



PROFIADAU NIWEIDIOL MEWN PLENTYNDOD
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Trauma and ACE (TrACE) Informed Organisations Toolkit

Supporting organisations to embed ACE Awareness
and Trauma and ACE Informed Practice

Guidance Document

September 2021 (Version: 1b)

Foreword

“In the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Support Hub, we are clear about the importance of knowledge about ACEs but this knowledge has to help us consider whether we are doing the right things and has to inform how we do things differently in Wales. ACEs are not a ‘model’ or an ‘intervention’ nor is this about adding ‘ACEs’ on to a list of things to do. What we must do is assess whether our strategies, policies, processes, services and people are trauma-informed; we must integrate the knowledge and trauma-informed practice into everything we do. In this way, we are supporting a human and children’s rights based approach to tackling ACEs.

We also recognise for many, ACEs is not something new and that there is already good practice and key building blocks in place across Wales. We now need to build on these further, strengthen our ambitions to create an ACE-informed, trauma-informed, trauma-responsive Wales and drive transformational system change.

Whilst some are familiar with ACEs, to others this is new. The ACE Informed Organisations Implementation Toolkit is designed to support organisations to become ACE-aware and trauma-informed and/or become more trauma-informed.”

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Support Hub

Contents

About this toolkit	4
Introduction	5
What are ACEs?	5
Wider trauma and adversity	5
Principles of trauma-informed practice	6
Suggested Process	8
Step 1: Preparation	8
Step 2: Completion of the Self-Assessment Tool	9
Step 3: Action Planning and Implementation	10
Step 4: Monitoring, Evaluation and Review	11
References	12

About this toolkit

Everyone has a role to play in Wales becoming an ACE-informed, trauma-informed, nation. Our aim for the Toolkit support this vision, which will be achieved through preventing, tackling and mitigating the impact of ACEs. Within this vision is the reduction of the incidence of ACEs, trauma and re-traumatisation, increased focus on the facilitation of healing from past trauma, supporting the use of trauma-informed practice, strengthening reflection on practice and self-care approaches, improving system's responses and facilitating a compassionate and responsive society that demonstrates human rights based approach.

This toolkit is a practical guide to support organisations to embed ACE Awareness and Trauma-Informed Practice. The toolkit aims to support organisations to reflect on current culture, practice and process and identify activity to implement more trauma-informed and trauma responsive approaches resulting in increased ownership for transformational change within their setting.

The guide supports the implementation of a whole organisation approach to being ACE-Informed and therefore has different sections that may be relevant to different people/teams within the organisation. It provides practical information to support the various stages of becoming ACE-informed, from senior leaders identifying ACEs as a strategic priority through to the provision of skills and knowledge to staff.

Increasingly the policy context in Wales is highlighting the need for a more professions and organisations to be ACE-informed and to consider their role in preventing, mitigating and tackling ACEs, to ensure an integrated and innovative approach to health and wellbeing generally and support prevention and early intervention. It is imperative that organisations and staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to consider their impact on future generations living in Wales. As part of the implementation of ACE-informed approaches, organisations may consider relevant national and local policies that are specific to certain areas of their work. This will help to strengthen the case for being ACE-informed and to see where it fits best within the context of local area and the population it serves.

Introduction

- What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences that occur in childhood and are remembered throughout adulthood. These experiences include direct harm (e.g. verbal, sexual or physical abuse) and indirect harm through the environments in which they live (e.g. households where there is domestic violence, alcohol addition, substance/drug abuse, parental separation (where there is conflict), parental mental illness or incarceration)¹.



Without the presence of protective factors, these experiences can physically change how a child's brain develops potentially displaying as challenging and health-harming behaviour and leading to long-term physical and mental health problems across the life-course.

- Wider trauma and adversity

As well as adversity within a family it is also important to acknowledge that wider adversity, such as adversity within a community, can have similarly impact an individual's long-term physical and mental health across the life-course, including the risk of chronic stress and adverse coping mechanisms. Ellis and Dietz (2017) Pair of ACEs tree image illustrates the relationship between adversity within a family and adversity within a community. The leaves on the tree represent the 'symptoms' of ACEs and the tree is planted in poor soil that is steeped in systemic inequities, robbing it of nutrients necessary to support a thriving community. Adverse community environments such as a lack of affordable and safe housing,

community violence, systemic discrimination, and limited access to social and economic mobility compound one another, creating a negative cycle of ever worsening soil that results in withering leaves on the tree².

- **Principles of Trauma-informed Practice**

Trauma-informed practice is not about the treatment of trauma or the symptoms, but rather a recognition that trauma experiences are a possibility for anyone, therefore, this Toolkit is relevant for everyone (not just trauma-specific services that exist specifically to address trauma, the impact of trauma and to aid recovery). Trauma-informed organisations assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma and that, without interventions and supportive factors in place, the cycle of ACEs, trauma and adversity, is more likely to continue in future generations.

Trauma-informed practice is an organisation, programme or system that realise the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for healing and recovery; recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seek to actively resist re-traumatisation¹. They prioritise physical and emotional safety and commit to ‘do no harm’ by applying a trauma-informed approaches. Trauma-informed organisations recognise that everyone has a role in creating opportunities and life chances for people affected by trauma and adversity.

This toolkit is built-on, and incorporates, foundational values and principles of trauma-informed care³:

Safety	Ensuring physical and emotional safety
Choice	Maximising choice and control
Collaboration	Maximising collaboration and sharing power
Empower	Maximising opportunities which build on and validate others’ strengths and create opportunities for individuals to take power for themselves and realise their individual strengths.

Trust (relationships and trustworthiness)

Maximising trustworthiness through relationships, task clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries

Trauma-informed organisations recognise that the same principles apply to all of us. Being trauma-informed is as much about the workforce as it is about those our organisations and services are designed to serve. Trauma-informed organisations take care of their workforce by placing importance on support, safety (cultural, emotional, and physical safety), positive relationships and connections.

Suggested Process

The guidance document aims to describe a suggested process for making the most of the self-assessment of trauma and ACE informed practice across implementation domains / areas as part of a change management initiative. As with any transformation programme or improvement activity, a process should be followed. A suggested process is as follows:

- **Step 1: Preparation**

To get the most out of the Self-Assessment, there must be organisational wide sign-up to completing the process and a commitment to reflect and act on action / improvement activity needed. The organisation should be clear about the purpose of the exercise before they complete the Tool. Therefore, before the Self-Assessment is completed, the organisation needs to understand how it fits with their strategy.

What is your organisations vision or strategy?

How does trauma-informed practice support this?

- To shape why trauma-informed practice should be embedded it will be helpful to map the organisations vision or mission statement to the principles of trauma-informed practice
- What existing work or projects fit with the ACEs and trauma agenda? Trauma-informed practice may be able to strengthen other specific plans.
- Within strategy and policy documents, do the common values, goals or aims resonate with the principles of informed practice? Reflecting on this will strengthen the case for Embedding Trauma and ACE ACE Informed Practice make sure the benefits to the whole organisation, the people who work for the organisation and the people it works for are seen and highlighted.

It might be useful to complete the below readiness checklist before continuing with the self-assessment tool:

Implementation Readiness Checklist	
Organisation strategy and policy content identifies the case for embedding Trauma and ACE informed practice	
There is support from leadership and senior leads outline the offer of support to implement Trauma and ACE Informed Practice and to undertake any change and/or improvement activity	
There is a working group identified to provide support and guidance	
Resourcing has been considered e.g. change management/ACE Champions to drive the work, communications, training/workforce, support to ensure long-term monitoring/evaluation, sustainability and future planning.	
Timescales have been outlined and there is consideration for the long-term, sustainability and future planning	

- **Step 2: Completion of the Self-Assessment Tool**

The baseline assessment tool is an opportunity to reflect on the foundational values and principles of trauma-informed practice across **Implementation Domains**:

- Governance, Leadership and Organisational Culture
- Policies and procedures
- Workforce Training and Support
- Physical Environment
- Service Design and Delivery
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Running throughout each of the implementation domains is the theme of **engagement & involvement**. Engagement is an important part of being ACE-informed and includes involving those who experience the organisation, programme or service, as staff or customers/service users/clients/etc.

The toolkit serves as an opportunity to identify areas of good practice (‘evidence of things we do’) and well as consider ‘Where things might be done differently’.

- **Step 3: Action Planning and Implementation**

The next stage is about taking the ‘Where things might be done differently’ and building an action plan. This may be done by working group or facilitated cross-organisation workshops and should also consider the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act five ways of working.

THE FIVE WAYS OF WORKING



LONG-TERM

The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs



INTEGRATION

Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies



INVOLVEMENT

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves



COLLABORATION

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives



PREVENTION

How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives

<https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

Suggested action plan template:

	Action	Responsibility	Timescale for completion	Resources required	Outcome
1.					
2.					
3.					

4.					
5.					
6.					

Next is to implement the action plan. Having worked through the self-assessment and planning process, with engagement and involvement of those who experience the organisation, programme or service, as staff or customers/service users/clients/etc the next step is about delivering it. Even when you have been meticulous in preparation, there is always the potential for challenges and changes in direction so the plan may be routinely adapted. This links us to Step 4.

- **Step 4: Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

In order to understand that the action plan is effective the organisation must think about measuring the degree to which they are Trauma and ACEs informed as a result of implementing the action plan. This may involve the activities such as monitoring progress and using metrics, obtaining stakeholder feedback, ongoing communication and review the self-assessment tool periodically.

References

1. Hughes, K., Ford, K., Davies, A. R., Homolova, L., Bellis, M. A. (2017) Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences. Accessed at www.aceawarewales.com
2. Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences. The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. Academic Paediatrics. 17. (2017) pp S86-S93
3. SAMHSA (2014) SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-informed Approach. Prepared by SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative July 2014 Accessed at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf>