is key, for example, supervisions, end-of-day de-briefs, journalling and reflective practice groups. Seeking support from your clinical well-being team will also support you in making sense of what is beyond the tip of the iceberg.

## ‘Words make worlds. The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice’

Peggy O’Mara

# Behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg

The way children have learned to manage their early trauma and therefore survive is something to be celebrated! Taking the time to understand how children have learned to manage and survive will give us clues to the underlying need, enabling the best support. Asking the question 'why' about a behaviour can enable us to delve deeper and see beyond the tip of the iceberg. It is important to remember this also relates to us and our teams too - we don't always know what is going on beneath the tip of any iceberg!



## What you see

## What they are really saying

- ⦿ Am I safe?
- ⦿ Am loved?
- ⦿ Do I matter?
- ⦿ I feel sad.
- ⦿ I feel scared.
- ⦿ I feel hungry or tired.
- ⦿ I am feeling overwhelmed.
- ⦿ I can't communicate any other way.
- ⦿ I feel overstimulated.
- ⦿ I need understanding or help!

# What we might see and hear

‘He’s vile’

‘She’s kicking off again’

‘He’s attention seeking’

‘She’s trying to manipulate everyone’

‘She’s so lazy at work’

## What we should consider

- ◉ She needs us to see, hear and respond to her
- ◉ He may have learned that the only way he could get his needs met was by trying to keep adult’s attention on him
- ◉ Maybe she had to compete with others for her needs to be met, this is survival
- ◉ His brain is in fight/flight/freeze mode (survival mode)
- ◉ He’s showing us he is distressed and overwhelmed and doesn’t know how to manage
- ◉ She wasn’t helped to soothe her feelings when she was little, so she doesn’t know how to do this now
- ◉ He has learnt that it’s safer to push people away than to risk getting close and being hurt again
- ◉ Adults can’t empathise with her in this moment
- ◉ She is having a hard time in her home life and needs some time and extra support



# Top Tips for Language Use

## Use person-first language

Place the individual before their trauma, for example, “a person who has experienced trauma” rather than “a trauma survivor”. An individual’s experience of trauma is only one part of their identity and does not define them.

## Avoid blaming language

This can be triggering – we need to focus on empathy and support. For example, instead of asking “What’s wrong with you?” you could say “How can I help you?” This approach validates the individual’s feelings and experiences while emphasizing your willingness to support them.

## Separate the problem from the individual

It is important that the problem is not located within individuals, and that we use language that externalises it. For example, rather than “I’m bad” using descriptors such as “the bad feeling”. This helps to reduce shame and encourages reflection and new perspectives to be explored, e.g. “When do you notice the bad feeling?” “Tell me more about the bad feeling”.

## Hear young people discuss the use of words here

Scan the QR code to learn more.

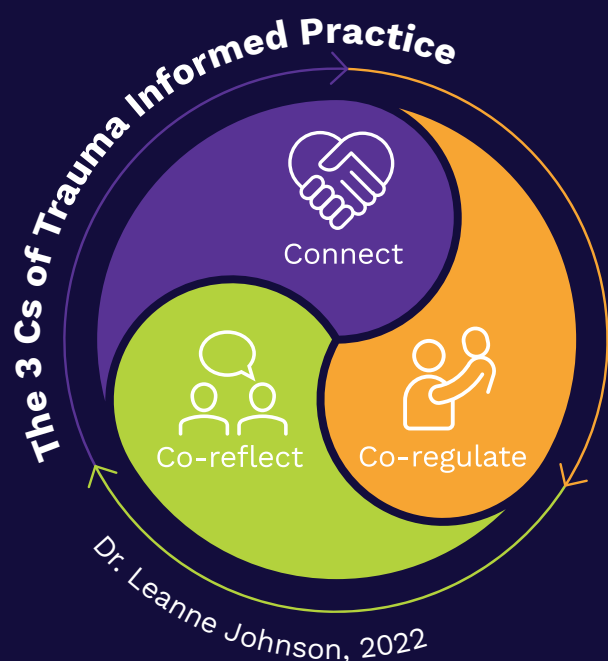


## Provide choice

Trauma experiences can feel very unpredictable and out of control – providing choice can be empowering and promote a sense of agency. For example, when encouraging young people, you could offer a couple of options and allow them to choose what feels most comfortable for them. You can create a choice out of anything!

## Non-Verbal Communication

Research suggests that as much as 70-93% of the impact of our communication can be attributed to non-verbal cues and those that have experienced trauma can be even more astute to possible signs of danger. It’s crucial to be attuned to non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and gesture. Maintain an open and non-threatening body posture being aware of physical distance and boundaries and having a kind facial expression all help to create a sense of safety. The use of pACE and individuals feeling heard is key.



Using the 'right' words and language is not straightforward and even if we mean well, we can say words that might be experienced as insensitive or at worse offensive.

Language and terminology are always evolving in response to experience, culture and society and at Outcomes First Group, we are keen to take the lead from those with lived experience. In conversation with lots of individuals (some with lived experience of trauma, others with experience of supporting those with lived experience directly), below are some examples of important strengths-based language changes that have been indicated.

It is important to note that some terms may need to be used as part of legal terminology and professional discussion, e.g., 'Looked After Child' is a term from the Children's Act (2004). It is, however, important to be aware that this language can be experienced by young people as jargon and insensitive so the indicated changes below should be used in conversation with and in front of young people at Outcomes First Group.

Instead of...	Use....
Attention Seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comfort/Attachment Needing</li> <li>- Connection Seeking</li> <li>- Need to feel seen</li> </ul>
Defiant/Oppositional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finding it hard to trust others</li> <li>- Needing to be in control</li> </ul>
Contact Contact Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Time, Family Visit, Visit</li> <li>- Family Centre, Visiting Centre</li> </ul>
LAC (Looked after Child)/ case/bed/desk/placement	<p>(Do not use the abbreviation LAC in front of young people at Outcomes First Group)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child/young person</li> <li>- Pupil (education-related)</li> <li>- Young Person who is cared for</li> <li>- Young People cared for by us</li> <li>- Care experienced young person</li> </ul>
LAC Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supported Child Review</li> <li>- Our Review</li> </ul>
Statutory Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social Worker Visit</li> <li>- Home Visit</li> </ul>
Difficult to place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Looking for the right home/environment</li> <li>- Extra support needed</li> </ul>
Drop out/dropped out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early school leaver</li> <li>- Left school early</li> </ul>
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support</li> </ul>
Abscond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Missing from home/school</li> <li>- Absent without authorisation (when we know where the young person is)</li> </ul>
Respite (the meaning of respite is to describe a short period of relief from something difficult or unpleasant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Short break</li> <li>- Breathing Space</li> </ul>
Challenging behaviour/ dysregulation/negative behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Behaviour as communication</li> <li>- Adults finding behaviour challenging to support (Or describe the specific behaviour exhibited)</li> </ul>

Instead of..	Use....
Manipulative/ Controlling others	(It is important to remember this is also a trauma response) - He/she needs to be in control to feel safe - Fearful of relationships
Liar/lying	- Protecting him/herself from shame - Fearful of telling the truth
Matching	- Right home right child - Right school/class right child
Staff Staff Team	- Adult - Team/adults around the children
Unit/Care Home	- Home
Foster Carers	- Foster Parents/Foster Mum and Dad - (Ask the child what they want to call them) - Call them by their name
Care Leaver	- Moving on - Moving to independent living
Care Plan	- Young Person's Plan
Placement Moving placement	- Family, Home - Moving home/family
Reunification	- Returning home - Going back to the family
NEET (Not in Education or Employment)	- (Do not abbreviate to NEET) - Not in school or work
Offender Perpetrator	- Person who has committed an offence - Person who has perpetrated
Sexually Harmful Behaviour	- Behaviour that is sexualised - (Or, describe the behaviour)
Committed Suicide	- Death by Suicide
Permanence	- Long term - Settled
Specific learning needs	- Additional needs - Complex needs
Victim	- Survivor - Person harmed
Asylum Seeker	- Safety Seeker - Seeking Refuge

Whilst these are important considerations, language use should be led by the young people that you are working directly with. Do not be afraid to ask them about their specific preferences!

Finally, two last considerations

‘Say what you mean  
but don’t be mean  
saying it’

Sandy Bloom

‘If your words were  
about to be broadcast  
far and wide, would  
you still say it?’

Karen Treisman, 2023

Thanks to all those that  
have contributed

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