

Language is at the foundation of all our relationships and helps us connect

In the context of trauma, language can play an important role. Use of positive language can reduce and mitigate impacts of exposure to negative discourse, labels and problem-saturated conversations. Language, however we express it, can be loaded with assumptions of power and authority which, whether real or perceived, makes us react and act in a certain way. Communicating our understanding of what an individual's behaviour is saying about their unmet social and emotional needs, shows positive regard and validates what has 'happened'. It allows us to develop empathy and compassion for those we offer help and support to. Laying the foundations, and focusing on making, sustaining and supporting individuals to engage in positive changes, can provide a sense of security and consistency. This builds trust in a relationship, which in turn, enables and supports the development of emotional resilience. Ultimately, this can lead to individuals leading fuller, healthier lives and developing the capacity to thrive.

### Trauma sensitive language

We need to be aware of the words we choose the tone we use and how we phrase our questions. Be mindful of labelling (Stigmatising). Demonstrate Cultural Competence and Humility. Use language that builds a safe, calm, secure and supportive environment (emotionally, psychologically, physically) & is inclusive to promote a positive internal narrative. Acknowledge and validate (listening). Ask What has happened not what is wrong? Use the language of 'we' rather than 'you'. Restorative. Empathy not sympathy. Use language that does not denote assumptions or judgement. Be careful about labels "offender," "perpetrator," "victim," etc. because it could describe a beloved parent or family member that has abused them. Refer to behaviour rather than characterising a person and defining them as a label. i.e., "behaved abusively". Take a universal approach to language.

### TRAUMA INFORMED LANGUAGE

Other thing to consider when working with people affected by trauma

Non-verbal communication IS a method of communication. Acknowledge silence as a way of communicating. Consider English as a second language. Using age-appropriate language that matches the individual's level of understanding. Don't use jargon. Be culturally aware. Question your unconscious bias - own internal prejudices. Use language that is open and professionally curious. Focus on understanding causation factors that may trigger feelings, emotions and behaviour (all forms of communication) rather than solely on the management of external behaviours with no knowledge or understanding as to 'why'. All behaviour is a method of communicating a need

### Why this approach is at the foundation of (TIP)

We start to heal the moment we feel heard. Builds emotion and verbal literacy. It communicates that you are trauma aware/informed/sensitive, that your organisation has a system wide understanding of trauma. It provides an opportunity for a shared understanding and shared language across different organisations and professionals.

### Language and assumptions

The way we communicate conveys a powerful message that we are witness to another's experience. Biases can colour and filter what and how we see. Separate the feeling (emotion) from the action to see the person behind the behaviour, the situation or the label. If we want individuals who have experienced trauma to hear us and be open to sharing their feelings and needs, then it is important to watch the language we use and assumptions we make.

### Using trauma sensitive language is powerful

It generates curiosity in the listener. Stimulates reflective conversation. Is thought provoking. Brings to the surface underlying assumptions we may have. Invites creativity, innovation and helps us to consider new possibilities. generates energy and forward movement (Taking action/small steps). Channels our attention and focuses our discussions. Provides some structure. Stays with us. Encourages us to be and remain in the conversation. Is meaningful. Evokes more questions. Keeps us connected. Empowers and enables change.