

WHAT IS A TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH?

There is an increasing interest across many settings to take a 'trauma informed approach' rather than looking at specific pathways or interventions. This is because we know that many people who have experienced trauma previously may not feel able to disclose their experience.

This is particularly relevant to current maternity settings where it might feel difficult to set up trusting relationships with healthcare professionals involved in birth, where normal practices in birth can be traumatising and re-traumatising for some, and because this is a particularly vulnerable period.

If we take a trauma informed approach for all women and birthing people, we believe we would see a reduction in birth trauma. A trauma-informed approach is across a whole service, changing the way that service is delivered down to our daily interactions with staff and patients/clients.

WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

- Speak to your team leaders about how to integrate a trauma informed approach into your current practice
- Learn about trauma and the impact of trauma
- Print off the Make Birth Better Model to share with team members
- If you do one thing today, keep in mind that while we can't change the histories of the people we come into contact with, we can actively 'do no harm'
- Join us (alongside organisations the Association for Improvements in Maternity Services, Birthrights and the Birth Trauma Association) in campaigning for meaningful changes in maternity services.

What are the principles of trauma informed care?

There are six key principles to follow (Cuthbert & Seng, 2015):

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural and historical issues and gender awareness

While we at Make Birth Better try to use these principles in our work, we have slightly adapted these to encompass the core values of the Make Birth Better model. As a first step, individual professionals can reflect on these and instil them into their practice. However, to fully embed trauma informed care into maternity services will take top-down change to maternity services.

- Consent (offering informed consent regardless of protocol)
- Kindness (having compassion at the forefront of our interactions)
- Communication (considering language and tone, even in an emergency)
- Trust (creating a relationship where disclosure is welcome and will be acted upon)
- Safety (creating physical and psychological safe spaces, support for staff to process their own trauma)
- Respect (for physical and psychological autonomy, considering cultural, social, LGBTQI+, historical, physical, gender issues)
- Collaboration (considering collaboration between professionals, with the woman or birthing person at the centre of their care).

FURTHER READING

'Trauma Informed Care in the Perinatal Period' (Seng & Taylor, 2015)

Make Birth Better Training Manual (available online) and events

Weinstein, Ann (2019) 'Trauma-Informed Care Needed to Address Obstetric Violence', Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-beginning/201903/trauma-informed-care-needed-address-obstetric-violence>